

Farm incomes are top of IFA agenda

As IFA branches prepare to meet to elect a new leadership, I want to assure you that IFA is working hard for you and that farm incomes are top of our agenda.

At home and in Brussels, IFA has hammered home the message to politicians that livestock, dairy, pigs and tillage farmers are under serious income pressure.

During the General Election campaign, the IFA Executive Council met Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin and left them in no doubt about what is required from the new Government to address key issues for farm families.

Our national commodity committees are targeting unsustainable product prices. The National Livestock Committee is focused on maximising price competition for cattle by driving live exports, and challenging the Minister on the Slaney Meats deal and the factories on price, weight limits and specifications. We are determined to secure stronger direct support for our national suckler herd.

Our Dairy Committee has met the co-ops and called for continued support for farmers through the current milk price crisis. We have used the Dairy Forum to put pressure on the banks and Teagasc to support farmers on cashflow and budgeting. In Brussels, we have called for urgent EU measures that can impact farmers' cashflow and support markets.

On Rural Development, IFA wants national and EU funding for farm schemes to reach annual expenditure of €580m. Farmers need the early re-opening of GLAS to bring total participation to 50,000, speedy approval of TAMS applications and restoration of ANC payment levels.

The Grain Committee is pushing for minimum price contracts as growers cannot endure another year that fails to deliver a margin, as well as early implementation of TAMS support for



Candidates for the position of IFA President with An Taoiseach Enda Kenny during his address to IFA Executive Council ahead of the General Election (l-r) Joe Healy; Flor McCarthy; Taoiseach Enda Kenny, IFA National Chairman Jer Bergin; Henry Burns; and, Bryan Barry, Acting General Secretary.

grain storage and technology equipment, and greater flexibility in GLAS.

Tackling input costs is a priority and IFA has presented an independent report in Brussels seeking EU Commission action on price fixing in fertilisers and the ending of border taxes that would be worth €1bn in cost savings to Irish and European farmers.

Our Pigs Committee has intensified pressure on processors to use only Irish pigmeat with the Bord Bia QA mark for well-established Irish brands as part of a strong home market for our producers.

The Sheep Committee is actively pursuing a targeted payment of €20 per ewe for flock-owners, and the Hill Farming Committee has identified key priorities for the new Government.

IFA is pressing the Department for delivery on payments and inspections under the Charter, as well as the introduction

of a yellow card system and pre-checks to reduce penalties and errors under Commissioner Hogan's CAP simplification initiative.

On retail legislation, IFA is pushing for the appointment of an independent Ombudsman and an end to below-cost selling.

Across every sector and region, IFA is committed to making progress on the issues affecting you and your family. Our new President will have a strong mandate to lead Irish farmers and the renewal of IFA.

Thank you,



Jer Bergin
National Chairman

Do we have your up-to-date contact details?

Let us know your email address and mobile phone number so we can keep you updated with important news and developments. If we have your contact details, we'll also be able to keep in touch on the progress of your queries.

Email membership@ifa.ie or call us on 1800 236 236 to update your details

Real delivery on IFA taxation proposals

A sustained campaign by IFA has resulted in new and enhanced measures targeted at improving land mobility, farm restructuring and the promotion of on-farm investment.

A key achievement was the introduction of the 'Family Transfer Partnership' model announced in Budget 2016. This is based on IFA proposals and will assist family farm succession by allowing family members to enter into a partnership arrangement where, at the end of a specified period, the family farm is transferred to the younger farmer. To support this, a tax credit up to €5,000 per annum for five years, may be allocated to the partnership.

IFA is continuing to pursue priority taxation measures identified by the Association in the Agri-Tax Review process and not yet implemented, including an increase in the Self-Employed Earned Income Tax Credit to bring it in line with the PAYE tax credit and further taxation measures to address income volatility. IFA is also pursuing the introduction of Stamp Duty exemption for leases over five years, announced in Budget 2015 but held up on account of EU State Aid Rules.

Keep updated at www.ifa.ie.



Putting agriculture on the political agenda: Pictured at the launch of the IFA's General Election Manifesto: Back row (l-r) Harold Kingston, Environment Chairman; Tom Doyle, Farm Business Chairman; George Mason, Grain Committee; and, Flor McCarthy, Rural Development Chairman. Front row (l-r): Maura Canning, Farm Family Chairperson; Jer Bergin, National Chairman; Tim O'Leary, Deputy President; and Bryan Barry, Acting General Secretary.

