AUTUMN 2017

ICMSA NEWSLETTER

THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION THAT CONCENTRATES ON SOLUTIONS

BPS 2017 Payments - Dept Is "Ahead of Schedule"

Dairy Markets Looking Solid To Year's End

Ornua Explain Butter Price Surge

Cap Post 2020 – Where Do We Want The Debate To Go?

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Look Past The Teagasc Dairy Income Projections, ICMSA Wants To Know Why Ireland Is 14th In The Eu Milk Price League

John Comer, President, ICMSA

At the time of writing a good deal of media and public attention is focussed on figures published by Teagasc projecting a 2017 average income for dairy farmers of in excess of €70,000. A few things must be said and first of those is that this good news story for dairy farmers and for the wider rural economy they sustain and represents a welcome turnaround from the income crisis farmers were faced with this time last year. The second thing to be said is that although we are happy to welcome the positive performance of dairy in 2017, we must not get carried away with ourselves. Outstanding debts from last year still need to be paid and money needs to be put back into farms. We must also emphasise to the more excitable commentators that tax, drawings and bank repayments must come out of this, so this kind of income figure will not be the reality for the vast majority of dairy farmers with averages hiding the true picture for many. For instance The latest 2015 National Farm Survey highlights the fact that 63% of dairy farmers have an average debt over €100,000 - much greater than other sectors within the industry. Farm debt is a real and growing phenomenon. The third thing we'd like to lay stress upon is ,perhaps, the most important and it is this: Farmers don't want this 'Peak/Trough' model that we've ended up with, where we're wiped out in 2016 and a year later we are at the present figures.

As an industry and as a country we need to employ strategies that protect farm income and this vital export sector from milk price volatility. The introduction of something like the Farm Management Deposit Scheme - which we designed based on a proven Australian model - would allow farmers put away cash in the good times that can be withdrawn in tough years. We need to see that being introduced in this October's Budget and we're quite hopeful that our case, which is unanswerable in terms of logic and fairness, has been heard and noted.

Behind the flattering illusion of projected income figures is a more questionable reality about our milk price. Last week we called for a further increase in July milk price and we rejected what we described as the "carefully cultivated notion" that Irish milk price had risen to its correct level and that the gap or 'lag' identified between our milk price and that of mainland EU states had been completely closed. This gap still exists and no logical explanation has ever been advanced that could account for it. ICMSA has led the charge in highlighting this mysterious gap and demanding that it be closed and we will continue to lobby for increases in farmer milk price based on ongoing improved market returns as well as this underlying lag that has our milk prices actually lower than the EU average.

We make no apology for pointing out that even after this sustained period of price rises that Irish milk price is still in 14th place at EU level, a position which - when you consider our investments at processing level, SDAS and our practically unique grass-based natural system of milk production - is very disappointing. So we're going to keep on pointing out that we should not just be looking at milk price on an internal, Irish, year-on-year basis but actually should be looking at direct comparisons with other comparable EU milk producers and the EU average and when we do that, the picture darkens a little and we're still left with this inexplicable gap between our prices and theirs.

As of May, the EU average was still 1.6c/Kg above our figure, that difference translates to almost €5,000 over a year for a 300,000 litre dairy farmer. Why are we still lagging the EU average? ICMSA has been asking this since the recovery in milk price began and we've never received an explanation. Similarly, we see other EU farmers receiving a premium for grazing their cows for 120 days while here the idea has never been mentioned even though we graze our cows on grass for much longer than 120 days. We are back again here to this carefully cultivated notion that everything is now 'hunky-dory' as regards farmer milk price and that no contention or disagreement exists between farmers and processors on the prices being achieved presently. ICMSA does not accept that, nor do we accept that present prices represent the best that can be achieved. We do acknowledge the progress that has been made but we will continue to draw attention to the quite substantial gap that has existed – and still exists – between what we are asked to believe is the maximum milk price our Co-ops can pay and the average prices being paid on the EU. Things are not hunky-dory and they won't be as long as this inexplicable gap exists, with that in mind, we're calling for a further increase in July milk prices and we expect that to be delivered by Co-op Boards.

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Free Text and Email Service

ICMSA provides a FREE text and email service to members. If you would like to receive email alerts please contact Linda on: 061 314 677 or email: info@icmsa.ie with your email and/or mobile phone number.

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John Comer at the 'CAP- Have Your Say' Conference in Brussels last month.

Dairy Markets Looking Solid To Year's End

Gerald Quain, Chairperson, Dairy Committee

Looking back to the situation this time last year, dairy markets have (thankfully) come a long way and milk prices have returned to reasonable levels. In terms of overall outlook, and at this stage, we can say with confidence that milk prices should move further upwards and will certainly remain solid until the end of the year.

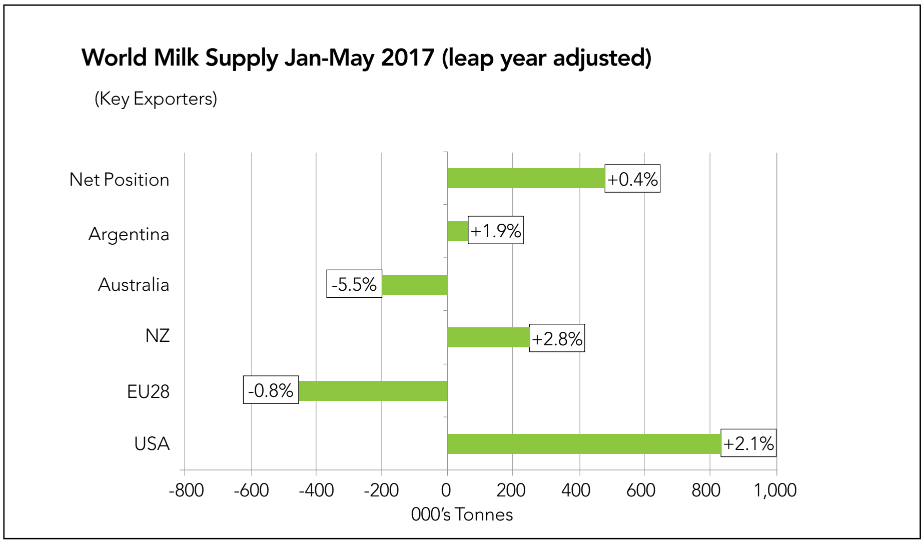
Forecasting beyond three months is always difficult with supply trends and, in particular, weather obviously tricky to estimate but in the event of milk supply growth staying within reasonable levels – a big assumption, granted – then we can also look forward to the beginning of 2018 with confidence. The question I am most frequently asked is why milk price would have increased by almost 10 cents per litre in a year and the simple answer is reduced milk supplies at a global level. As can be seen from the charts given below, global milk supplies remained constrained throughout the first half of 2017 with growth of only 0.4% in the period January-May 2017. In the period January-May 2016, the corresponding figure was 3.4%. In a context where global demand for dairy products is estimated to grow by 1.75% - 2% per annum, we can see quite clearly that the current supply/demand balance is in our favour and it has resulted in a significant increase in dairy products.

