Climate Submission,
The Citizens’ Assembly,
16 Parnell Square,
Dublin 1,
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10th August 2017

Via email & post

RE: IFA response to call for submissions on
“How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change”

IFA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Citizen’s Assembly. Consideration of this important issue is timely in light of Ireland’s national and European obligations, and the need to future proof our society and economy for generations yet to come.

This is important to IFA members, as farming is the backbone of economic and social activity in rural Ireland, undertaken in every county and parish. The farming and agri-food sector is Ireland’s largest indigenous sector, providing employment to over 300,000 people directly and indirectly. Exports from the agri-food sector have grown by more than 50% since 2009, and reached over €11b in 2016.

In addition to climate change, farming is faced with many challenges. For example, the vote by the UK to leave the EU has created major economic uncertainty. No other sector will be as significant impacted by BREXIT in Ireland as the agri-food sector.

A strong agriculture sector in Ireland is critical to the achievement of a more balanced economic recovery. Agriculture provides employment and generates earnings across the country, not just at farm level, but in the thousands of regionally based jobs dependent on and linked to the sector. Many of these jobs are located outside of the main urban centres. This provides an opportunity for families to both live and work in rural Ireland, and contributes to the maintenance of vibrant rural communities.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that Ireland’s national greenhouse gas emissions profile reflects this importance. Ireland did not have the industrial revolution experienced in many other European Member States. This is the reason why countries such as Germany and France have a lower proportion of emissions from agriculture when compared to Ireland.

However, as outlined below, not all sectors are the same, with agriculture having other obligations, in addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As such climate change
cannot be dealt with in isolation. Wider policy objectives and societal implications must also be considered. This point is accepted in national, European and international climate policy and is worth consideration.

For example, the provisions, which allow for forestry sinks and soil carbon sequestration in the July 2016 announcement by the European Commission of Ireland's 2030 target reflects this balanced approach – although it will present a significant challenge to farmers. Ireland’s 2030 climate target builds on the October 2014, European Heads of Government energy and climate package, which includes a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030, compared to 1990.

Importantly the European Commission in the October 2014 agreement, specifically in paragraph 2.14 stated that when deciding on sectoral plans, regard should be had for the multiple objectives of the agriculture sector, as food, fuel and energy producers as well as environmental enhancement and also the lower climate mitigation potential of the sector.

Paragraph 2.14 went on to refer to the need to ensure coherence between EU’s food security and climate change objectives and the need to examine the best means of encouraging the sustainable intensification of food production, while optimising the sector's contribution to greenhouse gas mitigation and sequestration.

This October 2014 position of the European Union was subsequently reaffirmed by international leaders in Paris in December 2015, when they met and agreed the successor to the Kyoto Protocol, known as the Paris Agreement. Article 2 of the Paris Agreement specifically refers to the need to ensure that food production is not threatened when addressing the climate challenge. Thoughts of the food riots of less than a decade ago in the Middle East, food poverty in developing countries, the UN Sustainable Development to achieve zero hunger by 2030 and the increased global demand for protein based foods, such as beef and milk, informed these Paris discussions.

Therefore, international climate policy is now at a more settled point, where it acknowledges the many responsibilities that agriculture must deliver, in addition to making a contribution to addressing the climate challenge. However, this settled view is no reason for complacency. Ireland has a responsibility to act, and within this context, agriculture has an important role to play – while respecting the need to safeguard food production.

National and EU legislation will be an important driver of climate policy. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act introduced in 2015 required the preparation of sectoral mitigation plans for the agriculture, transport, built environment and electricity generation sectors. These plans will be supported by climate adaptation plans, to prepare Ireland for future climate challenges.

**Policy influencing farmers’ climate actions**

In agriculture, Ireland is taking a leading position in Europe by targeting European funding through the Common Agriculture Policy to areas that reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the sector. 87% of the measures in Ireland’s Rural Development Programme have climate reducing elements.
These measures include the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme, or GLAS as it is known, which promotes the retention of soil carbon stocks through the encouragement of climate friendly agricultural practices such as minimum tillage, green-cover establishment and low-emission manure spreading techniques.

GLAS has clear and measurable agri-environment objectives over the next 5 years. They include:

- To have over 90,000 hectares of land with a crop cover, delivering almost 50,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide savings annually.
- Minimum tillage being used across 30,000 hectares of land sequestering over 10,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.
- Delivering 1.4 million metres of new hedgerows, which have the potential to sequester almost 5,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.