Since the Agri-Taxation Review in 2014, the IFA has delivered the following taxation measures for farmers:

- Enhanced income tax exemptions for long-term leasing;
- Retention of 90% Agricultural Relief;
- Retention of CGT Relief for Farm Restructuring and extension to include whole farm replacements;
- Retention of CGT Retirement Relief, with additional incentives to encourage long-term leasing;
- Retention of Young Trained Farmers Stamp Duty exemption and Stock Relief measures to 2018;
- Retention of Capital Allowances for farm buildings and machinery;
- Retention of Stamp Duty consanguinity relief to 2017;
- Increase in income averaging from 3 to 5 years;
- CGT exemption for forced disposal of SFP entitlements worth €25m;
- Beneficial tax treatment of Dairy quotas purchased prior to the introduction of capital allowances in 2000;
- New 'Family Transfer Partnerships' mechanism based on IFA proposals;
- New Earned Income Tax Credit for the self-employed of €650;
- Increase in CAT Group A 'parent to child' CGT threshold;
- No CGT implications on Basic Payment entitlements for those moving to joint herd numbers or entering partnerships during the 2015 scheme year; and,
- Removal of forestry income from the 'High Earners Restriction' for active foresters and farmers.

Better banking terms for farmers

IFA has met with the commercial banks to discuss their plans for agriculture in 2016, including product offerings, flexibility to cope with volatility and, the need for competitively priced products.

Spring 2016 will see a number of sectors face challenging income and cash flow positions. IFA has challenged the banks to be flexible and support farmers through difficulties. IFA Farm Business Chairman Tom Doyle advises farmers to review their cash flow situations early and engage with their banks if they foresee future repayment issues. IFA is putting increased pressure on ACC to allow flexibility on security for farmers taking out loans with other financial institutions.

Credit costs

CSO figures show agriculture has the highest percentage of performing loans in the SME sector, yet interest rates remain high relative to our European counterparts and to large firms. To address this market failure, discounted funding for certain investments is available via AIB, BOI and Ulster Bank through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). While this is a welcome initiative, which has improved the supply of funds to the agri-sector, issues remain: specialist tillage farmers are restricted from access to SBCI funds and no farmer representation on the board of SBCI. The IFA has met with the SBCI and the commercial banks and will continue to push for more targeted competitive agricultural lending.

Price competition essential for livestock

IFA has campaigned hard this spring on price, competition, specifications and the live export trade, says Livestock Chairman Henry Burns.

“Farmers are demanding that the Minister for Agriculture and the Government tackle the lack of competition evident in the beef sector. Bord Bia has provided figures showing that the average Irish/UK price gap for 2015 has widened to 82c/kg or €293 per head, compared to an average of 27c/kg or €97 per head over the 10 years from 2004 to 2013.”

Live Trade

Henry Burns said the recent agreement on a protocol to reopen the live trade to Egypt is positive and we need to see cattle moving. The Government needs to be much more supportive of the live export trade and securing access to our nearest and highest priced markets in Northern Ireland and Britain, “The EU labelling issues being used by processors and retailers to impede the live export trade and deny price competition must be resolved. The Minister must also lead the drive to open live markets to Libya and Turkey.”

Competition and Slaney

Livestock farmers have real fears and concerns around dominance in beef processing and rendering in the context of proposed consolidation in the industry involving Slaney Meats. IFA has called on the Minister and the Government to make a submission to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission focusing on the importance of protecting and guaranteeing competition in the processing and rendering sectors.

Weight Limits

Henry Burns said winter finishers need a price rise on cattle sold out of the shed. He said the way the meat factories are imposing weight limits and age penalties on our best farmers and quality stock is wrong and a move to undermine the QPS.

It is unacceptable that Minister Coveney has allowed the factories to blatantly ignore one of the key outcomes in the Beef Forum which clearly states: ‘Processors agree that there will be no dual base pricing for steers and heifers in individual processing plants, by breed, age or weight or Quality Assurance status’. He said weight penalties imposed by the meat plants are extremely penal and unnecessary, and target our best farmers and best cattle.

€200 per cow

IFA is lobbying hard for an increase in suckler cow payments to €200 per cow. Henry Burns said to maintain the suckler herd, which is the backbone of our quality beef sector, we need strong and targeted direct payments.