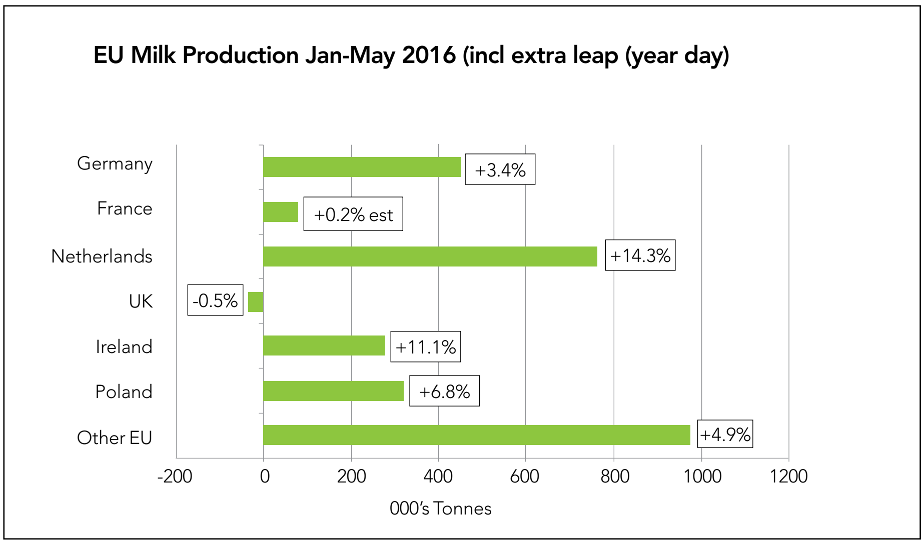
We and our colleagues in EMB might also take a small bow here as we note that that the EU Voluntary Milk Supply Reduction Scheme – of which we were the chief advocates - played a significant role in boosting and maintaining dairy prices and it is positive to see EU Commissioner for Agriculture Phil Hogan acknowledging while being disappointed at the lack of support – if not outright opposition – that came from our own Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine and our milk processors. ICMSA position was, is, and will remain very clear: if milk processors cannot or will not pay a price that returns a reasonable margin for the dairy farmer then dairy farmers must be given the option to reduce milk supplies voluntarily for a period to bring the market back into balance. After that, the decision is for others and the ball is in the hands of the milk processors hands - pay a reasonable milk price and farmers will produce the milk for you.

Back to the marketplace, with the supply/demand balance in our favour, what should this mean to the milk price for the Irish farmer? The Ornua PPI is probably the best milk price indicator available to us at this point and the chart below highlights the improvements made over the last year and also the forecast for July and August.

The June level represents a milk price of 33.14 cents per litre including VAT and this is projected to increase for August. This milk price is based on a processing cost of 6.5 cents per litre which, as we have noted many times previously, we consider to be excessive and in many cases not reflective of actual processing costs, even without incorporating the efficiencies that should follow increased production at processing plants. Looking at developments in the markets, particularly in relation to butter and the aging stocks of SMP held in intervention, ICMSA's view is that the PPI projections given above are somewhat conservative and higher increases are likely. The butter 'story' from a farmer perspective is hugely positive in that butter has seen an unexpected resurgence in the marketplace and while current prices may not be retained, there is general acceptance that butter prices will remain ahead of historical levels leading to some processors changing their butter/protein milk price ratio. All of the above factors should lead to further milk price increases.

While developments in milk have been positive, it is important to realise that our milk price is in 14th place at EU level





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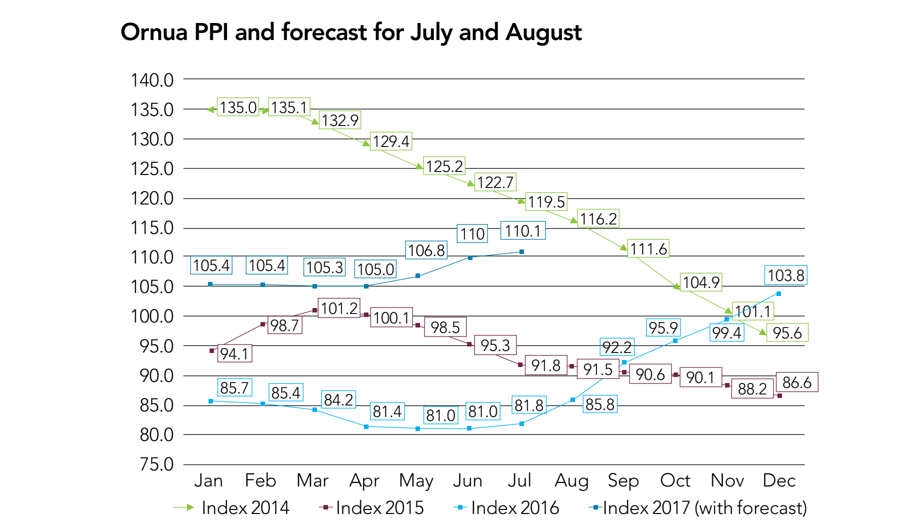

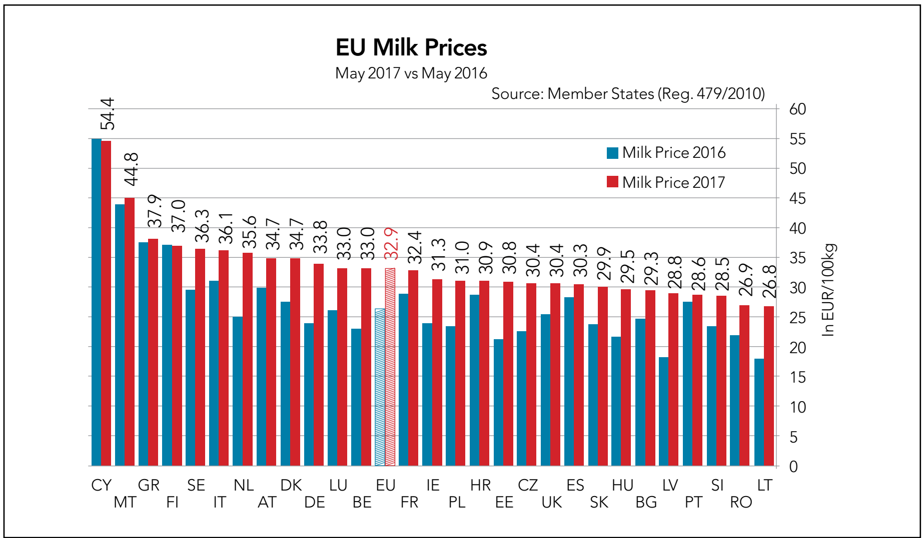

which – considering, for example, our investments at processing level and farmer investment in SDAS – has led farmers to quite legitimately ask why we are not further up the league table and, at least, equal to or above the EU average which for May 2017 was 1.6c/kg above the Irish price. The difference is equivalent to almost €5,000 for the 300,000 litre supplier for a full year. Farmers in other countries are receiving a premium for grazing cows for 120 days while Irish farmers are seeing no such premiums even though our cows graze grass for much longer periods.

ICMSA acknowledges the progress made on milk price over the last twelve months but it is an indisputable fact that our milk price is lagging both the EU average and that of our competitors and this is an issue that simply will have to be addressed by our processors and marketers going forward. We need to see, and ICMSA will continue to demand, increased premiums for our sustainable system of grass-based milk production.

