



IFA President Francie Gorman Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Union Affairs

Priorities for Ireland's upcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Wednesday 18th February 2026

Chair and members of the Committee,

Thank you for giving IFA the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion.

I am joined here today by IFA Director General Damian McDonald and IFA Director of Europe Affairs Liam MacHale from IFA's office in Brussels.

IFA welcomes this engagement on Ireland's priorities for the forthcoming EU Presidency. IFA remains deeply involved in European Affairs and is the only Irish farming organisation to maintain a full-time office in Brussels for engagement with the European Institutions.

Agricultural priorities must be central to the Irish Presidency, given their pivotal role in sustaining rural communities, food security and environmental stewardship.

Priority 1: Securing Tangible CAP Support: Budget & MFF post 2027

Ireland's Presidency coincides with crucial negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Securing a properly funded and farmer-focused CAP, for existing and next generation farmers, must be at the centre of Ireland's Presidency priorities.

Initial proposals for the MFF / CAP have generated significant concern, particularly its revolutionary changes to structure, governance, and funding, which risks dismantling the traditional two-pillar structure; the 'commonality' approach applied and the integrity of the Single Market.

The farmers' voice is being diluted. Most severely, in the context of an increasing overall MFF budget, is that EU agriculture risks a 20% cut in funding, at a time when the challenges facing Irish agriculture both persist and are escalating.

Any cut to the CAP budget is unacceptable.

Priority must be towards securing an adequate ring-fenced CAP budget.

Potential funding sources outside the €293.7bn ring-fenced for CAP income supports are hypothetical supports until guaranteed, much like the Commission '10% Rural Target' and '€45bn frontloaded' proposals in the absence of legal text.

We urgently need all relevant Articles from the NRPP to move to the CAP regulation for greater coherency for farmers.

National Plans must reward active farming, support evidence-based environmental measures that complement output and efficiency, and which recognise sustainability as a tool for long-term resilience.

They should protect commercial farming and rural communities across Europe. Obligations under the **Nature Restoration Law (NRL)** must **NOT** be funded through CAP, directly or indirectly. Any funding for the NRL must be 'new' money.

The requirement to include a Young Farmer Starter Pack within the future CAP framework is positive. Attractive supports, together with a strong budget and a series of broader national interventions is needed to reverse declining trends. IFA rejects proposals to exclude those in receipt of pension income from key income supports.

Priority 2: Restoring EU Competitiveness and Ambitious Simplification:

Driven by regulatory changes and geopolitical events, the cost of production on farm, most especially for land, fertiliser and energy has escalated considerably, leaving family farm incomes exposed.

Progression of the **Fertiliser Action Plan** will be important to help rebalance the market for farmers which has been highly impacted by geopolitical events and increased regulation.

Ireland is also well placed to contribute to the **EU Livestock Strategy** – a strategy which should more greatly promote livestock farming, recognising that 'no one size fits all' when it comes to livestock production.

Any changes to **EU Animal Welfare Regulation** must also be cognisant of that and Irelands single market access protected.

A proposal on the revision of the **Unfair Trading Practices (UTPs)** legislation is anticipated. Under this revision, greater powers should be given to the national competent authorities which enforce the UTPs.

Closer attention to price transmission across food supply chains should be examined aiming for the greatest levels of transparency and fairness along the chain to retail markets.

It is essential that any simplification efforts reach farmers on the ground and not just the agencies they interact with for administrative management. It is important the Irish Presidency advance every opportunity for greater simplification for the benefit of EU and Irish farmers. The Commission is expected to conduct 'stress tests' on both the **Nitrates and Habitats Directives** in the coming months which are of immense significance to Irish agriculture.

It is imperative that these reviews are not a talking shop but that actual proposals are brought forward to update these directives to account for food security and legal certainty for Irish farmers.

Trade deals such as Mercosur and Australia which provide additional access to the EU market for beef and sheep meat are a threat to Ireland's most valued markets. The EU must not agree any trade deal which further compromises sensitive EU agriculture sectors, or which creates double standards in the market on quality and standards of EU food.

Conclusion

IFA stands ready to work constructively with the Irish Government and European partners to ensure that Ireland's Presidency of the European Union provides certainty and opportunity for current farmers and the next generation. The immediate and overriding priority must be to secure a strong, adequately funded, and ring-fenced CAP that safeguards farm incomes, supports sustainable food production, and sustains rural communities.

EU support is most visible in rural Ireland with rural development projects in most communities and the impact of CAP visible in almost every farmyard nationwide. The Irish Presidency should be well connected to rural Ireland and the agricultural diversity within it.

ENDS.

Information Note:

IFA

The IFA is Ireland's largest farming organisation, with over 72,000 farmer members covering all production systems. The Association has 947 branches and 29 County Executives across the country. The IFA President and various Committee Chairs, along with branch and county representatives are democratically elected by the farmer membership. IFA represents all farming sectors at national, European and international level. Through our office in Brussels, the IFA represents Irish farmers on the European umbrella body of farm organisations COPA/COGECA. In addition, the IFA is the representative for Irish farmers on the World Farmers' Organisation.