



**Citation read for Dr. Willie Murphy upon presentation for the Fertilizer
Association Special Merit Award**

The Award was presented on behalf of the Association by the President, Kieran Murphy to Dr. Murphy at the Fertilizer Association of Ireland Annual Dinner in the Heritage Hotel, Killenard on Friday 26th November 2010.

This is the first time the FAI decided to do “special recognition award” and have a very worthy person for it in Willie Murphy of Johnston Castle.

He is a Wexford man, of a farming background and went to school in St Peters College, Wexford. There were 30 in the class and we are reliably informed that it was the brightest class ever to pass through the college at the time. His special subject was maths and obviously that stood to him later when it came to analysing research results prior to the real computer era. It would be true to say that he was the computer those days.

He went on to the Albert College, Glasnevin and qualified in Agricultural Science in 1956. “The Albert College is where you got the real Ag Degree those times, prior to the change over in the 1970’s to Belfield”.

He took up an appointment in Johnstown Castle straight after college in the soil/grassland section in the Dept of Agriculture. He became involved in “Survey of Irish Pastures” and travelled all over Ireland with his team to gather all the relevant data. The laboratory in Johnstown Castle was central in analysing all the data. This was the era of low agricultural productivity in Ireland, yield of cereals were low and stocking rate was anywhere between 1.4 and 8 acres per livestock unit. Aphosphorosis was recognised and the only nitrogen applied was some bit of Sulphate of Ammonia.

Basic Slag was used to solve the P problem. The amount of chemical fertiliser used then was 20,000 tonnes of nutrient N and 36,000 tonnes of nutrient P. So the assembly of information and research was most important to progress Irish agriculture and farmers incomes. Our award winner tonight and his colleagues were central in the gathering of that information and getting it out to farmers.

In 1960 Johnstown Castle was taken over by An Foras Taluntais (AFT) and he was appointed head of the Grassland department. There was up to 30 research graduates in Johnstown Castle, including such people like Jim Brogan, Gary Fleming and Tom Gately. A project on the productivity of Irish soils really took off in the 1960’s based on the knowledge base coming from Johnstown Castle. The soil survey, which was so important to the knowledge of our soils, also progressed and 15 counties were completed in detail. Based on Johnstown Castle research, CAN replaced Sulphate of Ammonia as a source of Nitrogen and our award winner tonight and his colleagues

were central to the Government decision to fund a Nitrogen plant which we know as NET in Arklow.

He was central to the development of Botanical analysis in Johnstown Castle and spearheaded the change in Ireland in the increased use of Perennial Ryegrass from 4% to about 50% in Irish pastures.

Because of the Research completed in Johnstown Castle, Irish farmers were well equipped to avail of increased prices for produce after our entry into the EEC in 1973. Consequently, stock numbers rose, farmers changed from hay to silage and use of additional fertiliser increased productivity and increased farmers income. During the 1970's, this man was centre stage in the Urea research. As a result farmers could now use Urea in the Spring with very little risk of Ammonia loss. Later a new Urea production plant was commissioned in Marino Point in Cork to cater for farmer needs. This Urea research has stood the test of time and is still very relevant today.

He was President of the Fertilizer Association of Ireland in 1979 and was a good friend to the Association over many years. He wrote many articles and was always available with good advice whenever requested. – In fact he could not say no when it came to anything associated with agriculture and his speciality was grass.

He was also a good friend to the Fertiliser industry. All companies consulted with him before putting a new product on the market. He produced the science and would advise accordingly.

He was not just recognised in Ireland but also internationally as he did many international consultancies for AFT/Teagasc and also for the World Bank.

Perhaps his greatest legacy to Irish Agriculture over the years was his ability to pass on all his knowledge and experiences to Agricultural advisers and farmers alike. He listened to all questions carefully and always provided answers based on his immense knowledge of agriculture.

He retired from Teagasc, Johnstown Castle in 2002. His contribution to Agriculture will never be forgotten and he is a worthy recipient of our Award in 2010.

Ladies and Gentlemen----- Dr Willie Murphy

Thanks to Aidan Conway & Noel Culleton for their assistance in putting this together

Jeremiah Murphy
25/11/10