Dairy markets continue to move forward with butter particularly delivering very strong prices and with 'spot' markets in the Netherlands and Italy delivering in excess of 40 cents per litre at farm gate, there is clear scope for further price increases in the months ahead as processors bow to the facts and move to close the gap with our EU counterparts.

Splashplate Ban Proposal:

There was considerable farmer concern recently regarding suggestions that splashplate slurry spreading was going to be banned by a yet to be decided date. In response, ICMSA met with officials of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and separately with the Minister for Agriculture, Food & Marine and following these meetings and our very strong lobbying on the issue, we are confident that no end date will be imposed on splashplate slurry spreading. New methods of spreading slurry are available and their use is being encouraged under TAMS and GLAS but these are voluntary measures.

Payment Dates & Reviews To Remember

ANC Review:

The much anticipated review of the ANC areas (formerly Disadvantaged Areas) looks increasingly likely to be postponed for least one year. It was expected that the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine would publish the new ANC areas in June 2017 but this has not happened. A revised regulation is currently under discussion at EU level and if agreed, it will mean that the new ANC areas will not be introduced in 2018 and perhaps also, not in 2019. The implications of this change is that any farmer currently receiving an ANC payment will continue to do so in 2018 while farmers anticipating that their land may be included under the review will have to wait at least another year.

Department Payment Delays:

As we enter the critical period for Department payments, just a reminder for members that ICMSA provides a service to members who are experiencing payment delays under the various Department. If you have any issues with specific schemes, please feel free to contact head office at (061) 314677 for advice on how to proceed or we will deal with the Department directly for you. We are here to help.

Payments Dates for 2017:

The following are the key payment dates for Department Schemes in 2017:

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme (Formerly Disadvantaged Areas)
3rd Week of September

BPS First Instalment:

16 October 2017.

BPS Final Instalment:

1 December 2017.

GLAS:

75% in October.

25% when inspections are complete in Mid December.

JOHN FEELY FOUNDATION OFFERS FOUR €1,500 SCHOLARSHIPS FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES.

The John Feely Foundation was established to honour the memory of the much esteemed former President of ICMSA with the objective of supporting the agricultural education of young people who chose farming as a career.

In 2017, the Foundation has decided to make available four scholarships of €1,500 each to ICMSA members or members' family who are attending (enrolled full-time) specified agricultural collegeges in 2017 for the first time. The cost of sending family members to agricultural college is significant and the Foundation wishes to provide support to four students in 2017.

One award will be made available to each ICMSA region and applicants must be attending one of the following agricultural colleges: Clonakilty, Kildalton, Pallaskenry, Gurteen, Mountbellew, and Ballyhaise.

To apply, you must nominate the student, providing the name and address of the student and the agricultural college he or she is attending, you must provide your own name and quote your ICMSA membership number together with with your mobile phone number. Please send either by post to John Feely Scholarships, ICMSA, John Feely House, Dublin Road, Limerick or email the same information to info@icmsa.ie.

John Comer, President, and Pat McCormack, Deputy President, with the 2016 recipients of the four John Feely Foundation Scholarships, L to R, Michael Casey, Blueball, Tullamore, County Offaly, Eoin Troy, Coalbrook, Thurles, County Tipperary, Gavin O'Donoghue, Crecora, County Limerick and John Cullinane, Lismore, County Waterford.

The closing date for receipt of applications is Friday, 6th October 2017.

The successful students will be selected by a supervised draw and the presentation will be made before the end of 2017.

A Fond Farewell

Mary Buckey has left ICMSA and taken a position with Kerry Agribusiness. She worked with us for nearly 10 years during which she proved a highly regarded and popular colleague and someone who represented the association at numberless meeting and seminars with aplomb and confidence. 'The Call of Kerry' proved irresistible for the Scartaglen native but she carries with her our very best wishes and we've little doubt that our sectoral paths will cross again.

New Appointment

Ballina, County Tipperary native, Aine O'Connell has been appointed as Agricultural Policy officer with the Association. Aine was awarded a Bachelor of Science and Education Degree by UL and then went on to earn a PhD in Dairy Science from the University of Wisconsin while working with, and under the supervision of, Teagasc Moorepark. Aine joins us from Arrabawn where she was working as a dairy advisor and coordinator of the Teagasc/Arrabawn 'Milk For Profit' joint programme.

Beef Outlook Remains Positive But Processors Must 'Play Ball'

Michael Guinan, Chairperson, Livestock Committee

It's a matter of satisfaction and relief that the negative sentiments regarding cattle prices and the massive additional numbers of cattle projected to come into the system at the start of this year have not to-date come to pass and with a level of calm goodwill from all stakeholders, we see absolutely no reason why prices can be retained at current levels for the remainder of the year.

BEEF PRICES TO DATE:

The accompanying articles chart the developments in beef prices since the start of the year and shows that, due to a combination of factors, prices are somewhat stronger than 2016. Such a scenario would not have been predicted at the start of the year and one of the principal reasons has been the growth in live exports which has increased competition for cattle and also the 6kg per head reduction in the carcase weight. The finalisation of a free trade agreement with Japan is certainly a step in the right direction for the Irish beef sector and while its benefits may take a number of years to impact, we're confident it will provide a high priced outlet for specific meat categories. Brexit impact - in terms of a weaker sterling - has to-date had a limited impact on prices and the long term impact of Brexit is unlikely to manifest before 2019. An issue of serious concern going forward is the potential damage of a possible Mercusor deal and, put as bluntly as the threat warrants, Ireland should not agree to any deal that undermines our beef sector and exposes beef producers to competition from countries whose beef production standards and legal requirements are very substantially below ours.

BEEF THROUGHPUT TO DATE:

The concern at the start of the year was that an additional 100,000 cattle would be slaughtered in 2017 putting serious downward pressure on cattle prices. The good news is that though an additional 44,000 cattle have been slaughtered in 2017 to date beef prices have generally increased. All categories of cattle apart from young bulls have shown strong growth in numbers.

		Week Ending		% Change		Average to Date		% Ch
		23.07.2016	22.07.2017	Prev.Week	Prev. Year	2016	2017	
Steers	03	3.65	3.8	0	4.1	3.7	3.72	0.5
	04	3.68	3.82	0	3.8	3.74	3.75	0.3
	R3	3.81	3.97	0	4.2	3.87	3.88	0.3
	R4	3.81	3.97	-0.3	4.2	3.86	3.88	0.5
	U3	3.9	4.07	0	4.4	3.95	3.98	0.8
Young Bulls	03	3.6	3.7	0	2.8	3.58	3.63	1.4
	R3	3.83	3.93	0.5	2.6	3.76	3.8	1.1
	U3	3.91	4.05	0.5	3.6	3.85	3.91	1.6
Heifers	03	3.75	3.91	0.3	4.3	3.84	3.82	-0.5
	04	3.76	3.92	0.3	4.3	3.86	3.84	-0.5
	R3	3.94	4.08	0.2	3.6	4.02	3.99	-0.7
	R4	3.93	4.07	0	3.6	4.01	3.99	-0.5
Cows	03	2.91	3.23	0.3	11	3.09	3.16	2.3
	04	2.93	3.24	0.6	10.6	3.1	3.16	1.9
	R3	3.11	3.44	0.9	10.6	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

	w/e	w/e	To Date	To Date	% Change
	23.07.2016	22.07.2017	2016	2017	
Steers	12,065	13,061	309,521	331,644	7.1
Heifers	6,904	7,854	243,920	254,752	4.4
Young Bulls	2,787	2,616	127,023	118,323	-6.8
Total Prime Cattle	21,756	23,531	680,464	704,719	3.6
Cows	7,504	7,711	187,069	205,668	9.9
Other	585	649	20,308	21,748	7.1
Total Cattle	29,845	31,891	887,841	932,135	5

