

Hill Farming Committee Report

Progress and Delivery in 2015

GLAS & Commonages

- The Committee had several meetings with the Department of Agriculture to ensure that flexible arrangements are put in place for commonage farmers under the new stocking arrangements required.
- Over 7,000 commonage farmers have now joined the GLAS scheme and it is expected that a further 3,000 - 4,000 will join at the end of 2016.
- Where there are difficulties with GLAS on commonages, these will be referred to the Commonage Implementation Committee.
- The commonage plans will be done over the summer of 2016 and IFA has got guarantees that the min/max stocking levels set out can be reviewed by the Planner.
- IFA is ensuring that Planners are not asked to determine the eligible area.

Heritage Bill 2016

- The Committee were involved in the course of 2015 and early 2016 in a lobby campaign to change the burning date from the end of February to the middle of March.
- The Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Heather Humphreys, proposed the Bill at the end of 2015 to change the date to the end of March. The Bill was introduced to the Senate in January 2016 and IFA successfully lobbied Senators to ensure the passing of the Bill. Due to the General Election the Bill never reached the Dáil.

Walks Scheme

- The Hill Committee were actively involved in Comhairle na Tuaithe and in lobbying for an extension of the walks scheme.
- Over 40 walks are now established in the scheme, which IFA negotiated in 2008. Around 1,900 farmers are availing of the scheme, which is worth €1.9m annually.

Sheep Handling & Fencing Grants

- The Committee secured increased standard costings for the Sheep Handling and Fencing Scheme in hill areas given the increased costs of investment required in these areas. Farmers who have now been paid their grant under TAMS I have availed of the higher rate of grant.
- However the main issue affecting fencing on hill farms was the requirement of planning, IFA encouraged local consultation with the County Councils to overcome these issues.
- Under TAMS II, the Hill Committee supported the Rural Development Committee in getting Sheep Fencing included in the scheme through an amendment of the RDP.

CAP Implementation

- With the introduction of the new CAP, the Hill Committee dealt with many problems of hill farmers which included eligible land, National Reserve, Young Farmers and individual payment problems.
- The Hill Committee ensured that Natura land which was eligible in 2008 and has since become ineligible qualifies for BPS and ANC payment if the land has become ineligible due to restrictions imposed.

Priorities for 2016

The IFA Hill Committee has set out a 16 point plan as follows:-

1. The funding allocated RDP 2014-2020 is fully utilised for farm schemes which help support low income farmers.
2. Payments under GLAS are increased and the €5,000 cap is removed from the general scheme as well as the €7,000 limit for GLAS+.
3. That an additional €50m is put into the ANC scheme to reverse cuts and to increase payments up to a maximum of €6,000 in hill areas.
4. That a special Hill Sheep Knowledge Transfer measure is put in place with a payment of €1,000 per participant.
5. For Hill Farmers with Suckler Cows a payment of €200/cow should apply.
6. A targeted payment of €20/ewe is required to maintain the national flock including the hill flock.
7. A special upland environmental scheme along the lines of the Burren should be put in place to reward farmers for collectively managing their farms.
8. The recently published 2016 Heritage Bill to allow the extension of the burning season from the end of February to the end of March must be implemented without delay.
9. Recent flexibilities on eligible land must allow farmers to claim land where they are not allowed to improve such as Natura land.
10. The recent inclusion of Sheep Fencing under TAMS must be followed by increase in costing in hill areas where planning approval and other Natura restrictions apply.
11. Teagasc should give priority for online courses and more flexible arrangements for farmers in hill areas.
12. Where restrictions are imposed on farming in designated land, compensation must be paid through the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme.
13. The operation of Leader through the LCDC structures at Local Authority level must ensure that Designated and Hill areas are not discriminated against.
14. The income disregards of 30% must be restored in the Farm Assist means test.
15. This scheme should apply not just to recipients of Farm Assist and other Social Welfare schemes but also to other low income farmers who want to participate.
16. The number of walks covered under the Walks Scheme must be increased. This will support the development of recreational tourism in hill areas.

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