The GLAS programme is oversubscribed, with a high level of farmer interest in participating. Government must reopen this scheme and allow maximum participation.

Other programmes include the Beef Data and Genomics Programme and the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme, which assist farmers to reduce emissions and increase productive efficiency.

This climate focus of policy makers in Ireland is having a real impact, with emissions intensity per calorie of food output in 2013 approximately 14% below 2005. This figure is projected to reach 25% by 2030, based on the delivery of current policy measures.

**Focus on emission intensity – a clear path forward**

Emissions intensity as a proportion of output is the most appropriate climate barometer for agriculture, particularly if we accept the position of the EU Heads of Government from October 2014 and the international Paris Agreement of December 2015. The guiding focus of EU and international climate policy is on emission efficient food production, rather than reducing food production.

Research completed by the European Commission’s science and knowledge service, the Joint Research Centre, demonstrates that Ireland has an emission efficient model of food production. Ireland’s dairy farmers have the lowest carbon footprint in the EU for milk production and our beef farmers having the fifth lowest. This is not surprising given our natural grass based model of food production and our temperate climate, with 90% of our agricultural lands being carbon sequestering grasslands.

Whilst these facts around Irish farmers’ emission efficient model of food production are welcomed, they still provide no room for complacency and Irish farmers are far from complacent. They are very clearly going the extra environmental mile.

**Farmers going the extra environmental mile**

Ireland is the only country in the world that monitors, measures and manages carbon from farm to fork. 90% of beef exports are now in an audit and carbon foot printing programme. 100% of milk production is entering into a carbon auditing cycle. In addition, over 137,000 carbon
assessments have been completed on farms to date as part of Bord Bia’s Origin Green programme.

This Origin Green programme is the only sustainability programme in the world that operates on a national scale, with collaboration between Government, the private sector, food producers and farmers. It enables participants to set and achieve measurable environmental mitigation targets in areas that include carbon, water, energy and biodiversity.

In IFA we, in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency, are leading a voluntary initiative called Smart Farming. This programme aims to address the dual challenges of improving farm incomes while reducing environmental impact.

The genesis of this initiative came from the findings of the Teagasc climate marginal abatement cost curve or MACC as it is known. The MACC quantified the opportunities for abatement of agricultural greenhouse gases, as well as the associated costs/benefits. It provided guidance for the development of the Smart Farming.ie initiative, which focuses on the double dividend of improving farm returns while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Each year over 600 farmers throughout the country participate in this over-subscribed programme. The initiative combines the knowledge and expertise of agencies such as Teagasc, the EPA, UCD and the Grassland Association of Ireland and communicates it in a targeted way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve farm returns through better resource management.

**Further opportunities to reduce emissions**

The science tells us that Irish agriculture can reduce emissions by no greater than 8%. The greatest and most cost-effective opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions come in the built environment, transport and energy sectors. This emphasises the need for action in these other sectors – and this is perhaps where farming can do more and offer more support.

For example, last year IFA held a national solar energy seminar, which examined the potential for farmers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while delivering on Ireland’s renewable energy targets through the use of solar PV technologies. The interest in attending this seminar amongst farmers was greater than the capacity of the venue.

The potential of solar PV is being restricted by Government inaction. Government must come forward with a realistic feed-in tariff, which encourages community participation in renewable energy production and farm scale projects.

A different narrative around the delivery of renewables is required in Ireland and it must put communities centre stage, whether in regard to grid connection policy, feed-in tariff or planning policy. IFA firmly believes that at least 25% of all renewable energy projects, once built, should be made available to communities for part ownership. Future Government policy should support this.

On forestry, Ireland currently has over 312,000 hectares of forest cover that has been planted since 1990, with the State investing over €3.2 billion between 1990 and 2030 to increase this. The new forest plantation has a tangible carbon sequestration value that must feature positively in Ireland’s carbon accounting out to 2030.
Concluding views
Irish agriculture is facing up to the climate challenge, from farm to fork. Farmers’ futures and that of the next generations depend on agriculture’s sustainability actions today. However, sustainability is not just about the environment. It is also integral to the economic and social aspects of farming and the wider rural community.

This in IFA’s view is what leadership really looks like, when policy makers and the society work together to deliver on the multiple objectives of environmental/climate, economic and social sustainability and we really have a holistic and vibrant future.

I would appreciate the opportunity to address the Citizen’s Assembly and talk through this submission further.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Healy