National Chairman Jer Bergin addresses a rally of 1,000 livestock farmers outside Slaney Meats in Wexford to highlight price and competition issues in the livestock sector.

Strong sheep trade

The lamb trade remains strong with hogget prices running above 2015 levels. However, weather conditions have impacted on thrive and added significantly to feed costs. With lambing in full swing around the country, IFA Sheep Chairman John Lynskey said it is very important that the new season lamb trade gets off to a strong start and strong viable prices are maintained into the summer. He said lamb prices averaged €5.09/kg in 2015.



John Lynskey presses Minister Coveney on sheep supports

€20 per ewe

The IFA campaign for a targeted payment for the sheep sector of €20 per ewe received a boost following the announcement from Minister Coveney that he has committed to a specific new support programme for the sheep sector. IFA will continue to strongly push the case for €20 per ewe both at home and in Brussels on the EU Sheep Reflection Group.

TAMS and KT

John Lynskey said IFA has made good progress in securing the reinstatement of grant aid for sheep fencing through TAMS II. In addition, IFA has secured payment under the new Knowledge Transfer Programme of €1,125 for mixed enterprise farmers such as cattle and sheep producers.

Get IFA cattle and lamb price updates twice weekly at www.ifa.ie, on Twitter and on the IFA's app - iFarm

Irish agriculture cannot be sacrificed in trade talks

TTIP discussions between the EU and the USA continue apace in 2016. The threat to EU agriculture was most recently highlighted by a UDSA study estimating significant gains to US agriculture under a potential agreement. IFA has made it clear that there can be no sacrifice of EU and Irish agriculture in pursuit of an overall deal.

IFA is demanding that the EU insists on strict equivalence of standards in all trade negotiations - all imports must meet EU standards in respect of the use of animal health, welfare and traceability as well as hygiene and environmental standards.

In addition, IFA is insisting the EU cannot conclude any trade agreement that runs directly counter to EU climate change objectives by facilitating the replacement of carbon efficient Irish produce on the EU market with carbon intensive imports. This is particularly relevant regarding any EU moves to reopen discussions with the Mercosur trading bloc - Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.

Reduced penalties & RDP changes on the way

IFA has applied maximum pressure to get all outstanding payments made to farmers. However, while significant progress has been made on BPS payments, the delay to some farmers in partnerships and companies, and young farmers, has been very frustrating. Delays in the completion of National Reserve and Young Farmer payments also led to serious cash flow issues on farms. IFA Deputy President Tim O'Leary has encouraged farmers to make their Basic Payment application online and benefit in terms of early processing, reduced errors and payment on time within the deadlines set down in the Charter.

New simplification rules apply in 2016

At a recent meeting with the EU Commission, IFA got an undertaking that new CAP simplification rules on a fairer system of sanctions for BPS area overclaims can apply in 2016. IFA Chairman Jer Bergin said the new system of reduced sanctions, a yellow card system and a pre-check within 35 days of application will remove the strict regime where farmers have been unfairly penalised – find full details at www.ifa.ie.

Rural Development Amendments

Rural Development Chairman Flor McCarthy said that, following lobbying by IFA, a number of RDP changes have been proposed to the EU Commission. These include TAMS grant aid for grain storage, sheep fencing and rainwater harvesting.

On Knowledge Transfer, IFA has forced the Minister to allow two payments for farmers with mixed enterprises. For example, a cattle and sheep farmer in two KT groups will get a payment of €1,150. IFA wants all changes implemented immediately.



Meeting with the EU Commission to discuss the new rules on simplification (l-r): Bryan Barry, Acting General Secretary; Jer Bergin, IFA National Chairman; Tom Tynan, Cabinet of EU Commissioner Phil Hogan; Pierre Bascou, Head of Direct Payments DG Agri; Gerry Gunning, IFA Rural Development Executive; and, Liam MacHale, IFA Director of European Affairs.

TAMS approvals

Following IFA pressure, the Department has commenced approvals for the first tranche of TAMS. Priority approvals were issued to 750 dairy farmers who needed to start work before calving. In the case of Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) equipment, approvals were issued to all 194 farmers. This was necessary as some had the LESS as a measure in GLAS plans. IFA is urging the Minister to get approvals issued to all 2,500 farmers who have so far applied to TAMS. The current tranche closes on March 25 with the third tranche opening the following day.

