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An Comhchoiste um Thalmhaíocht, Bia agus Muir

Tuarascáil maidir leis an Scéim um Fheirmeoireacht Orgánach

Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Report on the Organic Farming Scheme

Report on the Organic Farming Scheme

The Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine (the Joint Committee) has examined the organic farming sector. As part of its ongoing scrutiny of EU draft proposals, the Joint Committee submitted a Political Contribution on the European Commission proposal *COM (2014) 180 – Proposed Regulation on Organic Production and labelling of Organic products* in November 2014.

As part of its work programme in 2015, the Joint Committee prioritised an examination of organic farming and decided to engage with the relevant stakeholders regarding the new Organic Farming Scheme of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM). The Joint Committee met with the Organic Farmers Representative Body on 8 October 2015; officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine on 17 November 2015; and representatives from Bord Bia on 1 December 2015.

The Joint Committee recognises the significant potential for Ireland to grow its organic farming production on the basis of the green image of the country and welcomes the ambitious aims of the new Organic Farming Scheme. The Joint Committee understands that there are five different certification bodies who grant a farmer organic status, and is interested in the possibility of streamlining such an arrangement into one unified body. The Joint Committee is of the view that if these issues are not addressed, there may be an exodus of smaller farmers from the organic farming sector, leaving Ireland's potential unfulfilled. The Joint Committee recognises that there may be significant opportunities for Irish organic products - particularly premium cuts of meat - in the US market in the context of the ongoing TTIP negotiations, and the development of the organic sector will be crucial in exploiting such opportunities. The Joint Committee is eager to encourage farmers – particularly young farmers – to consider the possibility of entering the organic farming sector.

Following its deliberations, the Joint Committee has prepared this report which outlines a number of recommendations for consideration by the DAFM.

1. The Joint Committee recommends that the DAFM ensure that no payments are delayed this year as they were in 2014.
2. The Joint Committee recommends that the DAFM investigate whether it would be more efficient to have one streamlined body granting organic status - preferably Bord Bia - and that the registration fees for same would be reduced.
3. The Joint Committee recommends that the DAFM adopt as flexible as possible approach to ensure that farmers participating in GLAS can be accommodated in the Organic Farming Scheme. It also recommends that a special payment of €315 would be made under the organic scheme for protein crops up to a limit of 5 hectares.
4. The Joint Committee is concerned that smaller farmers are not benefitting adequately from the Organic Farming Scheme, while farmers with larger holdings are benefitting disproportionately. The Joint Committee recommends that the first 20 hectares would be front loaded at €315/ha in view of the fact that small farmers cannot avail of the organic payment and claim low input pastures or traditional hay meadows under GLAS.

5. While the Joint Committee recognises the ambition of the DAFM to increase organic farming from 1% to 5% over the lifespan of the Food Wise 2025 programme, the Joint Committee is aware of the challenges involved in achieving such a target and therefore recommends that such a significant increase be achieved in a viable manner.
6. The Joint Committee recommends that the Organic Farming Scheme encompass sheep pasturing in upland areas where the minimum amount of pesticides is used. Organic meat produced under such a scheme could add significant value to the sector if it is marketed accordingly to attract a premium price. Naturally produced sheep meat in the west of Ireland, for example, has massive potential to add value to the organic sector, yet it is difficult to get it recognised as 'organic'. For the purposes of organic farming on hills the 0.5lu/ha should be reduced to 0.15lu/ha.
7. While the Joint Committee welcomes the increased funding provided by DAFM for the organic farming sector, the Joint Committee recommends that any mid-term review of the scheme address any funding deficits which may arise.
8. The Joint Committee recommends that the DAFM liaise with both farmers and factories to ensure that organically produced meat is packaged and sold as such to attract a premium, and is not sold merely as ordinary meat.
9. The Joint Committee recommends that farmers on commonages in particular are informed that organic and inorganic animals can coexist together on the one holding. This would ensure that the potential amount of organic meat produced is maximised, and that organically produced meat is not branded as inorganic.
10. The Joint Committee recommends that a clear Bord Bia label be used on Irish organic produce to show clearly to the consumer that the product has a mark of Irish organic quality.
11. The Joint Committee recommends that the DAFM employ a risk-based inspection regime when inspecting premises engaged in organic farming.
12. The Joint Committee recommends that the DAFM attempt to reduce the duplication of inspections by making Bord Bia the certification body.
13. The Joint Committee has identified Austria as the Member State which has best expanded their organic farming sector – around 15% of agriculture there is organic - and recommends that the DAFM examine the Austrian model to see what aspects of their model could be replicated in Ireland particularly in relation to the definitions of organic.
14. To encourage organic farmers, the Joint Committee recommends that a graduated penalty system be employed, and that farmers not be heavily penalised on a first discrepancy when engaging in organic farming.

