

Submission to the Department of Agriculture, Food and The Marine on the Future of CAP post 2020

March 23rd 2018

Dear Team at The Department of Agriculture, Food and The Marine,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission regarding the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2020. I welcome the chance to attend the public meetings held in February where as part of a group from the Steering Committee of Cork Food Policy Council I travelled to Charleville on a wet and wild Monday night. We listened to the perspectives of active farmers, the Minister and other representatives from different departments and public bodies. This represented an important opportunity to listen to a variety of concerns and recommendations on the future of the CAP.

Cork Food Policy Council was established in 2013 to work towards the achievement of a fairer, healthier, more secure and sustainable food system throughout the region. Cork Food Policy Council supports the development of partnerships between statutory agencies, community groups, businesses and other institutions to promote knowledge, skills and improved access to quality food in Cork. We are delighted to see Galway establish a Food Policy Council in recent months.

I would like to express concern regarding Ireland's commercially non-viable agriculture and the level of Green House Gas (GHG) Emissions generated by Irish agriculture. According to the EPA¹, agriculture is responsible for 32% of Ireland's GHG emissions. I emphasise the need for Ireland to meet its energy and climate targets, and advocate for a prioritisation of environmental considerations above expansion of production. Can the CAP ensure that it is profitable for farmers to switch from livestock to crop production? Surely, we should be working to reduce rather than expand the level of ruminant derived food production and indeed, consumption of such food on the island of Ireland.

Following reflection and study on Ireland's current and projected agriculture, I believe that Ireland should increase the production of plant proteins for human consumption improving soil and biodiversity while reducing the need for artificial fertilisers. Increased afforestation is not a panacea for offsetting emissions, especially when that afforestation is a monoculture. Can the CAP support an increase in native woodland cover instead? Will the CAP promote carbon sequestration in Ireland by protecting and preserving our peatlands?

Recognising that farm payments account for 75% of Family Farm Income on average as reported in the 2016 Teagasc National Farm Survey, I would like to see CAP establish alternatives for farmers that make environmentally sustainable food production an attractive alternative to intensive production that is dependent on

¹ https://www.epa.ie/media/epa_agriculture_v2.pdf

inputs. The atmosphere and pleas of farmers at the public consultation meeting in Charleville to strengthen the position of farmers in the food chain urges us all to look for solutions that make farmers' on-farm practices work for farmers as well as the environment. Together, we must improve and maintain a true 'green' image for Ireland's agriculture.

Despite widespread food poverty, for many, food is relatively cheap. This means that there is little economic incentive for consumers to reduce their food waste. The CAP has achieved its early aim to ensure a stable food supply of safe food for Europeans at an affordable price. Unfortunately, this has also meant that many people take food for granted. In order to reduce farmer dependence on direct payments, the dominance of food processors and retailers, and to empower consumers, consideration should be given to the promotion of healthier, less ecologically damaging diets where food is sold for a true cost and valued and appreciated as such. I believe that this is possible. Shouldn't consumers pay more for food that is produced unsustainably?

With concern for the aging population of farmers, the CAP should remove barriers to entry for new and young farmers. I care about the health and wellbeing of farmers and consumers and I want policy to reflect these priorities. Agriculture is one of the main sources of nitrates in groundwaters and of nutrient enrichment of surface waters. I call for agricultural policies that will enable the restoration of Ireland's water bodies in line with Ireland's international obligations under the Water Framework Directive and the Nitrates Directive.

It is my great hope that Irish agriculture can be supported by the CAP to move towards a new model with reduced emissions, increased biodiversity, improved water quality, and holistic support for farmers. Finally, I ask you to ensure that future policies are not created by industry and lobby representatives. There are a far greater number of stakeholders eager to input to policy that will affect us all.

Signed

Yours sincerely,

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