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Minister's Online Newsletter



September 2016

Welcome to the first edition of my Ministerial newsletter.

On May 6th I was honoured to be appointed as Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, by the Taoiseach and subsequently have my nomination approved by Dail Éireann. Representing as I do, a largely rural constituency, I am only too well aware of the central role agriculture and the agri-food sector plays in the Irish economy. It is Ireland's largest indigenous industry, with a turnover of €26 billion and is responsible for 160,000 jobs. The Irish agri-food sector, through ambitious targets in Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025, has been a key driver in our economic recovery. There are however significant challenges across the sector. I hope in particular to focus my efforts, during my tenure as Minister to ensuring that farm families reap a viable return for their enterprises.

Brexit

The decision of the UK to leave the EU is one that creates considerable challenges for the agri-food sector. The UK is by far our largest trading partner. Last year we exported almost €5.1 billion worth of agricultural products. This included more than €1.1 billion in beef products and almost €970 million in dairy products. Ireland is also the UK's largest destination for its food exports - worth €3.8 billion last year.

This bilateral trade takes place on the basis of harmonised EU rules on animal and public health and labelling, without complex certification, quota limits or customs duties and tariffs. And it is underpinned by the vital support of the CAP budget, to which the UK is a significant net contributor.

Given these linkages, and as the UK is a net food importer, both countries have a strong interest in maintaining a close agri-food trading relationship. In addition, the resilience of the Irish agri-food sector is well recognised, and this, together with the strong commercial relationships built up over years of trading, will help us to negotiate our way through the challenges ahead.

It is important also to bear in mind that the precise implications of the referendum outcome will depend on the trade and other arrangements ultimately negotiated between the EU and the UK. These negotiations may take up to two years, and perhaps longer, and over that period existing arrangements will continue to apply.

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Nevertheless, my Department has engaged in detailed contingency planning for the possibility of this result, and has published a summary of the key actions we are taking to address the challenges arising from the UK's decision.

The most immediate concerns for exporters centre on Euro-Sterling exchange rates. It should be noted that the fall in the value of Sterling against the Euro, while significant, is not unprecedented. Nevertheless, a sustained period of currency volatility would be of concern. In that regard, the Central Bank of Ireland has pre-established contingency plans to deal with market volatility surrounding the referendum result. The Bank will engage with the Department of Finance and individual financial institutions regarding potential risks. Actions by ECB and other global actors will be monitored closely.

I have also asked the relevant agencies, including Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland, to provide practical guidance to SMEs. Bord Bia has announced a number of measures, covering areas such as managing volatility impacts, providing consumer and market insight, deepening customer engagement and extending market reach, with the aim of helping companies maintain their competitiveness. Similar support is also being provided by Enterprise Ireland.

Aside from currency fluctuations, the main areas in which potential impacts are foreseen are in relation to tariffs and trade, the EU budget, regulations and standards, and customs controls and certification, while complex issues also arise for the fisheries sector.

However, we must remember that our trading relationship with the UK is not altered in any way until the negotiation process that will dictate the terms and conditions of the UK's departure is completed.

In the meantime, and as part of our overall contingency planning, I have taken a number of measures to ensure a sensible, coherent approach is adopted, including:

- I have established a dedicated unit in my Department to work on all of the issues that I have mentioned;
- I have convened a Consultative Committee of stakeholders, to ensure a full exchange of information as the negotiations proceed;
- I am also ensuring that the response of the relevant agencies is fully coordinated through a contact group established under the Food Wise 2025 High Level Implementation Committee, and
- My Department will continue to feed into the central Contingency Framework being co-ordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach.

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Irish Agri-Food Trade Mission to Asia

I have just returned from a major trade mission to China and Singapore where I led a large delegation of 30 Irish agri-food and fisheries companies. I chose Asia for my first trade mission as Minister because I believe it offers enormous potential for the Irish food and drink industry to realise the targets set in the Foodwise 2025 strategy. Asia is already a key driver of Irish food exporters in recent years, increasing threefold since 2010 to reach €954 million last year. Exports to China alone grew by 16% in 2015 maintaining its position as our fifth most important market and our second largest for dairy and pork. Diversification of markets is a key goal of this strategy and Asia represents one of our major potential growth areas. This is even more important now as we face the uncertainty which the Brexit decision brings for exporters. This mission provided Irish companies with an exciting opportunity to increase their profile there and build relationships with potential business partners and buyers.