	Week Ending		% Change		Overall To Date		Change (Head)	
Country	23.07.2016	22.07.2017	Prev.Week	Prev.Year	2016	2017		
Northern Ireland	270	385	34.6	42.6	15,116	15,107	-0.1	-9
Netherlands	58		100	-100	26,818	41,334	54.1	14,516
Spain	552	294	-60.9	-46.7	32,609	45,747	40.3	13,138
Italy	370	272	50.3	-26.5	13,878	14,742	6.2	864
Belgium		41	100	100	211	5,454	2484.8	5,243
Great Britain	202	126	-15.4	-37.6	1,987	3,410	71.6	1,423
France			100	100	5,752	2,542	-55.8	-3,210
Other Countries	52		100	-100	2,056	13,305	547.1	11,249
Total	1,504	1,118	-18.3	-25.7	98,427	141,641	43.9	43,214

LIVE EXPORTS:
While we have often and justifiably criticised the role of the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine, ICMSA is happy to acknowledge the role the Department has played in re-opening live export markets for Irish cattle and the result is that an additional 43,000 live cattle have so far been exported in 2017 to the highest animal welfare standards in the world. Given the growth in the dairy herd and the constant need for a credible alternative to meat plants as an outlet for farmers, a strong vibrant live export trade is hugely important and we've seen some significant developments on that front in 2017 with the latest being the approval of a cert for fattening cattle to Egypt. While there are now options for all types of cattle from calves to forward stores, the critical next step is to develop a market that will take forward store-type cattle in significant numbers and perhaps the recent fattening cert signed with Egypt is the first step in this regard. It is essential that the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine and Bord Bia prioritise a live export market for forward store cattle and provide direct competition for meat plants.
As we enter the critical Autumn period for beef farmers, the markets continue to perform well having absorbed the additional cattle in the system, and there is absolutely no reason why current prices cannot be maintained based on market developments.

THE BEEF FORUM:
While we note that the Beef Forum has made progress on a number of issues, any fair assessment would have to conclude that it has not achieved its objectives and that certain parties have failed to deliver on their commitments. At the most recent Forum, ICMSA set out our reasonable objectives for a beef sector which is increasingly going to be dominated by cattle from the dairy herd. This is the reality and, as we go forward, policies being considered for the beef sector will have to recognise this fact. Among the areas of concern highlighted by ICMSA at the Forum was the pressing need for a complete review of the beef grid and its given specifications, as well as greater transparency in the supply chain, a premium for grass-based beef production, market access issues, Brexit and the need for an adequately funded CAP post 2020.

Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme (SDAS) Update

Eimear O'Donnell, Sector Manager, Dairy Ingredients, Bord Bia

The Bord Bia Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme was launched in December 2013 and was developed in cooperation with milk producers, processors and regulatory authorities. It has been designed to assist in securing new and existing markets for Irish dairy produce as farmers increase milk production in a post quota era. It sets out the necessary criteria to produce quality milk and in addition the scheme has also been designed to assess and record data to demonstrate the sustainability of Irish dairying in a systematic way at individual farm level. It provides the necessary proof to customers of dairy products that milk has been produced under both Sustainability and Quality Assurance criteria.
The SDAS is the first national dairy scheme of its kind anywhere in the world. It sets out requirements for best practice on Irish dairy farms in animal health and welfare, land management, biosecurity, safe farming practices and the production of safe milk. It also provides a framework for measuring the continuous improvement of each participating farmer, recording and monitoring sustainability credentials at farm level. The SDAS is a rigorous, independently verified and internationally accredited programme. (European Standard for Product Certification – ISO 17065: 2012)
To date, almost 17,000 of Ireland's dairy farms have applied to take part in the scheme. By the end of July 2017, over 27,000 carbon audits had been conducted and 15,095 farms had become certified members of the SDAS. These certified farms account for over 85% of Ireland's dairy farms. Another 1,815 farms have applied for certification which will bring the total number of participants in the scheme to 95% of Irish dairy farms.
Farms are audited every 18 months with each audit taking approximately two hours forty minutes. Details on application for the SDAS and audit can be obtained from your Co-op or from the Quality Assurance Department in BordBia at 01 668 5155 or email quality.assurance@bordbia.ie.

PROMOTING THE SDAS AND ORIGIN GREEN DAIRY
Irish dairy exports in 2016 were valued at €3.38bn, an increase of 2%, with product exported to 155 markets worldwide. The top five markets for Irish dairy exports are the UK, China, The Netherlands, Germany and the United States. International markets are growing in importance with exports valued at approximately €1.66bn or 49% of dairy exports.
Promoting Origin Green Dairy and the SDAS in overseas marketsis paramount as we grow our output and global footprint. As sustainability becomes a major priority for many of our customers, pressure is placed back on suppliers to help customers deliver on their sustainability targets. Origin Green as a national independently accredited standard, gives Ireland a point of difference in global dairy markets.
Communicating the story of Origin Green and Irish dairy remains a key focus for BordBia. The hosting of inward journalists visits, features in international trade press, participation in trade fairs and a heightened online social presence plays a key role in communicating Origin Green in international markets. Examples of Origin Green communication activity that is specific to the promotion of Irish dairy includes advertising in targeted print and digital media trade publications in selected markets. A number of inward customer and media visits allowing trade and journalists experience first-hand the high standard of dairy production in Ireland. Finally, in terms of our activity in China, this is predominately a digital marketing consumer campaign. China is the second largest market for dairy exports after the UK with exports in 2016 valued at €646m, +32% on the previous year. The consumer campaign aims to promote Ireland as a supplier of sustainable and quality dairy products. The Origin Green dairy China website is available on www.origingreen.com.cn For further information on Origin Green Dairy, visit www.origingreen.ie/dairy.

ICMSA – THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION

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CAMPION INSURANCE

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  - Have over 3,000 farmers as clients
  - Are the largest farm insurance broker in Ireland
  - Have an exclusive offering for ICMSA Members.
- **Local Branch Network**
  Our branch network allows us to provide a personal and professional service to our customers. Our local knowledge and expertise helps us to understand your business and your insurance needs.
- **Dedicated Claims Team**
  We have a dedicated team of claims handling experts. In our role as insurance brokers our primary responsibility is to manage your claim by acting on your behalf to ensure your claim is effectively dealt with.
- **Irish Owned SME**
  We are 100% Irish owned SME, just like most of our customers so the challenges and risks that you face in your business are ones that we can understand. We work with you to understand the challenges you face and help build common sense and practical solutions.

