



**The Irish Farmers' Association Submission**  
to the Public Consultation on proposed terms of reference for a  
Programme of Research on Environmental Impact of Unconventional  
Gas Exploration and Extraction.

Prepared by

Harold Kingston – Chairman, IFA National Environment and Rural Affairs committee  
Thomas Ryan – Environment and Infrastructure Executive

The Irish Farmers' Association  
The Irish Farm Centre  
Bluebell  
Dublin 12

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## Introduction

The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) is a national organisation representing the interests and views of farmers and rural dwellers in Ireland and the majority of farmers in Ireland are members of the IFA.

Members of the Association, particularly those living in the Northwest Carboniferous Basin, the Lough Allen Basin and the Clare Basin, have experienced real and genuine concerns regarding the proposals to commence hydraulic fracturing in the area.

This public consultation provides a significant opportunity to facilitate necessary debate and provide necessary scientific facts to the farming and wider rural communities in the area.

## Agri-Food Sector

The agri-food sector is of vital importance to the national economy and is contributing to our national recovery.

- Supporting 300,000 jobs in all parts of the country;
- Producing enough beef each year to feed 30 million Europeans; and
- Producing over 15% of the world's infant formula

Through the hard work of farmers, the agri-food sector continues to grow.

At this point, the sector is on-track to achieve the target of €12 billion in exports by 2020, as set out in the *Food Harvest* strategy.

This growth is being achieved sustainably and with reduced emissions.

- For example, emissions per litre of milk have reduced by over 13% since 1990;
- The beef sector in Ireland has the fifth lowest carbon footprint in the EU; and
- The 35% reduction in chemical nitrogen use over the last decade is equivalent to an annual reduction of ½ million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Regionally and within the Lough Allen and Clare Basin(s) it is clear from the tables below that agriculture is of critical importance to the economic wellbeing of each county.

### Lough Allen Basin

	No. of farms	Value of Agricultural Output
Leitrim	3,669	€62m
Cavan	5,279	€238m
Donegal	9,240	€207m
Mayo	12,441	€236m
Monaghan	4,559	€232m
Roscommon	6,316	€114m
Sligo	4,369	€96m

### Clare Basin

	No. of farms	Value of Agricultural Output
Clare	6,551	€189m
Cork	14,221	€1,046m
Kerry	8,413	€358m
Limerick	5,981	€326m

## Configuration of the Steering Committee

IFA considers that the true significance of agriculture and the food industry is not understood or represented on the current steering committee established to examine the challenges forced from fracking.

*IFA proposes that the Steering Committee should therefore be expanded to include representatives from Teagasc (the National Agriculture, Food and Advisory Authority) and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine.*

### **Need for Wider Public Debate**

Currently strong views are being expressed by those opposed to fracking and those promoting the technology. However, there is no forum to facilitate open discussion.

*IFA restates its call for Leitrim County Council to establish and facilitate a stakeholders forum which allows farmers to raise specific concerns and receive specific responses from the appropriate agencies and development companies.*

### **Key Questions to Address in Research Programme**

#### Water

Agriculture is sometimes described as a “water hungry” sector and depends on clean water for food production. Therefore the following research questions need to be answered:

- How much water is required in the fracking process?
- What impact will this demand have on water availability for farming and food production?
- Is the recharge rate in the region sufficient to ensure the water table and water supply will not be affected for farmers and the wider rural community?
- What potential water contamination may occur during the hydraulic fracturing process?
- Based on international best practice, what mitigation measures are naturally put in place to avoid water contamination?
- Where water rises above ground level as part of the fracturing process – this may become contaminated: how is degraded water disposed of?

#### Land

- What restrictions are placed on landowners adjoining well pads?
- What, if any additional negative health exposure would farm families and livestock have, who may be in close proximity to well pads?
- What is the current practice regarding the use of chemicals as part of the hydraulic fracturing process and what are the operating guidelines for the use, management and disposal of such chemicals?

#### Air Quality

- What impacts will well flaring and other activities associated with the hydraulic fracturing process have on the air quality of the region?

#### Noise

- What is the legally acceptable operating decibel levels during exploration and construction?
- What mitigating measures are usually put in place to reduce noise levels?

Regarding water, land, air and noise, what agency will be the independent monitoring body to ensure compliance with standards?

The agri-food sector is currently on a path of sustainable growth, based on emissions efficient food production, high animal welfare, environmental and agronomic standards.

It is essential that the programme of research which will be undertaken arising out of this public consultation adequately address all areas of concern for the farming and rural communities of the Lough Allen and Clare Basins.

IFA would welcome an opportunity to meet with the EPA and members of the Steering Committee to set out in greater detail the concerns expressed in this submission.