Above: As part of the trade mission, Minister Michael Creed met with the General Manager of Sanyuan, Dr. Chen in Beijing

I co-hosted the “China-Ireland Global Food Partners” event in Beijing which focused on further increasing Ireland’s profile as an exporter of sustainably produced premium food.

I was also delighted to open the new Bord Bia office in Singapore . This represents an important strengthening of their presence in Asia, in recognition of the growing demand and opportunities for Irish agri-food

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exports in the region. I was pleased to showcase the very best of Irish food including beef, pork, duck, lamb, salmon, cheese and yogurts to a hand-picked audience of influential food industry representatives from Singapore. This was an important networking event which will help to establish Bord Bia firmly on the radar of the retail sector and buyers in this region.



Minister Creed has welcomed a very positive and constructive engagement with Mr. Zhi Shuping, the senior Minister with responsibility for the Quarantine Inspection Service in China (AQSIQ).



Minister Creed launching Origin Green platform in Shanghai

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€500m EU Aid Package for Farmers

Agreement has been reached at the EU Commission's Management Committee on proposals to give effect to the aid package for farmers agreed at the July Council. This package is designed to support market stabilisation across the EU's dairy sector. The agreement puts in place the legal framework for the exceptional adjustment aid to milk producers and a package for the provision of aid for milk production reduction. This step paves the way for their adoption by the Commission College in early September.

The finalisation of these proposals is very welcome and we can start to progress their implementation at national level. I have engaged intensively with Commissioner Hogan and Agriculture Ministers from other EU member States before and after the July Council which agreed this €500m package and I am delighted with the outcome and what it means for Irish farmers. Volatility in dairy markets is a global, EU and Irish problem, for which there is no single silver bullet.

The key measures include:

- Exceptional Aid to milk producers and farmers in other livestock sectors. This is a €350m package with individual MS allocations for them to undertake measures which best reflect their national circumstances. Ireland has been allocated €11.1m
- Aid for Milk Production reduction: this proposal will fund aid to farmers who agree to temporarily reduce their milk output at a level of 14c/L. The budget for this scheme is €150m and there are no individual MS allocations.
- An extension of the intervention period for SMP to the end of January 2017 and the next period beginning immediately after.

These supports build on previous measures implemented at both EU and national level, including the €26.4m in targeted direct aid payments to dairy farmers, and the advance payment of some €1.2billion in 2015 BPS payments. Advance payments are also planned for this October, and this will be of significant assistance in easing cash flow concerns on farms. I am also very pleased to see that intervention for SMP has been extended. This sends a very important signal to the market place that the Commission will continue to deploy market support tools when this is necessary.

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ANC Payments

I have just announced that the payments under the 2016 Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme and Areas of Specific Constraint (Islands) scheme, worth over €140 million, have started issuing to almost 165,000 farmers. These payments represent a significant and timely financial boost for farmers and for the wider rural economy. My Department will continue to clear remaining cases for payment over the coming weeks as a matter of priority.

I also can confirm that arrangements are on target to facilitate payment of the advance of 70% of the Basic Payment Scheme with effect from mid October. The 2016 AMC and BPS schemes saw a significant increase in online applications which brings benefits for farmers and my Department in terms of more efficient processing of applications. This trend will continue as we move towards 100% online applications from 2018.

Knowledge Transfer Group Scheme

In May I launched the €100m Knowledge Transfer Group Scheme. The Scheme is co-funded by the National Exchequer and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development as part of Ireland's €4bn Rural Development Programme, 2014-2020.

Knowledge Transfer Groups will be implemented for some 27,000 farmers across 6 sectors – Beef, Sheep, Dairy, Tillage, Equine and Poultry. These groups will provide a key support to the agri-food sector in building its knowledge and skills base to underpin continued growth and competitiveness.

The scheme builds significantly on the previous Discussion Group model and is designed in such a way as to ensure the farmer and advisor engage in one to one discussion on key aspects of a farmer's business such as controlling input costs, environmental sustainability, breeding and herd health. This one to one engagement will be complemented by group based discussion and the sharing of experience and information between farmers. Knowledge Transfer Groups will run for a period of three years, and form part of an integrated package of supports to be delivered under the Rural Development Programme.

The Government's continued support for the range of measures contained in the Rural Development Programme underline its commitment to facilitate farmers in addressing sustainability, productivity and competitiveness

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challenges. Helping farmers pursue best practice can only help to serve continued efforts in protecting and improving farmer's incomes."