TAMS I payments continue to be made and IFA has called on the Department to pay all outstanding monies owed.

GLAS

IFA has criticised Minister Coveney for locking 2,500 Tier 3 farmers out of the second phase of GLAS.

Around 38,000 farmers are now in the scheme, meaning payments worth around €170m. All farmers who applied must be allowed into the scheme.

In addition IFA will be pressing for an early opening of the next phase, which must allow a further 12,000 into GLAS.

The RDP has set out that a total of 50,000 farmers will join the scheme with a value of €250m. Payments for the three months of GLAS for 2015 are being made to 22,000 farmers due a payment.



IFA Flood Project Team Chairman Tom Turley addressed a National Stop the Flooding Rally in Athlone last month. He called for the establishment of a Single River Authority to deal effectively with the ongoing issue of flooding. He said the recent flooding is a clear reminder of the lack of joined-up thinking where a number of bodies have an interest in rivers but none of whom is a lead agency. IFA succeeded in getting a Fodder and Hardship scheme in place for farmers badly affected by the recent flooding.

Hen Harrier Scheme

IFA has expressed frustration that the NPWS has not come up with a compensation scheme for farmers affected by Hen Harrier designations. The Locally-led Agri-Environment schemes do present a possibility and IFA wants a significant part of the €70m available to apply in these areas. A recent IFA meeting in Killaloe, attended by the Department of Agriculture, agreed to highlight this.

Farm Assist assessment

With the Department of Social Protection doing reassessments of those on Farm Assist, IFA is urging farmers to ensure that an accurate calculation of their farm income is made. Flor McCarthy pointed out that Farm Assist is a vital lifeline to many low income farmers and is also an entry point to the Rural Social Scheme.

IFA calls for Independent Retail Ombudsman

The appointment by the next Government of an Independent Ombudsman to oversee the Grocery Goods Regulations is essential to ensure the new regulations are effective. This was a key demand in our General Election 2016 Manifesto and IFA is looking for a commitment from Government that a system similar to that in the UK, which is paid for by the retailers themselves, would be put in place here to regulate the behaviour of retailers.

This would ensure that suppliers who are subject to unfair trading practices by retailers can have confidential and effective recourse to an Independent Ombudsman to investigate and pursue their case. IFA is concerned that the new Competition and Consumer Protection Commission will not be sufficiently focussed on supplier interests to effectively pursue complaints.

Dairy Forum must focus stakeholder support

The Dairy Forum, recalled this month by Minister Simon Coveney at IFA's request, must focus stakeholders on co-ordinating action to support dairy farmers through the current milk price and cash flow crisis. IFA Dairy Chairman Sean O'Leary said, "We engaged with all co-ops early this year to urge them to continue to front-load milk price supports, and generally to hold milk prices while markets rebalance. We have also asked for favourable merchant credit conditions and keenly priced inputs. Co-ops, together with Teagasc, can also assist farmers with budgeting and financial planning.

Competitively priced, flexible finance a must

"We are asking the banks to provide dairy farmers with flexible, well-priced cash funding options, and long-term, internationally competitive investment packages with variable repayments to reflect volatile incomes without renegotiation costs. Banks must use the SBCI to fullest effect, and the government must tap into the European Investment Bank to increase competition and lower farm finance costs.

"From Teagasc, we need cost-cutting advice that will help short term without harming the sustainability of the farm or herd

Government action in EU

"In Brussels, where the dairy crisis is on the Agriculture Council's agenda, the Minister needs to deliver measures that can impact farmers' cash flow, markets and prices quickly. First, we need an extension to the three-year Superlevy Repayment Scheme to give farmers some relief. We need more flexible Private Storage schemes for cheese and SMP, and a removal of penalties for early withdrawal for the latter. A commitment to continue buying SMP at full intervention price over the coming months, and to a fundamental review of the intervention 'safety net' to include price levels and an extension to the buy-in period are also crucial.

"The Minister must press for changes in EU State Aid rules to deliver on IFA's volatility tax proposal, which would allow farmers to hold back funds in good years to be returned to their taxable incomes in bad years.

"Finally, our Minister must reject misguided proposals to re-introduce any form of EU volume restriction, which cannot have any impact on what is a global market."

