

Ensuring A Fair Price For Farmers



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Creating a Sustainable Agricultural Sector

The agricultural industry is the beating heart of rural Ireland. Our largest indigenous industry forms an integral part of the economy. The Agri-Food sector is uniquely placed to be a core component in delivering economic prosperity to every part of the country, addressing the widening rural urban divide that Fine Gael has neglected. A strong Agri-Food sector is crucial.

We are committed to a number of policies to boost this essential sector. We will deliver policies that will protect the 137,500 family farms across the country and secure a fair price for the primary producer. Fianna Fáil will protect Ireland's interests in CAP negotiations, work to ensure farming is a viable business and develop new market opportunities.

Our Goals

- ✓ A fair return for farmers
- ✓ An economically, socially & environmentally sustainable agricultural sector
- ✓ Quality affordable food for Irish consumers

Over the next 5 years, we will:

1. Defend CAP funding & ensure sustainable farm incomes

CAP is a cornerstone of the EU. It secures the livelihoods of farmers across the continent including 137,500 family farms in Ireland.

CAP ensures that over 510 million people have a safe, secure supply of food and ensures farming families survive and progress. We will defend and uphold CAP payments in these deeply uncertain times.

- ✓ Work with our European colleagues to ensure a fully funded, fair, and simpler CAP that safeguards direct payments.
- ✓ Negotiate for a fair income for farmers in the new CAP post 2020.
- ✓ Secure national ceilings at EU level on individual CAP payments and restrict them to €60,000 in Ireland to safeguard the family model of farming.
- ✓ Introduce a complementary redistributive income support for smaller and medium-sized farms in the next CAP.
- ✓ Fight to ensure the next CAP accommodates Ireland's 3,500 "Forgotten Farmers" (farmers under 40 years, who commenced prior to 2008).
- ✓ Establish an Independent Agriculture Appeals Review Panel in legislation that will have farmer representation.

2. Work to amend EU rules to provide greater supports for the Agri-Food and Fishing sectors

Brexit presents a major threat to the Agri-Food and fishing industries as we have deep economic trading links with the British Market.

The sector is acutely vulnerable to sterling fluctuations that jeopardises profitability. In addition, the prospect of trade barriers or transportation impediments will directly hit the profit margin on agricultural goods.

We will:

- ✓ Work with our EU colleagues, to seek approval at European level for flexibility around state aid rules to allow schemes to help protect the most exposed sectors such as the Agri-Food sector.
- ✓ Seek that contingency supports and market disturbance funding is provided at EU level for farmers and fishermen in order to mitigate against the harmful impact of Brexit.
- ✓ Ensure adequate Brexit supports for Enterprise and Food Promotion Agencies.

3. Establish a National Food Ombudsman

The future of the family farm unit and the long-term food security of the country is reliant upon producing goods at a profit. Farmers are struggling to make a sustainable income because of the ongoing price erosion by large multiple retailers. A fair price for their produce is a core priority of Fianna Fáil's agriculture policy and is vital to the long-term survival and success of the horticulture, beef, sheep, liquid milk, pig, horticulture, tillage and poultry sectors. We will:

- ✓ Establish a new state independent authority called the National Food Ombudsman (NFO), to protect primary producers in national law and ensure fairness and equity in the food supply chain. This will cost €2.3m.
- ✓ Designate the new NFO as the independent public authority in Ireland to enforce new EU wide rules (EU Directive (2019/633)) on prohibited unfair trading practices in the food supply chain. The NFO will have the statutory power to issue penalties for those who breach regulations.
- ✓ Enhance price transparency for farmers by designating the NFO as the responsible state body to capture price and market data in Ireland.
- ✓ The NFO will also be required to produce regular price reporting at wholesale and retail level in the food supply chain as required under new EU regulations.

4. Ensure a suckler cow payment of €200 per head

The beef industry is the cornerstone of Irish agriculture and employs more people than any other sector. While the beef data genomics scheme plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the Irish beef herd, the administrative burden and low returns of the government's scheme continues to undermine this vital industry.

The sector requires targeted payment supports that are accessible to all farmers; that contribute to environmental objectives, while avoiding an administrative black hole. We will:

- ✓ Reform and simplify the existing scheme and ensure a €200 per head payment on the first 20 cows. The approximate cost of this measure will be €46m in additional funding.
- ✓ Ensure that the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP) scheme remains a permanent suckler support scheme.
- ✓ Support the work of the Beef Market Taskforce and associated actions regarding beef specifications.
- ✓ Work to ensure that processors and supermarkets pay proper prices for quality Irish beef as part of the broader efforts to increase price transparency and strengthen profitable farming.
- ✓ Fully support the setting up of Producer Organisations (POs) for primary producers in the beef sector.
- ✓ Actively seek EU approval of protected geographical indication (PGI) status for Irish suckler grass fed beef to enhance promotion as a premium priced product.
- ✓ Continue to develop and support live exports.
- ✓ Support the sheep welfare scheme as a key income support for sheep farmers.

5. Increase resources to the market access unit

Access to international markets will be critical to the future development of the Agri-Food industry and vital exports in Irish meat and dairy product. We will work with embassies across the globe, the Department of Agriculture & Food to co-ordinate new market access initiatives. The recently established Market Access unit was advocated by Fianna Fail in its 2016 manifesto. However, it only has 6 staff members. More is needed to develop local relationships to grow new markets.

We will:

- ✓ Increase resources and staff to the specialised Market Access unit in the Department of Agriculture & Food to at least 20 staff in order to spearhead access to new markets for Irish Agri-Food produce. This will be drawn from existing resources.
- ✓ Support the dairy sector to continue adding value to high quality product in line with national food strategies.