Another significant benefit of the scheme is the socialisation element of the scheme. Rural isolation has long been a factor in contributing to mental health issues amongst farmers. Schemes such as this which encourage interaction on an on-going basis are a useful tool in the battle against this significant problem.



Minister Creed and local farmers at the launch of the Knowledge Transfer Group Scheme

Steps to Success 2016, the First Annual Progress Report on Food Wise 2025

In July I launched the first progress report on Food Wise 2025: **Steps to Success 2016**.

Steps to Success highlights the progress achieved one year into the implementation of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. Of the 330 detailed actions which were due to commence in 2015 or 2016, 28% have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken; and a further 67% have commenced and are progressing well.

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This is a good start and I will press on to get as many actions as possible completed within the next year.

Steps to Success provides examples of successful State collaboration across the key themes of Food Wise: environmental sustainability, human capital, competitiveness, market development and innovation; as well as examples of innovative approaches by Irish food and drinks companies. I welcome the recent opening of Bord Bia's Thinking House, which will be a world class consumer insight centre; and the establishment of the Meat Technology Centre, hosted by Teagasc, which will be a centre of excellence for meat processing research and innovation.

I am also very pleased to announce that we will be launching a major initiative in 2017 focusing on improving grassland management, use and profitability. My Department will establish a committee with representatives from the agencies and the relevant stakeholders to plan a year-long programme of events. It will celebrate and build on Ireland's comparative advantage in sustainable grass fed production.



Steps to Success 2016

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€6.32M EU Funding Secured for Agri-Food Research & Innovation Projects under Horizon 2020

Agri-researchers from academia and companies in Ireland have been awarded a total of €6.32 million in the most recent round of EU funding from the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme related to agriculture, food, marine and inland waters, the rural economy and the bio-economy. This follows the announcement by the Minister for Training, Skills and Innovation, John Halligan T.D. about Ireland's overall success in winning funding from the EU for recently awarded research and innovation projects.

I commend all of the Irish researchers and companies for their participation in this highly competitive EU funding programme and in particular I congratulate those participants that have been successful. Ireland is continuing to outperform targets set in this part of Horizon 2020 which is related to Agriculture, Forestry, the Marine and Inland Waters, the Rural Economy and the Bio-economy. Overall, we are competing successfully with the best researchers and most innovative companies in the EU for funding.

I particularly welcome the fact that Teagasc, the Marine Institute, our Higher Education Institutes and SMEs have been successful in Horizon 2020 thereby helping to innovate in areas such as Blue Growth, Rural Renaissance and the Bio-economy all of which are vital for creating high-quality and sustainable jobs, growth and investment particularly in the rural and coastal areas.

European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Grants to Seafood Processing and Aquaculture Sectors

In May, I announced the award of €4.3 million in grants to 51 seafood enterprises under 5 Schemes launched earlier this year under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Operational Programme for the seafood sector. The grants are co-funded by the Exchequer and EMFF and subject to terms and conditions.

The EMFF Seafood Development Operational Programme was adopted in December 2015 and I am delighted that it has quickly seen these significant investments in our seafood sector provided with the financial supports that will ensure that these critical investments can be implemented. Collectively, these investments will deliver jobs to coastal communities, develop new value added seafood products, develop new markets and further sales for

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our seafood products, and develop knowledge and new processes in aquaculture production, disease management and animal husbandry. These investments will assist seafood enterprises to contribute to the ambitious growth targets we have set for our processing and aquaculture sectors. I expect to announce further grant offers under these Schemes in the coming months.

Further details of the Schemes concerned are available at <http://www.bim.ie/schemes>.

Sheep Fencing now included in the TAMS II

I was delighted to announce in June the inclusion of Sheep Fencing in the list of eligible investments items in TAMS II, which has been recently approved for inclusion in the TAMS II Schemes by the European Commission.

Applicants can apply online immediately in the current tranche for Sheep Fencing which is included in the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme, The Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme and the Organic Scheme

The Terms and Conditions of these Schemes and applicable reference costs are available on the Department website following the attached link <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments/tams/>

Significant Opportunity for New Female Entrepreneurs in Rural Areas

I welcome the launch of the second year of “ACORNS”, a six month part time development programme for aspiring rural female entrepreneurs.

Fully funded under the Department’s CEDRA Rural Development and Innovation Fund, the initiative is focused on developing the potential of female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland who have recently started a business or who have taken concrete steps towards setting up a business. There is no charge for successful applicants.

