

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BY FRANCIE GORMAN TO THE 69TH IFA AGM  
JANUARY 9TH, 2024**

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to welcome all of you to the 69th AGM of the Irish Farmers' Association.

I would like to acknowledge our colleagues from FBD, and thank them for their ongoing support.

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I am very proud to be elected President of IFA. For me, this is about responsibility.

That responsibility is to the members of the Association, and the farmers of this country.

IFA is a democratic organisation.

Almost 30,000 farmers voted to elect a President and Deputy President. This gives us a very strong mandate to represent all farmers, to negotiate and deliver on their behalf.

I would like to congratulate Alice Doyle on her election as the first female Deputy President of IFA and I look forward to working with her.

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I want to be the President that people voted for.

During the election, several key issues came up again and again.

For the next four years, my focus will be on ensuring:

- A much bigger say in Irish and EU policy
- That farmers are acknowledged and paid for the work they do
- And a stronger and more vibrant IFA

Firstly, we need to develop and influence policy. That work starts now.

Like any organisation, we need to adapt.

I promised change and I want to deliver on that.

I intend to maximise the strength and reputation of IFA.

I want to see us front and centre in devising policy that rewards our sustainable farming practices, irrespective of where you farm in this country.

We have to respect and respond to the concerns of all members.

And I want to deliver positive results for farmers. At the end of the day, it's about putting more money into farmers' pockets.

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Farmers must be rewarded for the positive role they play in delivering on this country's environmental ambition.

ACRES, in its current form, does not deliver in this regard. We need a much better scheme, that properly rewards all farmers with payments of up to €15,000.

We have invested billions in our farms.

We have taken on new practices in a huge way to enhance our position as one of the most sustainable and environmentally-friendly food producing nations on the planet.

Too often, how we are portrayed is both inaccurate and unfair.

For me, Irish farmers are the unsung heroes of the climate and biodiversity debate.

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We are one of the most sustainable food producing countries in the world.

We have the climate and the skillset.

We need to recognise and reward farmers for the positive role they play.

My message for those who spend their time knocking farmers.

We are NOT going to stop producing top quality, sustainable food.

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This Government has failed to support primary producers since it came into office.

Farmers livelihoods are under most threat.

From CAP to Nitrates to TAMS to VAT to late payments, this Government has let farmers down.

The delay to payments last autumn was completely unacceptable. The necessary staff resources should have been put in place to ensure payments were made on time.

While others, rightly, received Christmas bonuses and top ups from the State, farmers were left in the lurch. Some received no payments at a time of the year when cash flow was under most pressure.

This has been an abject failure of the Minister and his Department.

The handling of policy in our forestry sector is another example of this.

Farmers' faith in the Department to administer schemes and deliver payments on time has been shattered.

The Department must sit down with us to devise a new and effective regime for payments and inspections.

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When Ireland held the vote to join the EEC over 50 years ago, the President of IFA at the time TJ Maher wrote an article in the Sunday Press encouraging a yes vote.

And he said: "Inside the EEC, ... our grass, with its long growing season, provides us with the cheapest raw material in Europe for the production of milk, beef and lamb."

Today, more than ever, that is the case.

The EU is trying to undermine our competitive advantage by designing regulations which do not give fair credit to Ireland's grass-based system.

A typical example of this was the recent Nitrates debacle.

Our Minister and his Department agreed to a completely flawed review mechanism, which resulted in our derogation going from 250kg to 220kg of organic nitrogen per hectare for most parts of the country.

This Government, and the one which succeeds it, must fight for Irish farming and our sustainable grass-based system.

There must be no repeat of their shambolic handling of the Nitrates review.

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The recent changes to the ICBF beef indices must be addressed.

We need to look at the makeup of the Index, how weightings and calculations are applied, and their impact on suckler breeding policy and SCEP.

I intend to engage with ICBF and the Minister in the coming days to find a resolution, one that unites farmers rather than divides them.

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Farm incomes will be the number one priority during my term as President.

Discussions on the new CAP for 2028 have already started. Farmers and sustainable food production must be front and centre of the next CAP.

This Government must fight for a larger CAP budget, with a focus on food production. They cannot limit their ambition to just maintaining the status quo.

Farmers need to be properly rewarded in a way that reflects the rising cost of production.

We can no longer accept our CAP supports being raided to deliver environmental ambition. This should instead be funded through a separate budget.

Farmers in all sectors, the vulnerable sectors in particular, are under serious and constant income pressure. This cannot continue.

Put simply, farmers producing top-quality food while safeguarding the environment must be properly rewarded.

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Farmers' incomes depend mainly on three things – the market, supports, and the cost of doing business.

It's a new year, but we see the retailers up to their old tricks by discounting quality food.

Nobody is fooled by their claim that they take the hit.

They don't. WE DO.

I've listened to the retailers over the last week, but what I haven't heard from them are any figures.

I have a clear challenge for them here today: publish all your data on margins and profits.

If they won't do that, the new Agri-Food Regulator has to get stuck in, and insist that these figures are exposed.

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One other issue I want to put down a marker on is this Government's agenda to make plans for our land.

Farmers are increasingly concerned about being taken for granted by the State and some private developers on infrastructure projects such as roads, Greenways, electricity lines, and pipelines.

Let me be clear – there must be full agreement before any developer enters their land.

Re-wetting, designation, the Zoned Land Tax, and the Land Use Review are all attempts to undermine farmers rights to farm their land.

76% of the land in this country is held by farmers. It is not owned by the State, its ours, and we will not allow it to be confiscated by stealth.

I have a clear message for this Government and future Governments: Hands off our land.

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We in IFA have represented farmers for nearly seven decades.

We rely on members making a voluntary commitment for the good of their fellow farmers to keep the organisation vibrant.

Across society, the challenge of persuading people to take on leadership roles is getting harder and harder.

We need to encourage greater involvement of women and more diversity in our Association.

I want to say here today to those who might be reluctant: the door is always open and everyone is welcome.

We need to be able to communicate our message to members, Government and the wider public in a much more proactive, timely and concise manner.

We will have a new communications plan to put in front of our National Council before the Spring is out.

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Before I finish, I want to pay tribute to our outgoing President Tim Cullinan and Deputy President Brian Rushe.

On taking office four years ago, we were confronted with the Covid19 pandemic.

Face-to-face meetings were not possible. I want to acknowledge the commitment to keeping the organisation relevant during that period and the work that was done over the past four years representing farmers.

I also want to acknowledge the contributions to IFA of Martin Stapleton and Pat Murphy, who contested the election for President and Deputy President.

We will have an opportunity later tonight to recognise the other officers and chairs who complete their terms today.

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In conclusion, 2024 and 2025 will see local and European elections, and a General Election.

Farmers feel abandoned by this current Government. Political parties cannot take farmers for granted, and that applies to all parties.

IFA has a proven track record of developing proposals backed up by the facts.

We are seeing farmer unrest in other countries, but I believe in the power of negotiation.

Negotiation will always be my starting point.

However, with the support of this Council and our members from around the country, I will be prepared to do whatever it takes to deliver for farmers.

I want to thank members from around the country for their support in electing me as President of the Irish Farmers' Association.

I look forward to working with you, and on your behalf, for the next four years.

Thank You.