

TEN PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW TAOISEACH

IFA has set out the following priority issues for farmers to be addressed by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD and the Government. Delivery on these priorities is critical to tackle low farm incomes, underpin the contribution of the farming and agri-food sector to the economy, including the achievement of *Foodwise 2025* targets, and to ensure the well-being of rural communities.

It should be noted that **IFA's pre-budget submission for 2018**, which will be launched in July, will contain additional detailed expenditure and taxation proposals for the Government's attention.

1 Putting Agri-Food Issues Top of the EU's Brexit Agenda

Brexit is the most significant threat facing our farming and food sector in the history of the State. The Government must ensure that farming and agri-food issues are top of the EU's Brexit agenda. The key priorities for the agriculture sector are:

- Maintenance of the closest possible trading relationship between the UK and EU, while preserving the value of the UK market for Irish exports; and
- Provision of a strong EU budget following the UK's departure. Member States must strengthen their contributions to the EU budget, to make good on any loss that may result from the UK exit.

2 A strong CAP with an increased budget post-2020

The CAP post 2020 must set as a target an overall improvement in farm income levels, and ensure a strong, sustainable and competitive agriculture for the benefit of farmers and consumers. The current structure of the CAP must be retained, whereby Pillar I provides basic payments and market supports, while Pillar II provides Rural Development measures, including farm schemes. The CAP reform post 2020 must also address the challenges of market volatility, climate change, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is clear that, to deliver on these challenges, an increased CAP budget is required

3 Securing a fair return for farmers from the marketplace

A rebalancing of power in the food supply chain is required, to deliver a viable price for farmers, and a return on their work and investment. Government actions in this area must include:

- Maximising competition through live exports;
- Stronger regulation of retailers through an independent ombudsman, and a ban on below-cost selling; and
- Support for the recommendations of the EU Commission's Agri-Markets Taskforce Report, including price and margin transparency at processor and retail level.

4 Access to Credit at a Competitive Rate and Fair Treatment of Farmers in Financial Difficulty

Access to credit at a competitive rate is critically important to support farm investment and improve efficiency. The high demand for the Agri-Cashflow Loan scheme clearly demonstrated the need for competitively priced working capital on farms. Further Government funding support is required to provide additional loan schemes. The Government must also work to accelerate a return to real competition between the financial institutions.

For farmers in financial difficulties, the Government must rebalance the power between borrowers who are seeking to resolve their financial difficulties and the financial institutions, including vulture funds and their agents.

5 Prompt Payments and Simplified Inspection Process

Delays to payments for farm schemes are resulting in serious cashflow pressures on farms. The Government must ensure, in line with the Charter of Farmers' Rights, that payments under all schemes are made on time, and that farmers facing inspections are treated fairly. The payment system and inspection regime must be farmer friendly, taking account of the practical realities of farming, in order to remove the fears and stress associated with inspections.

6 Reform of the Fair Deal Scheme to remove discrimination against family farms

The uncapped liability on farming assets under the Fair Deal Scheme is a major concern for farm families, causing anxiety that the viability of the family farm business will be undermined or lost when attempting to meet the costs of care. The Government must immediately make good on its commitment in the Programme for Government to remove the discrimination against small businesses and family farms in the financial assessment.

7 Restoration of funding for Areas of Natural Constraint (ANCs)

The funding for ANCs must be restored to its pre-2009 level of €250m, commencing in Budget 2018 with an increased allocation of €25m, as committed to in the Programme for Government. In the review of the ANCs, payment rates should reflect the natural disadvantage. All areas currently designated must continue to benefit from this vital support, which is essential to maintain farming and economic activity across all parts of Ireland.

8 Increasing market access while safeguarding farming interests in trade negotiations

As an export dependent sector, increased market access remains critical for the growth of the Irish agri-food sector. In the context of Brexit, increased funding for Bord Bia, and strengthening of the Department of Agriculture's market access unit, is critical to diversify and grow our exports into non-UK markets.

However, trade deals must not damage our vital interests in agriculture. The Government must strongly oppose any concessions on sensitive products, such as beef, in EU trade negotiations, such as Mercosur, and insist that all imports must meet the same animal health, welfare, traceability and environmental standards required of EU producers.

9 Supporting sustainable growth in agriculture

Farmers are fully committed to improving the environmental and economic sustainability of their farming enterprises, through participation in programmes such as the Bord Bia Quality Assurance Schemes, climate-smart measures under the Rural Development Programme, and farmer and industry-led initiatives, such as *Smart Farming* and non-statutory animal health programmes.

On climate change, the multiple roles of farmers as food, fuel and energy producers was recognised by the October 2014 European Council and in the Paris COP 21 Agreement. Government policy must continue to support farmers in achieving sustainable growth by:

- Delivering a positive outcome to the review of the nitrates regulations, to support optimum and sustainable crop and grass growth and continue the additional measures for the livestock, pig and poultry sectors; and
- Maximising the carbon sequestration potential of agriculture to meet both renewable energy and climate targets, including the development of a national biomass mobilisation programme and support for farm-scale and community based renewable projects.

10 Delivery of Quality Rural Services, Infrastructure and Farm Safety

To ensure balanced economic and social development across all regions of Ireland, the Government must implement measures that provide fair access to services and infrastructure to farmers and rural communities, including.

- Access to a high speed fibre broadband network;
- Allocation of sufficient funding for river maintenance and flood protection measures, including a review of the valuation of farmland under the cost benefit assessment of projects;
- Implementation of the recommendations of Independent Aquaculture License Review Group to support the growth of the industry and provide jobs in coastal communities;
- Continued support for Farm Safety through TAMS II and a lowering of the minimum investment limit to grant-aid farm safety measures;
- Increased Garda resources to tackle rural crime; and
- Ring-fenced funding for rural roads as part of a planned annual repair and maintenance programme



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#IFAtop10

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