

## MINISTER COENEY MUST ADDRESS REAL CONCERNS OF FARMERS ON BEEF DATA AND GENOMIC SCHEME ISSUES – IFA

- 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 Coveney 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 Coveney and the Department that many aspects of the new scheme are over complicated, the requirements are set at too high a level and will impose excessive costs on farmers. Thousands of farmers have expressed similar concerns at meetings all across the country in the last 2 weeks.
- The main issues of concern to farmers under the scheme are as follows;
  - The inflexibility of the 6 year rule and payment clawbacks
  - The 2014 reference year
  - Young farmers
  - The 60% genomic testing requirement and costs
  - The Replacement requirements
  - Penalties
- IFA is demanding that Minister Coveney and the Department makes the necessary adjustments and flexibilities to addresses these real issues and concerns of suckler farmers.
- The Minister needs to address the unfair criteria in the terms and conditions on the 6 year rule, which 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.
- IFA have put forward proposals to Minister Coveney and the Department to address the concerns of farmers, including the following;
  - A rolling reference year instead of 2014.
  - A mid-term review with real changes.
  - Access for Young farmers and New entrants
  - A reduction in the 60% level of genomic testing and reduced costs
  - The inclusion of 3, 4 and 5 star females as replacements as well as allowing eligible calves and weanlings qualify to meet the requirements with heifers and cows.
  - Improved tolerances and reduced penalties.
  - More time to complete the Carbon Navigator and Training.
- A rolling reference year would provide farmers with the necessary flexibility to adjust their cow numbers and prevent the lock in and claw back problems associated with the fixed 2014 reference year. In addition it would provide for access for young farmers and new entrants.

- The 60% requirement on genomic testing is excessive and eroding the value of the €95/€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. Forcing some farmers to test non breeding male animals or females that are destined for export makes no sense and is wasteful.
- 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 include 3, 4 or 5 star animals and allow eligible calves, weanlings, to be included to meet the requirements along with replacements and cows.
- 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.
- 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 needs to be adjusted, particularly for some more intensive producers.
- 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.
- 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.
- Minister Coveney 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.
- The Minister needs to respond and take on board the real farmer concerns, and make the necessary adjustments to the scheme. In addition, he needs to strongly encourage suckler farmers to apply before the May 29<sup>th</sup> closing date.