

Regional Veterinary Laboratories - ?A critical piece of Agri-food infrastructure that must be retained?

Commenting on reports regarding the uncertainty faced by a number of the Regional Veterinary Laboratories including possible closure or effective closure, the ICMSA President, John Comer, described the Regional Veterinary Laboratories as an absolutely critical piece of infrastructure for the Agri-food sector and said it was essential that they are not further downgraded in any way.

?With only six regional veterinary laboratories in the country, their geographical spread is already low and any further reductions or closures would totally undermine their work and would represent a real threat to the Agri-food sector and, specifically, farming. As farmers, we need an independent body - like the Regional Veterinary laboratories - to address, scientifically, issues like animal health and various other concerns on farms and, most importantly, this service is required within a reasonable distance. People and policymakers need to be realistic on this matter: farmers simply do not have the time to travel long distances and when they do decide to go to the veterinary laboratory, they need to be confident that the issue they have is being adequately addressed and we're not confident that this will be achieved by a collection-centre type facility. The Department needs to remember that in order to protect the whole Agri-food sector, farmers have to be encouraged to present animal health issues to the Department so that any issues can be dealt with before they become pressing or a major threat. The Regional laboratories have played a very valuable role and proved themselves to be the first link with farmers over the years in this regard and that role should not be underestimated?, said Mr Comer.

?The agriculture sector is unique in Ireland in that it has an economic and social impact in every townland in Ireland and its economic importance nationally has only received its due recognition since the economic crash in 2009. Food Harvest 2020 has set out ambitious targets for the sector based on the production of high quality produce from Irish farms. To ensure its continued development, the current Regional Veterinary Laboratory structure needs to be retained and developed so that any potential animal health and other risks can be identified and addressed in a timely fashion in the interests of the farmers in that region but also in the interests of the wider national Agri-food sector?, concluded Mr. Comer.

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