A core element of the ACORNS initiative is the involvement of ‘Lead Entrepreneurs’, who have already started and successfully grown businesses in rural Ireland. These business women, on a voluntary basis, facilitate the interactive round table sessions, act as role models and mentor the successful applicants.

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Last year 44 entrepreneurs completed the pilot ACORNS programme, with all participants reporting that participation in ACORNS was of value to their business.

- Eight businesses began to trade for the first time during the pilot
- Of the 35 trading, 86% increased their combined sales by 43% during the pilot
- 10 participants made export sales during the pilot, including five for the first time
- Participants increased their total number of employees by 13%

The pilot participants expect to achieve significant further growth in sales, employment and in the number of exporters by the end of 2016. They are being offered the opportunity of further ACORNS support to assist them to achieve their ambitious targets.

The deadline for application for this year's ACORNS programme is Thursday 22 September 2016. Interested female entrepreneurs can access information and register their interest at



Left to right: Mary B Walsh, Ire Wel Pallets, Anne Cusack, Critical Healthcare, Alison Ritchie, Polar Ice, Minister Michael Creed, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Geraldine Byrne, Mediskin and Paula Fitzsimons, ACORNS.

www.acorns.ie

Farm Safety

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I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of farm Safety. Farm safety is a critical issue facing farming today. I have seen first-hand the devastation that follows farm accidents and fatalities. The impact on families and communities is unquantifiable. Statistics show that accidents on farms cause more workplace deaths than all other occupations combined. Between 2004 and 2013, there were 176 fatal farm accidents, a shocking statistic. To date this year, there have been thirteen fatal farm accidents on farms. These twelve fatal farm accidents account for more than 45% of all fatal work accidents so far in 2016, while farming accounts for less than 6% of the workforce. While this is a welcome reduction, the rate of accidents on farms remains high and it is important the focus on farm safety is maintained.

Injuries and fatalities are caused in a several ways but the two highest areas of accidents relate to tractors and machinery and livestock. So far this year, tractors and machinery account for 66% of all fatal farm accidents. It is important farmers maintain all their tractors and machinery in good working order. This is part of being a good farmer. Farmers need to be reminded that accidents with tractors and machinery are the cause of the greatest number of fatal farm accidents. The pattern is being repeated again this year. Machinery and tractor maintenance should be seen as a routine part of farm work and that it is an essential expenditure to ensure a safe and profitable farming enterprise.

Cattle can be unpredictable, particularly cows with newly or recently born calves. A cow with a calf may see the approach of a person as a threat to her calf and may, naturally, take action to defend her calf, particularly if there is a dog present. It is important, therefore, to take great care when approaching or handling a cow and calf to prevent an accident from occurring. It is important to remember all animals can be unpredictable, especially when they are confined or there is poor visibility. Although most animal incidents are not fatal, many men, women and children are needlessly injured every year due to a lack of safety awareness.

Behavioural change is urgently required to minimise risk and prevent future accidents. In support of this, my Department has several ongoing initiatives in farm safety. As part of all of TAMS II, the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme, it is mandatory for all applicants to have completed a minimum of a half-day farm safety course before they can claim grant aid. This will ensure a farm safety statement has been completed on all of these farms, while for all of TAMS II, all structures must be completed in accordance with the Department's building specifications. These specifications set out the minimum standard to which all work must be completed and include safety

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related requirements, such as ensuring all slurry agitation points are outside a building.

In addition to the grant aid schemes, there is a mandatory health and safety element included in all knowledge transfer groups which I am supporting under the 2014 to 2020 rural development programme. These groups will directly engage with approximately 27,000 farmers with farm safety right

Important Dates

21-23 September - National Ploughing Championships, Scraggan, Tullamore, Co Offaly

27 September - Atlantic Stakeholders Platform - EU Marine Conference, Croke Park, Dublin

10 -11 October - EU Agriculture/Fisheries Council, Luxembourg

17 October - SIAL – International Food Producers Trade Show, Paris

26 October - North South Ministerial Council Agriculture Sectoral meeting, Armagh

14-15 Nov - EU Agriculture/Fisheries Council, Brussels

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across the sectors and, most importantly, in a setting where they are among their farming neighbours and peers. This year, as in the past four years, my Department has issued a farm safety leaflet to more than 130,000 farmers. This was included in the basic payment scheme application pack. This year the leaflet focused on slurry safety and the impact of non-fatal farm accidents.