Receive Dairy News by Email

Get a monthly newsletter with dairy news and market information straight to your inbox - sign up at www.ifa.ie/dairy. You can also keep up with global dairy market analysis in the IFA Dairy Market Blog.



IFA engaged with all co-ops earlier this year - pictured during a meeting with Aurivo Co-op are: front row (from left) Aaron Forde, Aurivo CEO; Sean O'Leary, IFA Dairy Chairman and Tom Cunniffe, Aurivo Chairman. Back row (from left): Eoghan Sweeney, Aurivo General Manager; Laurence McNamee, Donegal; Martin Gilvarry, Mayo; Gearoid O'Connor, Sligo; and Martin Dowd, Roscommon.

Strong payment and regulation needed to secure liquid milk

The 2015 calving season saw a 15% year-on-year fall in autumn dairy calf births, while overall births for the year rose 8.5%.

IFA Liquid Milk Chairman Teddy Cashman said: "IFA predictions were correct; farmers are matching their calving pattern to their liquid milk contracts to minimise losses, reduce or cease liquid milk production. We correctly warned that low base milk prices, boosted during the autumn by strong constituents, would be undermined without any base price cut as lower constituents would cut at least 6c per litre produced by January, at the most expensive time of year. Reduced calving in autumn will tighten the availability of fresh milk for consumers in winter".

"Our regulators - National Milk Agency and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission - Government and retailers must remember that sustaining fresh milk supplies requires stable remuneration with strong winter payments and regulation to protect primary producers".



Liquid Milk Committee Chairman Teddy Cashman presenting the IFA liquid milk petition to National Milk Agency CEO Muiris O'Ceidigh and Chair Denis Murphy. A total of 300 liquid milk producers signed the petition asking dairies and regulators to ensure specialist producers are nurtured to secure supplies of locally produced fresh milk year round for Irish consumers. The Petition has also been presented to senior Department of Agriculture officials.

IFA negotiates €9million roads deal

A renewed co-operation agreement between the Department of Transport, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly NRA) and IFA in respect of land compulsorily acquired or to be acquired for the development of the national road network has been signed.

IFA's National Chairman, Jer Bergin, said: "The agreement, which was being negotiated by IFA for over twelve months is an important framework that shapes further the good work done by many former officers of the Association who delivered the original 2001 agreement. Important measures such as the fixed payment are restored, albeit at a reduced rate of €3,000 per acre, and the assessment process where disputes arise is streamlined. This fixed payment alone will deliver an extra €9million in addition to all other compensation received by landowners.

Rural Ireland must be at the centre of future renewables policy

James Murphy, IFA's Renewables Project Team Chairman has called for the new Government to put rural communities at the centre of future renewables policy by putting in place the following measures for community projects: a 2.5c/kWh tariff premium, grid exemption and a community quota, whereby at least 25% of any new renewables scheme announced by Government is ring fenced for projects that have at least 25% ownership by rural communities.

IFA seek fair EU emission targets for ammonia and climate

Harold Kingston, IFA's National Environment Chairman met with members of the European Parliament including Mairead McGuinness MEP recently and sought fair EU ammonia and climate targets in the current discussion taking place in the Parliament.

IFA represented Irish agriculture during the international climate talks in Paris and made the case that Ireland's global leadership position in carbon efficient food production provides opportunities for the sustainable growth development of the sector.



Signing the renewed agreement on land acquired for national roads (l-r) Michael Nolan, TII CEO; Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Michael Ring; and IFA National Chairman Jer Bergin.

Hill Farming update

In advance of the formation of a new Government, the IFA Hill Committee set out 16 key action points for Government. These included increased ANC payments, removal of the GLAS €5,000 limit on commonages, a special hill sheep payment, increased costings for sheep fencing, compensation for Natura land, and a higher KT payment for hill sheep – find the 16 point plan at www.ifa.ie.

Heritage Bill and Gorse Burning

Hill Committee Chairman Pat Dunne said the 2016 Heritage Bill on burning and hedge-cutting must be a priority for the new Government. The Bill has passed in the Seanad but due to the General election it will have to be dealt with by the new Government. The Bill will allow burning to take place up to the end March as opposed to the current end of February deadline.



At the launch of the Energy White Paper Harold Kingston, IFA Environment Chairman; Communications Minister Alex White; and, James Murphy IFA Renewables Project Team Chairman.

