
For Written Answer on : 22/01/2019
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Department: Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Asked by: Brendan Smith T.D.

QUESTION

To ask the Minister for Agriculture; Food and the Marine the measures he plans to implement to support the suckler beef sector in view of growing concerns regarding its viability and the lack of an adequate return to the primary producer; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

REPLY

I am conscious that 2018 was a difficult year for the suckler beef sector, particularly in terms of unprecedented weather events, which resulted in increased input costs due to fodder shortages. We must also acknowledge the exposure of the sector to Brexit impacts.

However, one of the unique strengths of the agri-food sector has been the shared vision for the sustainable development of the sector in Food Wise 2025. I hope that this positive engagement will continue. I have utilised the Beef Round table to highlight the need for stakeholders to recognise their inter-dependency and to support the sector through examination of mechanisms to add value along the supply chain and increase the strength of all links in the supply chain, including Beef Producer Organisations. Officials from my Department are currently engaging extensively with stakeholders in relation to Beef Producer Organisations.

More generally in relation to the beef sector, in the last Budget I secured €20 million for a new Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot targeted at suckler farmers and specifically aimed at further improving the carbon efficiency of beef production.

My Department is examining all appropriate measures to support the different agri-food sectors, including the suckler sector in preparation for the next iteration of the CAP. I am committed to ensuring that suckler farmers continue to receive strong support in the next CAP. My view is that such payments should support and encourage suckler farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve the profitability, and the economic and environmental efficiency, of their farming system.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is currently the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) period. This scheme is an agri-environmental measure to improve the environmental sustainability of the national suckler herd by increasing genetic merit within the herd.

My Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the €4 billion Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for suckler and sheep farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

I am strongly of the view that the current range of supports available to suckler farmers, together with ensuring market access to as many markets as possible, both for live animals and beef exports, are appropriate supports for the continued development of the sector. National Farm Survey data suggests that suckler farmers receive support equivalent to approximately €500 per suckler cow on average. It is also envisaged that suckler farmers will be the primary beneficiaries of the €23million ANC increase in addition to the €20million available under the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot.

Securing new market access and enhancing existing Irish beef access has been a particular priority for many of the trade missions in 2017 and 2018. The opening of the Chinese market for Irish beef last year was the culmination of significant work, over a number of years. My Department continues to prioritise efforts to gain market access to new third country markets and, equally importantly, to deepen existing markets for Irish beef products.