

## VOLUME 1

## Issue 1

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From the Minister  
of State's Desk*News from  
Andrew Doyle TD*

September 2016

I am delighted to have been appointed as Minister of State in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine. This newsletter is an opportunity to keep you up to date on developments within my area of work. As Minister of State I have responsibility for Food Safety, Forestry, Horticulture, the Organic sector and the Greyhound industry. This certainly is a varied and busy block of work which I thoroughly enjoy.

My Department is very conscious of the volatility issues facing farmers in all sectors and works continually to deal with the market difficulties that arise. The recent decision of the UK to leave the European Union and the adverse affect this is having on the value of the pound bring fresh challenges which we always have to be vigilant in detecting and energetic in our efforts to mitigate. The UK is by far our largest trading partner. Last year we exported almost €5.1 billion worth of agricultural product. Ireland is the UK's largest destination for its food exports – worth €3.8 billion last year. Safeguarding the interests of the Irish agrifood sector will be central in informing the Government's overall approach to all negotiations pertaining to the UK's exit from the EU.

### Major Irish Agri-Food Trade Mission to Asia

I, together with Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Michael Creed T.D have just returned from Asia where we led some [30] Irish agri-food and fisheries companies on a week-long trade mission. I visited Vietnam and Korea to raise awareness of Ireland in these growing markets.

I was delighted to co-host with my Vietnamese counterpart, the Ireland-Vietnam agri-food seminar in Hanoi. This high-level event was aimed at expanding Ireland's footprint in this key target market for Irish agri-food exports. The event attracted huge media interest in Vietnam which will really help us to sell the image of Ireland as a premium producer of sustainable food. The event was also a key networking opportunity for Irish companies with major Vietnamese buyers. Between 2010 and 2014 exports of Irish food to Vietnam increased by a factor of four and while this comprised mostly of dairy products it was also made up of pigmeat, beverages, seafood and prepared foods.

The event followed bilateral discussions which I had with the Vietnamese Minister for Agriculture at which I formally submitted Ireland's application for

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beef access.

In order to succeed in Asia it is vital to develop relationships at government and business levels and to be guided by the best consumer and market insight available. I used my bilateral engagements to remind our host countries that we can provide safe, secure and sustainably produced food and to assist Irish companies looking to gain new business there.

After Vietnam I headed to Korea for a three day visit which included political bilaterals with counterparts in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries. Korea is already a fast growing market for Irish dairy, pork and seafood exports and I am examining new opportunities to expand these markets and for a deeper collaboration between both countries in the agri food sector.



*Minister Andrew Doyle TD meeting Vice Minister of Ministry of Planning and Investment Mr Nguyen The Phuong with Ambassador Cait Moran, Secretary General DAFM Aidan O'Driscoll, CEO Bord Bia Aidan Cotter, Michael Cantwell EI and David Butler SFSI on the first day of the trade mission to Asia.*

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## Capital Investment Approvals of €5.4M Issued to Horticulture Sector

In May, I announced that €5.4 million in funding has been awarded to successful projects under the 2016 Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector. The horticulture sector is one of my key responsibilities and I look forward to working with all the stakeholders involved in the sector.

This competitive grant aid scheme provides the main source of funding for Ireland's horticulture industry. By promoting efficient environmentally sustainable production, encouraging sustainable growth as well as facilitating production targeted at more quality conscious consumers, this Scheme is well aligned with the objectives for Ireland's agri-food sector set out in Food Wise 2025.

Ireland's horticulture industry, at farm gate level, contributed almost €350m to the value of agricultural output in 2015 and there is significant value-added and employment involved in Irish horticultural product processing, distribution and retailing.

The grant aid approved covers all areas of the horticultural industry; field vegetables, mushrooms, protected food crops, outdoor soft fruit and apples, nursery crops, cut foliage, Christmas trees, flower bulbs and beekeeping. The awards announced will support investments by 154 commercial producers in specialist horticultural buildings and equipment costing approximately €13.5 million.

The objectives of the Scheme are to facilitate environmentally friendly practices, to promote the diversification of on-farm activities, to improve the quality of products and to improve working conditions in the sector.



*Minister of State Andrew Doyle T.D. meets with Matt Foley and Joe Healy President of IFA*



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*Minister of State Andrew Doyle T.D. meets with Tim and Jenny Schram of Schram Plants Ltd. at the GLAS Horticulture Show in the Citywest Convention Centre*

## Bord na gCon

Since my appointment I have met with the board of Bord na gCon, and stakeholders.

The greyhound industry is an important driver of economic activity and employment in both rural and urban Ireland. Developing the sector to its potential is a key priority for me. I am confident that the Board of Bord na gCon shares that objective.

These meetings were very constructive and provided a useful opportunity to outline key priorities, including putting the sector on a sound financial footing, and building a reputation for good governance, strong regulation and high standards of animal welfare.

The Indecon Report already provides a good road map. My Department will be closely monitoring progress on its implementation, and is at present preparing the heads of a Bill to implement aspects of the report, including those in relation to governance and regulation. I look forward to working closely with the Board to develop this very important sector to its maximum potential.

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## **Measures to Encourage Wood Mobilisation**

I would like to highlight the availability of grants under my Department's Forest Road Scheme, the aim of which is to encourage and assist in the mobilisation of timber.