Recouping of forestry payments challenged

IFA Farm Forestry Chairman, Michael Fleming stated that inconsistencies in the Forest Service policy in relation to mapping and the recoupment of payments, raises serious questions over the legitimacy of the policy. He said it is unacceptable that farmers are being treated differently; while some farmers were not required to repay, others were required to repay all over payments since the forest was established and current policy is only to recoup payments back to 2007.

It is IFA's position that farmers have been treated unfairly; they adhered to the conditions of the Afforestation Scheme and quantified forest area using best available information. There was no requirement on the Forest Service to retrospectively recoup payments.

Following IFA lobbying, forestry income was been removed from the Higher Earners Restriction in Budget 2016, restoring forestry's income tax-free status - get more information on Forestry grants and schemes at www.ifa.ie/forestry.

Changes to TB Compensation Scheme secured



Bert Stewart questioned An Taoiseach Enda Kenny on TB compensation when he addressed IFA Executive Council

IFA has secured fundamental changes to the TB programme that will reduce the cost burden on farmers.

IFA had sought changes for some time and the amendments secured, in particular in regard to the income supplement rates for dairy cows are a significant first step in the process, says Animal Health Chairman Bert Stewart.

IFA has met with the DAFM seeking further amendments to the announced changes and their immediate implementation.

Income supplement

- The rate of income supplement for dairy cows will be increased from €25.39/month to €55/month.
- The 10% threshold for the income supplement will be retained as a general rule, but will be extended to include herds that lose at least 10% of their dairy cows.
- The 100 animal ceiling will be abolished.
- Continued eligibility for income supplement assessed after 12 months.

Depopulation grant

- The depopulation grant rate for suckler cows will be increased from €31.74 to bring it in line with the income supplement rate of €38.09.

Hardship grant

- The hardship grant scheme will be extended to dairy farmers even when producing milk.

Live valuations

- The ceilings on payments under the on-farm valuation scheme will be increased from €2,800 for a bovine to €3,000 and from €3,500 to €4,000 for a stock bull and €5,000 for a pedigree bull.
- Separate categories will be introduced for served heifers and maiden heifers.
- The EBI top-up coefficient for dairy cows will be reduced from €1.35 to €0.50.

Purchase in prohibition

- The Department will adopt as flexible an approach to feedlots as possible. DAFM will also allocate herd numbers to farmers who have parcels of land where there are no cattle currently to permit them to buy in cattle onto these land parcels. DAFM continues to offer an immediate test to herdowners where factory lesions are found and if clear will grant permission to purchase-in animals.

Potatoes

Potato Chairman Eddie Doyle has demanded that growers receive a fairer share of the retail price. Growers with potatoes in storage incur increased costs as the season progresses and need to be compensated for this. In addition, the continued profiteering on tare by some merchants needs to be addressed.

Horticulture

Horticulture Chairman Gerry Reilly is calling on all retailers to increase farm gate prices. Factors such as below-cost selling, poor weather and increased input costs have left grower returns at unsustainable levels.

Pictured right at the National Potato Conference last month: Lorcan Bourke; Bord Bia; Gerry Boyle, Teagasc Director; Eddie Doyle, Potato Chairman; and National Chairman Jer Bergin.



Poultry included in TAMS

IFA Poultry Chairman, Nigel Renaghan says IFA has delivered significantly for poultry farmers. A key achievement was the ring-fencing of €17.3 million for pig and poultry sectors under TAMS II. The Poultry Committee has compiled a detailed submission to the Department on additional TAMS measures required following consultations with all sectors within the poultry industry. All chicken processors have now committed to paying an increased margin to broiler producers. The Committee is also involved in negotiations with the Department to ensure the Knowledge Transfer scheme is tailored to suit all poultry sectors. The Committee is investigating alternative collection options for fallen animals and working closely with the Department and other stakeholders on biosecurity issues.

Pigs DNA scheme delivers

IFA continues to carry out DNA testing on pigmeat products in retailers, butchers, secondary processors and other food business providers. This scheme has impacted significantly on farm gate prices, delivering approximately 10c/kg to producer prices. The quantity of Quality Assured product in supermarkets has increased to almost 100% in own brand products, due to the DNA programme. Pigs Chairman Pat O'Flaherty has said IFA will continue to encourage retailers to demand Irish Quality Assured product from their suppliers and work to ensure consumers are fully informed of the origin of the pigmeat they are buying. Following a recent review of the scheme, a number of measures are being implemented to ensure continued optimum delivery. These include additional resources to administer the scheme, better IT infrastructure and routine validation of the boar database, as well as more frequent engagement with all retailers, encouraging them to move to a position of using 100% Irish pigmeat.

