



IFA

The Irish Uplands Forum

Local Perspective Uplands
Sheep Farming

Pat Dunne - Chairman

IFA Hill Committee

28 May 2014

Introduction

Overview

- 15,000 farmers involved in farming in hill areas, mainly sheep farming.
- 450,000 ha in commonage.
- 300,000 ha claimed for SFP.
- Additional land privately owned, and national parks.
- Cattle and sheep are essential to manage commonage.
- Farms in these areas are almost totally dependent on Direct Payments.
- Farmers are generally on lower incomes with around 5,000 on Farm Assist.

Issues

- Destocking and framework plans has led to under-grazing.
- Reduction in eligible areas, from DAFM inspections is a major concern.
- Farmers in hill areas have lost out on payments.
- Up to 60% of upland areas are designated Natura.
- Restrictions on farming and other developments.
- Cutbacks to various farm schemes over last 5 years - devastating effects on farm income:
 - REPS 4 closed
 - Cuts in REPS payment
 - More limited AEOS scheme
 - DA cuts from 45 to 34 ha, hit hill farmers most
 - Farm Assist disregards have cut payments by about €30 p/w
 - Ending of Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme.

Hill Farm Incomes

- Teagasc 2012 National Farm Survey of Hill Farmers.
- Family Farm Income €13,665.
- Direct Payment €18,138.
- Direct Payments % of Family Farm Income 133%.
- Due to poor market returns in 2013 the percentage will be higher.
- Cutbacks to scheme threaten income further.

Review of Commonage Stocking Level

IFA is awaiting the start-up of discussions to commence.

- Concerns highlighted
 - Collective agreements should not be forced on farmers. It will not work. It should be optional, as agreement in some cases will be very difficult to achieve.
 - No farmers should be forced to reduce their sheep numbers.
 - The timeframe to get to the level required should be staged.
 - No farmer should be penalised where the minimum and maximum is not attained by him, and when the commonage is under-grazed due to the number of dormant shares.

Review of Commonage Stocking Level

- A wide range should exist between the min. and max. stocking level.
- New entrants must be catered for in stocking calculations.
- An annual review of the new regime should take place.
- The sheep breeds allowed on the commonage, while in the main will be of a mountain breed, nevertheless lowland cross-breeds should be allowed
- Cattle should be allowed.
- IFA welcome the review of the burning date.
- The new burning date should be 1st September to mid-April.
- This must be part of the commonage plan.
- Consultative committee should be set up with an Independent Chairman

Agri-environment GLAS scheme in upland areas in RDP

- New Upland Agri-Environment GLAS Scheme vital to upland areas.
- Strong agri-environment programme necessary.
- Payment levels must be set at €175 per ha.
- 80% rule should be removed.
- Flexibility as part of commonage review.
- GLAS+ with €2,000 top-up should focus on hill areas as well as Targeted Output Scheme.
- Support required for
 - Areas of Natural Handicap (ANCs)
 - Upland Environmental Management Scheme.
- Farmers need certainty of funding.
- The 2014-2020 RDP must have specific support for commonage areas.

Other Hill Farming Proposals

- Specific measure for hill sheep such as coupled payment and hill lamb improvement scheme.
- An enhanced STAP to take account of profit monitor, quality assurance, reducing carbon footprint, animal health and breeding.
- Under TAMS, investment support for sheep farmers covering fencing, handling, housing.
- Fencing in Natura areas in hills is more expensive and may require planning. This needs to be addressed.

Outcome of CAP Reform

- Support required for
 - Enhanced Areas of Natural Handicap (ANCs)
 - Stocking level to secure Pillar I payments in line with commonage and review.
 - Entitlements - winners and losers.
- Greening not an issue for hill farmers.
- Incorporation of sheep grassland scheme major problem for hill sheep farmers.

Other issues for hill farmers to support incomes

- Recreational use must be done in a planned way.
- Support for the walks scheme by doubling up of the number eligible.
- Restrictions associated with Natura areas must be dealt with and hill farmers must not be at a loss.