

IFA DEMANDS MINISTER COENEY MAKES CHANGES TO THE BEEF DATA AND GENOMICS SCHEME TO MAKE IT WORK FOR SUCKLER FARMERS

- Since the abolition of the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme, IFA has worked extremely hard to secure funding of €300m or €52m pa for a New Beef Data and Genomics Scheme. Following the decision of Minister CoENEY not to couple payments for sucklers in CAP, IFA pushed the Minister and the Government to deliver strong RDP funding to support the important suckler cow herd.
- IFA has raised serious concerns with Minister CoENEY and the Department that many aspects of the new scheme are over complicated and will impose excessive costs on farmers. Some of the criteria and conditions are set at too high a level and IFA is concerned that these conditions will turn away potential applicants. In addition, farmers that do apply will find it difficult to comply and the financial benefits will be eroded.
- IFA is demanding that Minister CoENEY makes the necessary changes and addresses the issues and concerns raised by IFA.
- The Minister must confirm that he will amend the unfair criteria in the terms and conditions on the 6 year rule. The Department rule states ***“If you withdraw or are disqualified from the programme for a non-compliance, during the course of the six years, any payments already made will be recovered by the Department.”*** This is totally unreasonable, very negative and frightening farmers away from the scheme. Suckler farmers in general are small operators with low farm incomes and excessive penalties or claw backs will create severe financial difficulties.
- On breeding, the Department requirement that 50% of the breeding female animals have to be 4 or 5 star by 2020 is a very high and unnecessary target. IFA has requested the Department to adjust this requirement to 3, 4 or 5 star animals and ensure that calves, weanlings, replacements and cows are all included in the calculation.
- The Department requirement on farmers, who are purchasing a bull that they must buy a 4 or 5 star bull after Jan 2017 and have a 4 or 5 star bull by 2020 is a costly requirement, particularly for small suckler farmers. This requirement should be re-examined and adjusted to take account of herd size and the financial ability of such farmers to meet it. For farmers with less than 15 cows, this is a major financial burden.
- Minister CoENEY must make it clear that he will insist that the Department will process all applications efficiently and the necessary arrangements will be put in place to guarantee that all farmers are paid all of the €52m by the middle of December 2015, as promised.
- On genomic testing, the 60% requirement is excessive and eroding the value of the €100/€80 per cow. Genomic testing should be based on 15% of the herd, as was the case in 2015, when ICBF confirmed this level was adequate for an effective suckler genomic programme. Genomic testing should be targeted on a percentage of the female calves identified by ICBF. Testing non breeding male animals or females that are destined for export is wasteful.

- The per hectare payment rates should be the equivalent of €100 per cow on the first 10 cows and not €95, and €80 per cow on the remainder of cows in their herd. The inflexible rule demanding full claw back of payments if applicants reduce the “maximum payable area” by more than 20% in any year must be dropped.
- The deadline to submit a Carbon Navigator should be Oct 2017 as opposed to Oct 2016, considering the pressure on the availability of advisors/planners under other RDP schemes. On training, again the deadline should be Oct 2017 as opposed 2016, to facilitate the availability of advisors/planners.
- It is important that farmers are in a position to apply on all their suckler cows in 2015 and individual farmers are able to increase cow numbers in the scheme in future years. Limiting the scheme based on the number of calved cows in 2014 is very restrictive.
- The additional information required under the Data collection area needs to be limited and there must be adequate tolerances and reduced penalties which operate on a herd basis as opposed to an individual animal basis in this area.
- On the selection criteria, IFA is strongly of the view that the scheme must be open to all suckler farmers and that payments should be made on all eligible animals. If necessary, the budget for the scheme should be increased to maintain payment levels and meet demand. This should be regarded as a very positive response to the scheme and considered as a good investment in the development of the Irish beef sector.
- The Minister needs to take on board farmer concerns and make the necessary changes to the scheme. In addition, he needs to strongly encourage suckler farmers to apply before the May 29th closing date.