6. Increase Areas of Natural Constraints and biodiversity payments

The Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme is important to help maintain the continued use of agricultural lands by farmers. Additional financial resources are necessary to ensure that farmers on the most disadvantaged lands are maintained and that lands do not fall into disuse and disrepair. This will underpin a more regionally balanced and sustainable farming system across Ireland.

We will:

- ✓ Allocate an additional €50m above 2020 levels to bring the ANC scheme funding to €300m per annum.
- ✓ Enhance biodiversity management of lands by fully restoring the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Farm Plan Scheme with an additional €4m in funding.

- ✓ Ensure the NPWS completes a Threat Response Plan for the conservation of Hen Harriers on designated land.

7. Expand Farm Assist

State supports are vital to making family farms financially viable. Measures such as Farm Assist and the Rural Social Scheme combined help support low income farmers make a living and keep farming their lands. These schemes also have an important part in providing direct supports to marginal farming families in rural Ireland. We will:

- ✓ Expand Farm Assist means testing rules to disregard the first €3,000 of income and means test the remainder at 50% at a cost of €18m annually. This will encourage more enterprise and increased production from small farmers.

8. Review the Climate Action Fund and work with Teagasc to identify further abatement measures

Climate Change represents a fundamental challenge to food production across the globe. Farmers are intimately aware of the consequences of volatile climate conditions and challenges. Ireland is one of the most environmentally efficient food producing countries in the world. Taking progressive steps now will help to secure the long-term future of the sector, safeguarding the vibrancy of the rural economy for future generations.

- ✓ Ensure the Climate Action Fund is targeted to help prepare the sector for Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy.
- ✓ Work with Teagasc to identify further measures regarding carbon abatement potential over the decade ahead for the agriculture sector.
- ✓ Reduce ammonia emissions by introducing 100% capital allowances for the uptake of 1,500 units of Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment annually by farmers over a four period. This measure will cost €3.4m.

9. Launch a new strategy on sustainable waste processing

It is in Ireland's interests to enhance our climate change credentials in the Agri-Food sector.

It is increasingly important in the market and forms a central part of our national efforts to address the challenge of climate change. Anaerobic digesters offer a process to transform farm waste into valuable bio-gas.

The successful example of Lisheen and the potential of the bio-economy must be expanded nationwide to create rural jobs and reduce GHG emissions.

Working with stakeholders we can develop and advance this model across the country.

We will:

- ✓ Draw up a national strategy for Anaerobic Digestion (AD) and the agricultural sector to exploit the full potential of bio-gas production and bio economy in rural Ireland as a key economic stimulant of future jobs in rural areas.

10. Secure Ireland's place as the global leader in the Equine industry

Horse racing and breeding is a strong indigenous industry with a long historic tradition on this island.

We must maximise the economic impact and job potential of this enormous resource and consolidate its position as a first in class leader in the global industry.

We will:

- ✓ Secure the long-term funding of the horse racing sector to ensure its prestige and credibility as the global leader is fully maintained.
- ✓ Draw up and implement a national plan for the development of the equine industry factoring into account the ramifications of Brexit.

11. Increase Animal Welfare funding

We strongly support improvements in animal welfare and made significant achievements in this area when last in Government.

- ✓ We will double animal welfare funding by €3m for bodies and charities annually provided by the Department of Agriculture.

12. Support Tillage, Organic & Horticulture farmers

Tillage like other farming sectors is experiencing increased price volatility and lower profit returns.

Horticulture farmers are facing an income crisis as a result of unfair trading practices, Meanwhile, the organic sector of Irish farming contributes to Ireland's green image and the sector needs continuous support through the RDP programme.

- ✓ Establish a new National Food Ombudsman, to protect primary producers in national law and ensure fairness and equity in the food supply chain for tillage & horticulture farmers.
- ✓ Set ambitious targets to bring new land into organic production in the successor strategy to FoodWise 2025.
- ✓ Work to secure increased funding for Organic farming schemes in the next RDP.
- ✓ Work for a new Knowledge Transfer Scheme in the next CAP.

13. Create a sustainable Forestry sector

Forests cover 10.5% of the country's land area against the EU average of 38% showing the substantial progress that must be made. Afforestation is a vital tool to reduce our carbon footprint.

The inclusion of land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) within the scope of the new EU 2030 climate change framework is welcome and will broaden the tools available for Ireland by reducing GHG emissions, through carbon sequestration. It is paramount that we incentivise the planting of native trees with a balanced regional afforestation policy.

- ✓ Update the legislative mandate of Coillte Teoranta so it will also have a specific remit for supporting the delivery of climate change commitments and biodiversity protection.
- ✓ Request that the Climate Action Council carry out a thorough review of State forestry policy with respect to climate change mitigation and carbon sequestration and incorporate the findings into the next National Forestry Programme (2021-2027).
- ✓ Work at EU level to get recognition of the estimated 660,000 km of hedgerows throughout the Irish landscape as a carbon sink.
- ✓ Restore the annual forest premium rates to pre-2009 levels for Grant and Premium Categories (GPC). A priority will be put on broadleaves in order to incentivise the planting of native species. Cost €5.8m.
- ✓ Ensure the next CAP prioritises and incentives the planting of trees on farms.
- ✓ Work towards achieving the 30% national target for broadleaf planting, which is a condition of EU state aid approval for forestry.
- ✓ Expand the NeighbourWood scheme for increased recreational tourism opportunities.