At the opening of the National Forestry Conference, I had the opportunity to meet and talk to some of you involved in the forestry sector. As well as ensuring that there is a continuous and ongoing programme of afforestation to supply Irish sawmills and timber processing industry, we must also maximise the volume of raw material that is harvested from our existing forests, not just roundwood for our processors but also the less traditional assortments for our growing renewable energy sector.

The Forestry programme 2014-2020 includes the development of a Forest Machine Operator training course and the proposed establishment of forest certification groups, both of which would contribute to the mobilisation of timber and meeting demand for certified timber. I welcome the launch of the Irish Timber Growers Association Wood Price Quarterly initiative, while the ITGA's roundwood price database has been in operation since 2005, important information on the value of a forest owner's timber crop is now available to all for the first time. This information will be invaluable to forest owners when assessing the market or making decisions on thinning and felling sales.



*Left: Minister Doyle with Justin McCarthy Editor, Irish Farmers Journal and Fergal Leamy, CEO Coillte at the National Forestry Conference*

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## **AGM of Irish Wood Producers Group**

In June, I addressed the AGM of The Irish Wood Producers Group. This group is a relatively new producer group, formed by a collaboration of four groups in Wexford, Waterford, Kilkenny and Laois, with a current membership of 650.

By any reckoning, a group that represents 650 owners is a substantial force within the Irish forestry sector and offers huge opportunities through co-operation, in the sharing of knowledge and experience and in acting as a unified negotiating voice on behalf of its membership.

I believe that such collaboration and growth in membership is a welcome sign of the health of our forestry sector overall and an important indicator of the potential that exists within the sector for the future as it shows the interest of the members in maximising the potential of their forests.

Forecasts have indicated that roundwood supply will increase significantly over the next two decades, with almost all of the increase coming from privately-owned forests and wood mobilisation is recognised as one of the most significant challenges facing the forest sector over the coming decade. There are a number of measures being taken by my Department to address this challenge, including the availability of Forest Road grants to encourage and facilitate thinning, harvesting and extraction and almost €28 million will be provided towards the building of forest roads over the period of the current Forestry Programme [2014-2020].

On a sectoral level, I believe that forest owner groups such as Irish Wood Producers are playing an important role in helping to realise the potential of our forests. Not only can groups serve as a trusted and independent source of advice and information for forest owners who want to learn more about managing their forests and selling their timber, they also represent an invaluable contact point for the industry that depends on a steady supply of timber as its raw material.

## **Forest Certification**

I highlighted the importance and value of forest certification in my opening address to the National Conference on Forest Management Certification in Ireland, in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin.

Forest certification systems are designed to verify that forests are managed according to the principles of sustainable forest management. Sustainable forest management is recognised as essential in order to maintain the

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productivity, biodiversity, regeneration capacity, vitality and potential of a forest.

I note the warning in the recent COFORD Report, 'Mobilising Ireland's forest resource', that as the level of supply from the private sector increases, the lack of certification is likely to become a barrier to wood mobilisation.

All stages of forest management require careful planning and consideration. All these activities, from preparing a site right through to replanting after clearfell must be done in accordance with Best Forest Practice and environmental guidelines, all of which are well documented. Certification provides the mechanism for proving that these high standards have been applied. It provides the evidence supported by a formal internationally recognised process to show that forest operations have indeed been carried out to the required standards.

In my opinion, certification represents a sound approach to forest management that combines the highest environmental standards with practices that will maximise the financial return to forest owners from their investment. Furthermore, it protects this investment by ensuring that the timber that ultimately will be produced will have access to the market in the years to come. The time is approaching whereby private growers will recognise the economic necessity of such certification. The question for private forest owners may not be the additional income to be earned from certified timber but rather whether the market has the capacity to take and use the timber if it is not certified.

My Department is preparing to advertise for services to develop a group certification template for private forest owners. The North East Forestry Group and the Forestry Owners Cooperative Society are both taking part in a pilot project in which the template will be road tested and two certification groups for private forest owners will be established. This project will lay the groundwork for future groups to emerge and will provide the tools for owners and forestry professionals to navigate their way through a forest certification process.



*Left: Minister Doyle at the Teagasc Talking Timber Event in Ennis, Co. Clare*



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## Windblow Reconstitution Scheme

The Windblow Reconstitution Scheme recently launched aims to provide financial aid to land owners whose plantations were damaged by storm force winds that occurred between 5th December 2013 and 12th February 2014, with the most severe windstorm, named 'Storm Darwin', on 12th February 2014. The frequency and ferocity of these storm events, compounded by waterlogged soils on many sites, led to extensive damage on forest lands, affecting some 8,000 hectares overall.

Forest owners of conifer forests planted after the 1st December 1989 will be eligible to apply and those with broadleaves planted after the 1st December 1983 can apply. A maximum grant of €1,700 per hectare up to a total of 10 hectares will be made available under the Scheme to those private forest owners meeting the eligibility criteria. The budget allocated to the Scheme can provide funding in respect of a total of 2,000 hectares. In the event of applications received exceeding that amount, a selection process will be undertaken after the closing date for receipt of applications in an effort to ensure that funding is allocated on an equitable basis to favour those forests which suffered the greatest loss.

Scheme details along with the application form are available from the Department's website at <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests/service/grantsandpremiumschemes2015-2016/>. The closing date for receipt of applications will be 24th February 2017.

## Organics

I have met with the stakeholders in the organic sector and look forward to engaging with them as the sector continues to grow.

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