

MARCH 19, 2024

# HAPPY IRISH COWS: *Ireland's Dairy Sector*

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*This article is part of a OHLQ series tracing the journey of distilled spirits from Seed to Sip. To celebrate **Irish Cask and Craft**, this installment of Seed to Sip: Ireland will introduce you to the individuals in Ireland who help craft your favorite Irish whiskey and gin.*

In the plentiful pastures of Ireland, where the grass grows lush and green beneath the wide-open skies, lies the heart of a thriving dairy industry. This land, renowned for its beauty and fertility, is home to some of the happiest cows on Earth. It's here in this idyllic setting that the journey from seed to sip begins for many beloved, dairy-based Irish spirits — a journey that places these contented cows at its center, showcasing their vital role in Ireland's celebrated history.

## IRISH DAIRY TO DISTILLERY

Irish families have combined dairy and spirits for years, creating their versions of creamy drinks in the comfort of their homes. In the 14th century, Irish monks would blend Irish whiskey with fresh dairy cream as a tonic. Now, producers across Ireland, including renowned names like **Five Farms Irish Cream** and **Ballyvolane House Spirits**, continue this tradition; utilizing dairy to create rich, creamy, and distinctly Irish spirits. The care and attention given to their cows is directly linked to the quality of their spirits.

Johnny Harte of Five Farms, a seasoned veteran in Ireland's spirits industry, recognized this story of Irish cream liqueur as one that had yet to be told. "Very deep set in our culture is storytelling. The most revered person in an Irish family was called Shanna Keen. That's Gaelic for the older person who tells the story.

“ We love a story,” beams Johnny. “With Five Farms, our story is about the people who look after the farms on a sophisticated level. It takes a lot of skill to look after the animals in the right way.” ”

In many ways, the cows aren't just livestock. They are part of the family, even receiving sweet nicknames. They enjoy oceanside views along the coast of County Cork, and they can live and graze outside nearly all year round.

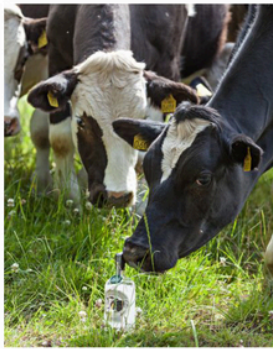


*A group of cows in an oceanside pasture in County Cork.*

Like Irish whiskey, Irish cream liqueur is held to national quality standards by Ireland's Geographical Indication (GI), which has been in place for nearly a decade to indicate that the product comes from a particular region that gives it unique qualities. Irish cream liqueur's GI requires that the spirit be made from milk produced in Ireland and even specifies that because of Ireland's climate and geography, Irish cows can graze outdoors for up to 300 days a year on a diet that is 95–97% grass. For **Five Farms'** Irish cream liqueur is made from single-batch cream sourced exclusively from five family-owned farms and their beloved grass-fed cows.

Drawing from this esteem for cows and the long history of cream liqueur in Ireland, Five Farms created an Irish cream liqueur of consistently high quality that “tastes like the one we used to make at home.”

## IRISH GIN FROM DAIRY



*A cow in front of Bertha's Revenge Irish Milk gin in County Cork.*

Ballyvolane House Spirits echoes the deep connection between cows and the Irish community. The inspiration for naming their whey alcohol-based gin "**Bertha's Revenge**" came from an extraordinary New Year's Eve event in 1993 in a quaint rural Irish bar. The community had gathered to pay tribute to a cow named Bertha, who at the age of 49, was the world's oldest cow.

Antony Jackson, founder of Ballyvolane, recalls, “Bertha retired from milk and calf production and became a local celebrity. She raised a lot of money for charities, led the St. Paddy's Day parade in the local town, and got on national television. You couldn't make it up... typical Ireland.”

Moved by Bertha's story and the deep connections it symbolized among the land, its animals, and local traditions, Ballyvolane Spirits chose to honor her legacy by using an often-overlooked dairy byproduct as the base spirit for their gin: whey alcohol. In doing so, they weave together Irish heritage, a commitment to sustainability, and a celebration of local flavors, offering a gin that entices the palate and unites cocktail aficionados of every walk of life in conversation and appreciation.

At the core of Ireland's dairy and spirits industries is a deep connection to the well-being of its cows, nurtured by a commitment to the rich history and landscape of Ireland. Ireland's dairy farms provide environments where cows roam freely in lush pastures, producing exceptional milk thanks to the nutrient-rich grass and the respectful, adoring care they receive. This holistic approach, emphasizing sustainability and natural processes, ensures the cows' welfare, recognizing their role as central figures in Ireland's story. So, the next time you're enjoying a whey alcohol based-gin or an Irish cream liqueur, be sure to raise a glass — responsibly — to “udderly” delicious Irish spirits.