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The Recent Surge In Butter Prices – Joe Collins Of Ornua Explains What's Going On

Butter prices on spot commodity markets have reached record highs in recent months which has created panic in the supply chain. Over the last 12 months butter prices have jumped 160% from the Intervention floor with most of this increase occurring in the last three months to reach record levels in excess of €6,100/t. The previous record was €4,100/t for two months in late 2007.

The majority of this price increase can be explained by a low and unsustainable Intervention base, supply reductions and strong demand. The remainder can to be attributed to panic buying by large food ingredient customers who were operating with low stocks because they had budgeted to buy butter at prices of €3,600/t in late 2016.

Supplies have been impacted by lower milk output in Europe since June 2016 and a reduction in the butter fat content of milk. In addition, increased volumes of cream are being used in applications like full fat milk, ice cream, dips, yogurt and high fat cheeses thereby curtailing volumes available for butter churning. In contrast, SMP (a by-product of butter) pricing has remained depressed with prices hovering just above the Intervention floor (€1,698/t). In late 2007, SMP traded at €3,600/t or 88% of the butter price compared to 30% today. This price mismatch has also discouraged processors from making butter as the cent-per-litre (CPL) returns are affected with strong butter returns being negated by lower SMP returns. In summary, the butter/SMP combination is struggling to attract additional milk.

Demand for dairy fat has been growing strongly in recent years. Dairy fat is now acknowledged as being a naturally, healthy and tasty food, while its substitutes (e.g. margarines) are viewed as less healthy, processed and not always produced sustainably. In the quest for flavour consumers are switching to dairy fat at the expense of sugar. This positive trend towards dairy fat started with butter and has now moved to other dairy products, markets and sectors.

While the retail price of butter has increased it only partially reflects the spot price increases. Butter brand owners' margins are being impacted and they are extremely concerned about long term brand damage and the potential for reduced demand as consumers switch to own label, lower quality brands and margarine. Foodservice and food ingredient customers are in crisis mode - particularly in baking - as they are unable to source as normal from processors and traders with butter costing 60%-80% more than budgeted. Some are looking to dairy substitutes to survive as consumers buy smaller quantities. Many traders are concerned as they sold forward in anticipation of normal butter market and are now exposed. Some will not survive and there will likely be bad debts for processors.

Milk processors across Europe are unhappy due to lower milk/fat supplies while low SMP returns are putting pressure on returns at a time when farmers expect higher returns based on spot butter prices. Indeed, some processors have cut milk prices (France and UK) to reflect product mix and forward contract commitments which are the mainstream for the prices returned to farmers.

In summary, the spike in spot butter prices carries risks within the supply chain that could have long term consequences. The market would welcome a rebalancing of fat and SMP protein values as this would be more sustainable for all the parties.

Joe Collins, Managing Director of Ornua Trading & Ingredients

An appreciation of Donal Murphy: a true friend of the farm families of Ireland

The passing of Donal Murphy on the 29th June 2017 led to a deeply felt sadness amongst his many friends in ICMSA, a friendship that for many extended over five decades. It was a friendship built on the huge respect people had for Donal, on his personal character and his willingness to help at all times, whether you were a farmer, a member of a farm family or a staff member. He was always there to provide an impartial and valuable opinion on how best to address your concerns even after his retirement in May 2000.

Donal took up the position of General Secretary in 1971 and over the next three decades led ICMSA and its members through a period of dizzying and unprecedented change from EU membership, the cattle crisis of 1974, the oil crisis of the mid 1970s, the interest rate crisis of the early 1980s, the introduction of milk quotas in 1983, the move to direct payments in the 1990s to the BSE crisis of the mid 1990's. At all times and addressing each and every one of those and many other challenges Donal had one objective and that was how best to protect farmers and their families and to represent their interests at the highest levels, locally nationally and at EU level.

The challenges, to put it mildly were enormous, and serving under seven Presidents as General Secretary Donal always kept the interest of farmers as his guiding star and the first item on his agenda. If that meant stepping on others' toes when required then he was perfectly willing to do just that and his work and dedication has stood farmers well to this very day. A timely example of his work would be the establishment of ICBF: Donal recognised the potential in Ireland in terms of cattle breeding but he also saw the need for better organisation, planning and farmer control over cattle breeding. Together with like-minded people, he set about addressing this matter and was involved in the establishment of ICBF from Day One. Today, the farmers across Ireland who are benefiting from the work of ICBF and the many advances in cattle breeding since its establishment are enjoying just one part of his legacy to farmers and the wider sector

A lot of Donal's best work would have been directly with individual farmers, work that would be unrecognised at a wider level but would have had a very significant impact on the farm family concerned. Donal would have spent countless hours on such matters and individual farmers will attest to his work with Government Departments, banks, meat plants and dairy co-operatives that resulted in practical and workable solutions for the farmers concerned. Donal's contribution to Irish agriculture has been very significant and on the 29th June, Irish farmers lost a true friend and tireless champion. To his wife, Agatha and his family, we extend our deepest sympathies on the passing of Donal who will be long remembered by his many friends and colleagues in ICMSA.

John Enright,
General Secretary.

Knowledge Transfer Scheme – Benefits Getting Drowned In Paperwork

The Association gets no satisfaction from noting the ongoing – and indeed growing – frustration and loss of goodwill in relation to the Knowledge Transfer (KT) scheme, the Chairperson of ICMSA's Farm & Rural Affairs Committee, Patrick Rohan, was widely reported when he noted that while the goals of the KT scheme were relatively simple inasmuch as they aimed to encourage efficiency and effectiveness of work, help farmers deal with complex issues, engage farmers in a process of continuous improvement, encourage innovation and new ideas and to raise awareness of issues relating to farm health & safety and farm succession – all from within a discussion group environment - the outcomes and results have proved disappointing and hugely over-complicated to a degree that is leading to a loss of credibility and confidence in the scheme from those who had expressed so much hope in it.

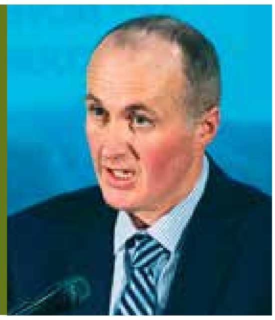
IT issues, the difficulty of submissions, the prescriptive nature of the scheme and the amount of paper work involved has reduced many fundamentally worthwhile tasks to exercises in 'Ticking the Box'. Farmers, facilitators and vets alike have become frustrated with the online system provided by the Department for uploading data. A matter of particular irritation is the fact that all plans have to be uploaded individually and batch uploads are not possible.

These complications - along with the extra blunder associated with Teagasc fees - have severely damaged the ethos and credibility of the KT scheme. Discussion groups are meant to be a place where farmers can meet regularly to exchange views, discuss relevant topics and ultimately learn from each other in a relaxed environment. Instead, as Pat Rohan has pointed out, an inappropriate classroom atmosphere has been introduced where "farmers have to answer a roll-call, sit through a prescribed curriculum and complete a project on our farm at the end of year" For the long-term good of the scheme it is essential that lessons are learned from Year One of the scheme and adjustments and amendments are made aimed at ensuring farmer acceptance and enthusiasm for such a scheme are won back and restored. In this regard, ICMSA has called on the Department to establish a review group on the KT Scheme that would report by the end of September and ensure that the necessary changes are made.