15. The Joint Committee recommends that the DAFM, Bord Bia, and the certification bodies work in a co-operative as opposed to punitive manner with organic farmers to allow the sector to reach its potential.
16. The Joint Committee recommends that the carbon navigator be utilised to track carbon savings associated with organic farming, and that the DAFM and Bord Bia use this information to promote the environmental benefits of organic farming.
17. The Joint Committee recommends that the DAFM encourage young farmers in particular to consider organic farming when they are initiating farming. By educating young farmers early in their careers about the benefits of organic farming, best practices can be utilised by organic farmers from the start of their agriculture careers.

The Joint Committee views organic farming as an area with significant potential in Ireland and requests that the above recommendations can be taken into account as the Organic Farming Scheme is being rolled out.



Andrew Doyle T.D.

Chairman

Appendix 1 Membership of the Joint Committee

Deputies:

Tom Barry (FG)

Pat Deering (FG) [Vice-Chairman]

Andrew Doyle (FG) [Chairman]

Martin Ferris (SF)

Martin Heydon (FG)

Willie Penrose (LAB)

Éamon Ó Cuív (FF)

Thomas Pringle (IND)

Arthur Spring (LAB)

Senators:

Michael Comiskey (FG)

Denis Landy (LAB)

Paschal Mooney (FF)

Mary Ann O'Brien (IND)

Brian Ó Domhnaill (FF)

Pat O'Neill (FG)

Appendix 2 Terms of Reference

a. Functions of the Committee – derived from Standing Orders [DSO 82A; SSO 70A]

- (1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on—
 - (a) such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of the relevant Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and
 - (b) European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.
- (2) The Select Committee may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann to form a Joint Committee for the purposes of the functions set out below, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.
- (3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such—
 - (a) Bills,
 - (b) proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 164,
 - (c) Estimates for Public Services, and
 - (d) other mattersas shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and
 - (e) Annual Output Statements, and
 - (f) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.
- (4) The Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the relevant Department or Departments and associated public bodies, and report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas:
 - (a) matters of policy for which the Minister is officially responsible,
 - (b) public affairs administered by the Department,
 - (c) policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,
 - (d) Government policy in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,
 - (e) policy issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,
 - (f) the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill published by the Minister,

- (g) statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,
 - (h) strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,
 - (i) annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in paragraph (4)(d) and (e) and the overall operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and
 - (j) such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil and/or Seanad from time to time.
- (5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments—
- (a) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 105, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,
 - (b) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,
 - (c) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and
 - (d) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.
- (6) A sub-Committee stands established in respect of each Department within the remit of the Select Committee to consider the matters outlined in paragraph (3), and the following arrangements apply to such sub-Committees:
- (a) the matters outlined in paragraph (3) which require referral to the Select Committee by the Dáil may be referred directly to such sub-Committees, and
 - (b) each such sub-Committee has the powers defined in Standing Order 83(1) and (2) and may report directly to the Dáil, including by way of Message under Standing Order 87.
- (7) The Chairman of the Joint Committee, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be the Chairman of the Select Committee and of any sub-Committee or Committees standing established in respect of the Select Committee.
- (8) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:
- (a) Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,
 - (b) Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and

(c) at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament.

b. Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (as derived from Standing Orders [DSO 82; SSO 70])

- (1) The Joint Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders.
- (2) Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil and/or Seanad.
- (3) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice given by the Chairman of the Select Committee, waives this instruction on motion made by the Taoiseach pursuant to Dáil Standing Order 26. The Chairmen of Select Committees shall have responsibility for compliance with this instruction.
- (4) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to Dáil Standing Order 163 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993.
- (5) The Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—
 - (a) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or
 - (b) the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle / Cathaoirleach whose decision shall be final.