

To the Gillis family, his relatives and friends, and to the wider farming community,

It's an honour to address you today as we come together to pay our respects to Alan Gillis.

He leaves a legacy of committed and determined representation on behalf of farmers.

Alan had a deep sense of justice and he brought that to the various roles he held when standing up for farmers.

During the Farmers' Rights Campaign in the sixties, he immersed himself in the fight.

Such was his level of personal commitment, he ended up in Mountjoy Jail in 1967 during the Farmers Rights Protest.

He refused to pay a fine he disagreed with. As a man of principle, he stood his ground.

He famously organised the IFA members into the Mountjoy Executive of NFA, as it was then.

Undoubtedly, this was very disruptive to his family life and his farm business, but he had a strong conviction that it was the right thing to do.

In the IFA history, The Path to Power, Rickard Deasy offered the view that Alan had been targeted because he was newly married to Irene and that he might not be able to take the pressure of prison.

But they were wrong.

We noted the sad passing of Irene during Covid.

I am sure Alan will now be reunited with Irene, as he will be with their son Stephen.

Alan cut his teeth with the Leinster Milk Producers and went on to become Chairman of this group, which we now know as FMP.

The group continues to represent farmers in this region who provide a unique product every day of the year.

Alan Gillis served as President of IFA from 1990 to 1994.

It's fair to say he took over at a turbulent time.

But Alan had a calm authority and a sense of decency that earned him the respect of farmers and the wider public.

One of the biggest challenges during his time as President came from the new trade rules from GATT, the forerunner to WTO.

Alan Gillis met this challenge head on and ran a successful campaign to safeguard the incomes of farm families.

At that time, he dealt with the then EU Commissioner Ray MacSharry, Taoisigh Charles Haughey and Albert Reynolds, and Minister for Agriculture Joe Walsh.

He also developed strong relations with the Director General of GATT Peter Sutherland.

It was a hugely volatile period for farming, with BSE emerging and the Beef Tribunal established.

Interest rates at the start of 1993 were 18%.

In his fight for farmers, Alan travelled to Libya to meet Colonel Ghaddafi to encourage Irish beef exports to north Africa.

His achievements were acknowledged when voters from the Leinster constituency elected him to the European Parliament.

Throughout his career, his involvement in Europe was a common theme.

During his presidency, he advocated for the Maastricht Treaty.

And he served as Vice President of the European Farmers umbrella body COPA.

It is fitting that we lay him to rest today, May 9th, which has been designated as Europe Day.

At a time when volunteerism is under pressure, his record is an example of how somebody can make a difference.

To his family – Nigel, Hazel, Barry and Anna -

I want to say you should be very proud of what your father stood for.

From engineering to farming, from Killeel to Grangecon, from Dublin to Brussels, and from Mountjoy jail to Libya, Alan Gillis gave so much of his life working to better the lot of Irish farmers.

He is an inspiration to those who have followed him.

May he Rest in Peace.