We conclude by noting that any delay in payments from the scheme will only add insult to injury and would only further undermine a Scheme that has already suffered an erosion of farmer confidence.

At the National Council held on 21 June were John O'Donnell, Ballina, Co Mayo, Thomas Rogers of Bailieboro, Co Cavan, the President, and Lorcan McCabe, Bailieboro

BPS 2017: Department Tells Us That They're 'Ahead Of Schedule'



Pat McCormack, Deputy President

From a farmers' perspective, the next three months is the traditional period when bills/ loan repayments/income tax are paid and cleared and there's also likely to be bills left over from 2016 as well, given the pressures on income many of us experienced last year. The timely receipt of the BPS/Greening and ANC payments are critical in this regard and at the most recent Farmers Charter meeting ICMSA reiterated, firstly, the importance of payments being made on time and, secondly, that the first instalment due to be paid on 16 October 2017 represents 70% of the total payment as opposed to 50% as currently proposed. For the last number of years, farmers have received a 70% advance and it is important in the context of scheduled bank loan repayments, as well as the payment of income tax, that this is again delivered. ICMSA also raised this matter directly as part of a scheduled meeting with the Minister for Agriculture, Food & Marine and he has indicated that discussions are ongoing with the EU Commission on this matter.

Whether your payment is held up due to digitisation, or whether your payment is held up due to an inspection report, or whether your payment is held up due to an over-claim (quite often a miniscule amount) or whether your payment has yet to be processed or whether you can't get through to the Department, it all leads to huge frustration amongst famers and that frustration can reach boiling point when these issues only seem to arise after the payment date has passed. This shouldn't be happening; the Department have our applications since May and there is absolutely no reason why applications cannot be finalised, cleared and problems notified to farmers well in advance of payment date. We have repeatedly raised this hugely irritating problem with the relevant sections. So what progress can we report?

On the Preliminary Checks system, approximately 7,500 farmers were issued with a letter indicating problems with their application and over 6,000 of these farmers responded by the closing date. If you are one of the 1,000 farmers who didn't respond, you should review your application at this stage and make the necessary amendments to avoid penalties and ensure your payment is made on time. The preliminary check system is available only to online applicants and addresses issues such as dual claims, over-claims and overlaps and it undoubtedly has helped to reduce penalties. In addition to the preliminary checks, the Department has also informed ICMSA that as of mid July 2017, 7,000 farmers have received correspondence regarding issues with their application compared to 2,000 farmers in 2016. The Department has also indicated that processing of applications is ahead of 2016 – it is, effectively, 'ahead of schedule' - and that this should mean that more farmers are paid on time. ICMSA would advise all farmers that if they are using the online system to check their agfood account for possible correspondence and respond to it to ensure your application is clear on payment date.

In terms of the ANC, the main problem that has arisen in previous years is that farmers forgot to tick the ANC box on their application form. So, again, if the application was made online, a farmer can check this on his/her application and if they forgot to tick that box, they should contact the Department at this stage and inform them that they wish to apply for the ANC. If using a paper application and if you took a photocopy of the application then consult it and check to see whether or not the box is ticked. If not, then inform the Department of the error and advise them that you intended to apply. This should resolve the matter.

The other big area of contention for farmers is inspections/penalties and ICMSA has consistently raised with the Department the issues that need to be addressed in order to make the system of inspection and penalties fairer to farmers. ICMSA believes firmly that these can be addressed while respecting EU regulations. The Nitrates penalties are a case in point. About 40% of the Cross Compliance penalties imposed on Irish farmers in 2016 resulted from a desk exercise in the Department with no actual inspection of the farm. These penalties related to farmers exceeding the 170kgs' of N per hectare and either not applying for a derogation, reducing stock numbers, exporting slurry or taking additional grazing. Under the Nitrates review, ICMSA have made a number of proposals to eliminate such penalties and allow the farmer rectify the issue in the following year. With a level of goodwill and application of common sense, this matter can be progressed and we can eliminate a huge issue for farmers. For 2017, ICMSA would advise farmers to very closely examine their stocking rate at this stage and take steps to avoid such penalties by either selling some cattle - perhaps at an earlier stage than normal – or exporting slurry to another farmer, taking additional grazing under a grazing arrangement or sending some cattle out to a B&B arrangement.

The important point to make is that if you do export slurry or take additional grazing, you must notify the Department by the end of December 2017. This process is the only option for 2017, it is cumbersome and is the principal reason why ICMSA is seeking a simplified approach under the Nitrates Review.

Inspections/penalties need to recognise the realities of farming in Ireland and a system of reasonable tolerances is critical in this regard. While a system of tolerances is in place, it is demonstrably deficient in a few particularly critical areas - notably animal identification and nitrates - and improvements are required in these areas in the interest of fairness. ICMSA continues to work with the Department and the EU Commission in order to address these critical matters.

Finally, if you run into a problem with a payment or inspection in 2017, ICMSA is here to help you, so please don't hesitate to contact the office if you require assistance.

Miss Joanne O'Dwyer married Pat McCormack in Donaskeigh Parish Church, Co Tipperary, on Friday, 30 June.

Brexit Response Must Inform Budget 2018 Taxation Measures

Lorcan McCabe, Chairperson of Farm Business Committee.

At time of writing Brexit is only 18 months away, the implications for Irish farming are still unknown but what we can say with certainty is that the outcome will not be positive and we now need to see concrete actions from our Government to prepare and protect vulnerable sectors. ICMSA in common with every other serious commentator has our Agri-food sector at the top of the list of vulnerable sectors. As well as accepting this indisputable fact, the Government needs to move on from that fact and recognise that farmers are at the bottom of the food supply chain and will bear the brunt of any negative impacts from Brexit. Therefore, specific measures are required for farmers.

The following is an overview of the key taxation policy items addressed in the ICMSA 2018 Pre-Budget Submission with specific priority given to measures to protect farmers from the implications of Brexit:

INCOME VOLATILITY MANAGEMENT:

Dairy farm income fluctuates from year to year due to many circumstances outside the control of farmers. But the agri-taxation system is very definitely within the control of our Government and as it presently operates it very significantly impedes the ability of the sole trader to grow and develop their business due to its complete inability to deal with or even acknowledge often lengthy periods of farm income volatility.

In this context, and in the context of Brexit, ICMSA is proposing the introduction of a Farm Management Deposits Scheme (FMDS) as outlined below. ICMSA believes that the Farm Management Deposits model has notable merits and most definitely should be used as a template for the introduction of a farm income volatility management tool into the Irish income tax code based on the following criteria;

- ICMSA believe limits could be placed both on the total amount to be deposited in a given year and the aggregate amount at any time and suggest a maximum deposit per annum of 30 percent of farm profit and/or a maximum of €10,000. Funds would remain in the Farm Management Deposit account for a maximum period of 5 years. In addition, ICMSA recommend that 12.5 percent tax should apply on a 'once-off' basis for the amounts deposited in the farm management account.
- Farmers would then be able to avail of these funds in the farm management deposit account to support the farm business in the event of a downturn in farm income and/or for investment in the farming enterprise.
- Where funds are taken from the farm deposit account in the form of income then the normal rate of tax applicable in the year of withdrawal would apply to these withdrawals less a credit for the 12.5 percent tax which was originally paid on the funds when deposited in the farm deposit account in the first instance.

