

IFA 71st AGM

Address by IFA President Francie Gorman – 13th January 2026

Good afternoon and welcome to the 71st Annual General Meeting of the Irish Farmers' Association.

Since we met this time last year, a lot has happened in the farming world.

2025 worked well for most sectors, with the obvious exception of those in tillage. This sector was a priority for us last year and it will be again this year.

Despite a good year in 2025, most sectors are under pressure on price in recent weeks.

Recent cuts in the milk price have been savage. There's also pressure on beef, sheep, pigs and potatoes, which is a big concern for the outlook for 2026.

Processors and retailers have to share the pain and support their suppliers during these challenges.

Side by side with better prices for producers – some of which were long overdue, particularly on the beef side – we had a lot of commentary about food prices that lacked context.

Higher costs have eroded much of the increases, yet it didn't feature in public discussions. The cost issue is something I will refer to again.

We have a number of officers here today who are completing their terms, and I will return to that later.

We have some huge challenges ahead and I want to focus on those in my address.

The backdrop to our AGM has seen some dramatic developments around what we consider a core issue: to have our world-class standards recognised in public policy.

That applies to trade deals.

it applies to how the next CAP is structured.

And it applies to how regulation is framed.

We have stood against Mercosur for over 20 years. In that time, we have travelled to Brazil twice with the Farmers Journal to expose the appalling lack of standards that exist there.

Last summer, we were with ICOS in Dublin and Brussels on Mercosur. On December 18th, COPA and its member organisations, including ourselves, brought Brussels to a standstill and the deal was postponed.

Since the recall of Brazilian beef in this country was announced last week, the authorities have been unable to provide a credible explanation for this very serious breach.

We are told that this was part of an EU audit, but that this full report won't be published until well into 2026. That is not good enough.

We need to see the full audit and we need to see it now.

Brazilian beef represents a threat to public health and it cannot be downplayed by referring to more audits and controls. Either the Commission knows what is going on or it doesn't.

In reality, Brazil has no interest in meeting our standards and they told us this when we carried out our investigation there a few months ago.

But if we know that, why doesn't the Commission?

The Mercosur deal is bad for farming; it is bad for public health; it is bad for rural Ireland; but it is also bad for the EU Commission.

The head of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen plans to head to Paraguay as she looks to drive home the Mercosur trade deal.

Our government took a stand last Friday and voted NO to the deal.

Which is what we and farmers expected them to do, as it had been promised in the Programme for Government.

But we expect them to do more. There was also a commitment to work with other countries in opposing the deal. That work must continue before the European Parliament votes on the deal.

We have sent a very clear message that people remain utterly opposed to this deal.

Now, it will go to the Parliament for ratification. I would appeal to our MEPs to make as many contacts in the time between here and the vote to get the numbers we need.

We will be working through our Brussels office to build opposition to the deal.

The President and Vice Presidents of COPA met yesterday, and the French Vice President will lead a protest outside the European Parliament next week.

I will be there to add Ireland's support.

Expecting Irish and European farmers to have trust in the EU while turning a blind eye to substandard imports is unfair.

What we want to see is a re-set of the relationship between the European institutions and farmers on the ground.

We are anti Mercosur, but we are not anti the EU.

We want the EU market to be a level playing field. When we joined in 1973, it was the Common Market. A market with common standards for all countries. We should not undermine that market with sub-standard product.

The dominant issue for this year, and particularly the second half of the year, will be the shape of the next CAP.

The first issue to be resolved is the size of the budget as part of the EU Multi Annual Financial Framework the MFF.

The original proposal got this off to a very bad start.

Despite the shuffling of funding last week by the Commission, they plan to cut the farming budget and cut it severely.

Whatever way they try to present it, there is no getting away from that.

I want to remind the EU Commission: there is no greater security than food security.

But you won't have it if you strip away certainty from farm families.

We need to encourage the next generation into farming. We can only do that if they have a standard of living comparable to their peers in other sectors.

Cutting CAP is a kick in the teeth for European farmers and their families.

We will raise this with the Taoiseach when he joins us later.

Before we have any discussions about how the next CAP should be structured, we have to resolve this budget issue.

For our government, this must be a priority during the Irish Presidency of the EU.

As net contributors to the EU budget, our government has to insist that a higher portion of the budget goes to the CAP.

And I want to make one thing clear: CAP funding should be directed at those farmers who are farming the land sustainably and producing food; tending to livestock; and harvesting the crops. Irrespective of what age they are, or where they are from.

Along with a higher budget, the Minister has to address the 'cost incurred, income foregone' issue. This restriction has effectively meant that farmers cannot derive any benefit from a number of schemes.

It is a ridiculous restriction, and it must be confined to the dust bin.

Suggestions by some that CAP funding would be used to incentivise farmers to take part in the Nature Restoration Law are a complete non-runner.

Any attempt by the Government to impose the Nature Restoration Law will be opposed tooth and nail.

I referenced the cost of doing business earlier. It is an issue that has to be tackled.

Our government can point to some costs and make the reasonable point that some are outside their control.

But there is plenty of Government policy that is adding to our costs.

We met Minister Peter Burke on this yesterday and we made the point that he has to have a laser-like focus on costs.

Carbon tax along with excise is having a big impact on the price of fuel. Farmers have no alternative. As one of the key inputs for farmers, it has to be addressed.

One issue we will raise with Minister Heydon later this afternoon is the valuation for farmers impacted by TB.

The ceilings are hopelessly out of date and if farmers are to have confidence in what is being done to tackle the issue, then these ceilings should be removed.

Market valuation should mean market valuation.

A number of our officers are completing their terms at this AGM. I want to thank them for their support and commitment. We also welcome our newly elected officers.

Everything we do in IFA we do as a team and each of you should be proud of how we represent farmers.

A big challenge for our Association is to find the leaders of the future. Social media plays a huge role in how we get the message out today.

But it's the face-to-face interaction at county and national level that really makes the difference.

Highlighting problems is easy. Getting them solved is the hard part.

Our Ready to Lead Programme sponsored by FBD was a great success last year and we have a strong interest in the programme again this year. Meeting these young leaders was a highlight of the year for me, as was our national Health Check programme.

Before I conclude, I would like to make a point about some of the commentary in the last 10 days around the Mercosur trade deal.

We have represented farmers for over seven decades, and we have a duty to put forward their issues and concerns. We make no apology for doing it well. The people in this room are a lobby army.

We have a democratic structure in every county, and each farming sector is represented in our Association.

That is what we are elected to do.

In any functioning democracy, there has to be a place for citizens to make their views known.

We make no apologies for what we do or how we do it.

Retaining the Nitrates derogation and holding our government to account on Mercosur was down to the hard work of the people in this room.

Farming and food production is the bedrock of this country. We are proud to be farmers. We are proud to represent farmers.

Candidates and parties are elected based on the policies they set out. A Government is formed on the basis of a Programme for Government. We did our homework. We lobbied before the election; we lobbied after the election. We lobbied every day since.

We lobbied at home and we lobbied in Brussels where we have a full time office we can also be proud of.

The fight on Mercosur and other issues goes on. We will hold all our MEPs and their parties to their pre-election commitments.

The fight goes on. Thank You.