Grain farmers: insist on minimum price contracts

Grain Chairman Liam Dunne has said grain growers should insist on minimum price contracts that deliver a margin before ordering fertiliser and cereal seed this spring from their co-op or merchant as current price offers for the 2016 harvest are significantly below the cost of production.

“Growers’ incomes have been decimated over the last three years as a result of low world grain prices and rising costs, particularly for fertiliser. Current new crop price offers, coupled with disproportionate input costs, will see many growers subsidising grain production from their Basic / Greening payment. This situation is not sustainable. Unless there is a dramatic turn-around in grain prices many tillage farmers would be better off growing fodder crops or leaving land fallow rather than producing cereals especially where the work is contracted out. No different than the trade justifying a margin from their grain input businesses growers are entitled to the same.”

On Greening Liam Dunne said, “Greening is distorting the EU’s grain market. Growers are being forced to grow crops to satisfy bureaucratic requirements rather than respond to market signals. The Irish and UK barley market is case in point with the market being over supplied. Commissioner Hogan must simplify the regime.”

You can access all IFA input surveys on the iFarm app, where you can also share your price information and get commodity price updates – www.ifa.ie/ifarm

Licences & grants the marine priority

New capital and innovation schemes are now available through BIM from January 2016. IFA’s priority is to ensure that all aquaculture producers can avail of this funding. New chairman of the Irish Salmon Growers’ Association, Damien O’Keeffe, said, “Renewals and processing of new licences have to be top of the marine agenda. We are losing investment and marketing opportunities simply because the state has made it unnecessarily complex to process even the simplest application. The government has also ruled that grants are unavailable to farmers without an up-to-date licence. It is an unsustainable situation that must be fixed immediately.”



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IFA calls for EU Competition investigation as fertiliser report points to price fixing and concludes existing trade barriers are costing European farmers nearly €1bn. An IFA delegation presented the IFA-commissioned report to EU Commissioner Phil Hogan, DG Trade and DG Grow in Brussels last month (l-r) Fintan Conway, Grain Executive; Antoine Bouët, IFPRI; IFA National Chairman Jer Bergin; James McCarthy, Inputs Project Chairman; and, Liam MacHale, Director of European Affairs.

IFA leads major inputs campaign

Inputs Project Team Leader James McCarthy said, IFA is spearheading a campaign for the abolition of antidumping and customs duties on non EU fertiliser imports into Europe. Fertiliser is the second biggest expenditure on European farms. The imposition of duties to protect the profits of major multinationals at a time when farm incomes are on the floor is unjustified.”

IFA has launched a major international study which clearly demonstrates the operation of a price cartel among the major EU fertiliser manufacturers. “We have written to EU Competition Commissioner Vestager and met with her officials requesting them to instigate a sector enquiry into the European fertiliser industry. Fertiliser prices to date have failed to reflect the dramatic fall in energy and transport costs.”

Farm family priorities

IFA Farm Family & Social Affairs Chairperson, Maura Canning said the Committee is very focussed on getting changes to the Fair Deal Nursing Home Support Scheme. She said that she has requested to make a presentation to the Fair Deal Working Group established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations in the Review of the Nursing Home Support Scheme. IFA is looking for a maximum percentage charge that can be applied to income generating productive assets.

Healthy Hearts

IFA and the Irish Heart Foundation have teamed up to raise awareness of the need to improve heart health throughout 2016. Following the publication in 2015 of the *Farmers Have Hearts* report that showed farmers are disproportionately affected by lifestyle diseases such as heart attacks, stroke, diabetes and cancer, the campaign will see a representative from IHF visit each of the County Executive to provide some practical guidance and information on how to reduce the risk of heart disease. The message is clear: there is no magic treatment; a healthy heart is about looking after the basics – eating healthy and being active.

Farm safety

Fifteen people died on Irish farms in 2015. Although this is a 50% reduction compared with 2014 farm families can continue to make farming a safer profession. That is why the SAVE LIVES campaign is asking farm families to remain vigilant and to continue to make safety a top priority in 2016. Together let’s make farms a safer place to work and live.