INCOME AVERAGING

ICMSA propose that individual farmers should be allowed to opt for Three-Year or Five-Year averaging in order to allow them to more effectively manage income volatility for their farming enterprise and to take account of individual circumstances.

PERSONAL TAXATION

Earned Income Credit

ICMSA welcomed the increase in the Earned Income Credit to €950 in Budget 2017. The Government has committed to equalizing this credit to the PAYE Tax Credit in successive Budgets and ICMSA believes this process should be concluded in Budget 2018.

Universal Social Charge

ICMSA calls for a further reduction of the Universal Social Charge in Budget 2018 and the inclusion of capital allowances in the USC calculation.

LAND POLICY AND TAXATION

Stamp Duty

Consanguinity Relief, which is due to expire on 31 December 2017, must be extended in Budget 2018.

Capital Gains Tax

Budget 2018 must provide for a significant reduction in the 33 percent rate of Capital Gains Tax. In addition, ICMSA propose that the first €5,000 of an individual's chargeable gain be exempt and that Indexation should be reintroduced in order to act as a catalyst to encourage land mobility. The status of Co-op shares also needs to be clarified and tax should only be applied on a realisation basis.

Capital Acquisitions Tax

Budget 2018 must provide for a significant reduction in the 33 percent rate of Capital Acquisitions Tax and the Group A Tax Free Threshold should be increased to €500,000 along with the retention of the 90 percent Agricultural Relief.

Income Tax Relief and Leasing Land

Income tax relief on land leases should be extended to family members in Budget 2018 subject to criteria regarding farm transfer.

FARM INVESTMENT TAX INCENTIVES

Stock Relief

Budget 2018 should provide for the introduction of a new Stock Relief measure whereby farmers would be allowed 100 percent stock relief on additional expenditure of up to €100,000.

Capital Allowances

Budget 2017 must allow for flexibility in the claiming of Capital Allowances and propose that farmers be allowed to write-off capital expenditure on farm buildings and plant and machinery over a period of three and eight years with a "floating allowance" of up to 50 percent allowable in any one year in order to facilitate maximum utilization.

The priority in Budget 2018 should be measures to counter what are highly likely to be negative Brexit impacts. Delaying their implementation runs the risk of diminishing their effectiveness.

Eddie Hennessy is a well known dairy farmer from Ballysimon, County Limerick, and a long-time user of Growvite. Here's his message to other farmers: " We've used Growvite for years because we see the results in front of our eyes in terms of thriving and healthy animals. I'd have no hesitation in recommending Growvite to any farmer who's looking for excellent animal health and great value for his or her money. And what farmer doesn't want that?"

How We Can Make CAP Rural Development Schemes More Effective

Patrick Rohan, Chairperson of Farm & Rural Affairs Committee.

The CAP Rural Development Plan or Pillar 2, as it is also known, contains a number of very significant schemes in terms of overall farmers' income including GLAS, TAMS, Areas of Natural Constraint, Knowledge Transfer and other locally-led Schemes. Anyone who attended any farmers meeting in the last year could not have failed to have noticed the extent to which problems with these schemes dominated in terms of complaints from farmers whether it was payments delays, inspections or over-fussy interpretation of terms & conditions. The Department has the opportunity on an annual basis to propose changes to these schemes to the EU Commission and the following is a summary of the proposed changes we would like Ireland to submit to the Commission for consideration

1. TAMS.
ICMSA believes that the following changes should be made in relation to the TAMS schemes:

- Underpasses should be included as an eligible investment. Moving cows across roads is becoming a bigger issue for many farmers and the provision of grant aid would allow these farmers address this matter in a much safer way for the cows, the farmer and the public.
- Cluster removers on existing units. At present, the Department does not allow grant aid for cluster removers on existing units. The consequence is that many farmers end up installing a completely new machine at an additional cost to them and exposing them to additional debt. ICMSA believes that a specification could be devised to allow for the installation of cluster removers on existing units. Given the emphasis on reducing antibiotic use on farms, this would be a very positive development. We believe that many farmers want to install cluster removers on existing units so TAMS should be designed to facilitate them as much as possible.
- ICMSA has also raised the issues of excessive specifications, the need to increase the standard costings used in the scheme to reflect actual costs incurred by farmers, the need for a system of split payments to facilitate investments and the need to simplify and speed up the payment process.

2. GLAS.
In light of climate change commitments and other environmental issues, the GLAS scheme is already hugely important and likely to become even more vital. ICMSA believes that the GLAS scheme should be re-opened to cater for an additional 5,000 participants in 2018. In addition, there is a need to make the scheme attractive to intensive farmers and ICMSA has made a number of proposals to the Department in this regard.

3. ANC SCHEME.
The ANC scheme (formerly Disadvantaged Areas Scheme) plays a key role in supporting farming in challenging or marginal areas and environments. The payments under this scheme were cut substantially in 2009 at the height of the financial crisis and ICMSA believes that there is now an unanswerable case to restore these payments to pre-2009 levels to reflect the level of disadvantage faced by farmers in ANC areas.

4. KT SCHEMES.
The KT schemes have a valuable role to play but there is an overwhelming consensus now that the terms and conditions of the scheme need to be addressed to maintain farmer commitment to the schemes. There has been mounting criticism from farmers regarding the level of paperwork and the prescriptive nature of the scheme and these issues must be addressed to restore farmer confidence in the scheme.

The Minister has the opportunity to make these amendments to the schemes and ICMSA believes that they would greatly improve operation and delivery of the schemes as well as making them much more attractive and effective for farmers either participating or considering participation (see also Page 10).

Also at that June 21 National Council were Tom O'Flynn, Kilbehenny, Co Cork, Pat O'Regan, Lombardstown, Cork, Gerald Quain, Colmanswell, and Michael Lenihan, Anglesboro, Co Limerick.

At the National Council held on June 21 were Pat O'Brien and Michael Guinan, both of Offaly.

CAP Post 2020 – Where Do We Want The Debate To Go?

John Comer, President.

The discussions on CAP Post 2020 are well under way and, indeed, I attended and spoke at the recent CAP Consultation Conference in Brussels. A number of issues are clear at this stage including the battle that will have to be waged for a strong budget for CAP and the shift at EU level to linking payments to environmental issues. Even the idea of additional requirements on farmers to access payments is obnoxious; as far as we are concerned even the present list of regulations is already grossly excessive and farmers simply cannot be expected to take on additional requirements. In fact, the whole thrust of regulation needs to go in the opposite direction; what we need to see in CAP Post 2020 is a real and determined campaign aimed at simplification. I have to be honest, however, and tell you that we face a major battle on this matter. In this article, I hope to briefly outline the priorities ICMSA has identified in the context of CAP Post 2020 which we have deliberately based on the need to support farm families in a way that enables them to earn a decent and proportionate income from farming.

1. BUDGET:

The decision on the size and structure of the CAP Budget post 2020 is the critical decision on which all the other matters rely. ICMSA's position is very clear in that we believe that, at a minimum, the current CAP Budget must be retained in full with the remaining 27 Member States making up the UK contribution post Brexit.

2. PRICE SUPPORTS:

While price supports are a less prominent part of CAP today, they remain hugely important during periods of market downturns and are essential to counteract the growing volatility of agricultural markets. ICMSA believe that the following specific proposals are required to protect primary producers in market downturns.

- The Voluntary Milk Supply Reduction Scheme – which ICMSA alone championed and advocated in the Irish context - should become a permanent policy fixture and should be available to farmers once milk price falls below 90% of the average cost of production in the EU. The rate of payment should be 60% of the average cost of production in the EU. This would be, and must remain, a totally voluntary measure.
- The Intervention price for butter and SMP should be adjusted annually to reflect 90% of the average cost of milk production in the EU. The current buying-in limits should be retained and should be increased once the milk price falls below 80% of the cost of production in the EU.
- Private Storage Aid should be retained and should be available each year irrespective of market prices.
- Emergency measures should be triggered once milk price falls below 80% of the average cost of milk production for three consecutive months.
- The de-minimis rule should be increased to €30,000 over three years for farm enterprises and should specifically allow a Farm Management Deposit Scheme type tax allowance.

3. PILLAR 1:

The BPS/Greening is the key income support for farm families and many farmers have found their payments cut substantially, including farmers with a relatively small overall payment. It is essential that this key income support is retained, particularly for farmers wholly dependent on farming for their income.

- Convergence: The national average payment per hectare is approximately €260/ha. ICMSA believes that the current system of convergence needs to be reformed to protect people depending on farming for their income and also for those with a low overall payment.
- ICMSA is proposing that the Basic Payment and Greening Payment should be amalgamated into one payment.
- Linear cuts to payments to fund various schemes e.g., National Reserve, should be discontinued and a tiered system of reductions applied where those with larger payments pay a bigger contribution. In addition, the first €10,000 should be exempt from any cuts.
- A realistic cap should be applied to the BPS/Greening payment.
- Cross Compliance:
- A reduction in the inspection rate to 1%.
- Compulsory 14 days notice of inspection.
- Improved tolerances to reflect the practical realities of farming.

4. PILLAR II:

Pillar II schemes such as GLAS, TAMS and ANCs are crucial schemes for farmers and rural areas. In the context of CAP Post 2020, ICMSA believes that the following issues need to be addressed:

- Pillar II has become too complex with large numbers of schemes with high planning and compliance costs and the system needs to be simplified.
- The Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme must be continued and payments made in September.
- Specific schemes should be in place for active farmers in SAC/SPA areas.
- An Agri-environment scheme that is relevant to all farmers should be introduced.
- On-farm investment schemes must be retained.
- An Early Retirement Scheme should be an option under Pillar II.

The CAP continues to play a central role in EU agriculture and over the next two years, decisions will be taken on CAP Post 2020 that will impact on every farm family in Ireland. Farm income is the key and the issues outlined above ICMSA believe are central to ensuring that farmers' incomes are protected during periods of market downturns and that farmers are adequately and fairly rewarded for the many public goods they provide. The question of CAP Budget is central and here we must make it plain: Farmers and their families will not pay for Brexit in the same way as they - and they alone – had to pay for the EU's political row with Russia in 2014 and the trade restrictions that followed.

Farm Safety – Don't Put It On The Long Finger!

Pat Griffin, HSA

We have been beating the drum on farm safety for over 25 years now and beating it particularly loudly over the last 10 years, we have Codes of Practice, safety leaflets & guidance documents and videos on almost every aspect of farm safety. We have access to TAMS II grants made conditional on doing a half-day of training and safety is now firmly part of the Knowledge Transfer Schemes which replaced discussion groups. Every farm organisation, every farm leader and every Minister associated with agriculture in any way calls on farmers to work safely, to prioritise safety and health so as to protect themselves, their family and, indeed, the farm itself.

For 2017, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is committed to having three major farm safety campaigns to focus farmer action on a small number of issues that lead to serious and fatal injury every year. In March we focused on Livestock safety to coincide with the busy calving period,in May it was Tractors and Machinery to coincide with the busy silage season and in November our campaign will focus on 'working at height& falling objects' often the cause of death later in the year.Running such campaigns gives the farming organisations -like ICMSA – the widerfarming community & farming media an opportunity to row-in and support farm safety.It also brings farm safety 'to life', in a sense,as it deals with current work and current risks and helps to keep the topic fresh in the minds of farmers as they carry out the specific tasks associated with different times of the year. Added into all this mix was the UK & Ireland Farm Safety Week which was supported by HSA andgenerated huge media interest. There has never been more events, more articles, more coverage of farm safety and we never seem to run out of people coming forward to tell their story in an effort to maybe help others prevent a similar serious injury or death to a loved one.

The question remains, however, whether all this isjust background noise? Is anybody really listening? Certainly - to judge from what we find during our inspection campaigns – the answer to that question isnot very encouraging.

During the recent May campaign, our inspectors served 19 Prohibition Notices relating to the use of unguarded PTOs on tractors, missing U-Guards and the discovery of unguarded drive shafts on farm machinery like slurry spreaders, fertilizer spreaders and toppers.

25 Improvement Notices were served and 103 Reports of Inspection were issued for non-compliance: During the inspection campaign we found that;

- 44 % did not have safe systems in place for agitating and spreading slurry;
- 39% had handbrakes on tractors not maintained;
- 53 %of PTO Guards were either not in place or defective;
- 50 % had not adequately assessed risks in their COP; and
- 50 %did not have the required safety measures listed in their action plans.

From the inspection figures we can deduct that almost half of all farmers do not maintain machinery and a similar number just keep putting dealing with farm safety issues 'on the long finger'. Half way through this year sadly we have 14 fatalities in farming and if this rate continues we are - yet again -looking at one of the worst years on record. It is difficult to see how some could have been avoided but generally farmers have to start putting more time and a more professional approach into farm safety.

Many will argue that time pressure, the 'weather-window', the lack of help, the ever increasing workload, fatigue, and maybe the lack of money all force the farmer to take such risks simply to get the job done. While certainly all these are or can be a factor, no job is so urgent or so important that a farmer should risk his or her life dong it. Many farmers - the lucky ones - have laid in their hospital beds thinking "if only"; if only I had fixed the brakes, if only I had switched off the PTO, got the proper machine, got some help, isolated that cow, if only I had left it for another day. My message to ICMSA readers is very simply this: There is always a safer way and, generally, when properly thought out doing the job safely need not incur significant cost.

Visit www.hsa.ie to download free copy of the new Code of Practice.

Meeting With Deputies From The Rural Alliance Group

As part of our lobbying on behalf of farm families, ICMSA recently met member deputies from the Rural Alliance group at Leinster House, L to R, Deputy Michael Collins, Deputy Mattie McGrath, Paul Smyth, ICMSA policy Officer, Deputy Dr Michael Harty, John Comer, President, Deputy Danny Healy-Rae and Deputy Michael Healy-Rae.