



THE FAMILY FARM ORGANISATION

The ICMSA Guide To Election 2024

The Questions That Farmers Need Answered



ICMSA- The Farm Organisation That Concentres On Solutions!

What this is and why you should read it

This document is the ICMSA Guide to the key issues for farmers in the upcoming European & local elections being held on June 7 and it has been produced and distributed to candidates standing in rural constituencies. It is designed to make sure that those candidates are alert to the issues identified as most pressing for our farming communities at present and also the solutions being proposed by ICMSA, the farm organisation that focuses on solutions.

We have carefully identified the key issues that matter most to our members, the farming community in general and the wider rural society in which we work, live and to which we wish to continue contributing to. We have to be broad and general in setting out these issues but anyone who wants more detail on both the issues and our solutions is welcome to contact us at **061-314677** or at info@icmsa.ie

Before a word has been uttered, we already know that two issues will dominate this election as far as farmers are concerned. Firstly, the relentless pressure on farmer margin and farmer income has come to a head after a historically wet and long winter. The value of Irish agri output has collapsed by in excess of 30% in just two years. In every sector, farmers are reeling from low prices, high input prices, a crushing regulatory burden, and a relentless attack from the most extreme environmental elements both in Government and through a bewildering array of taxpayer supported NGOs and quangos. That pressure is coming on farmers at the same time as their patience and finances finally comes to an end. We have dairy farmers receiving the same prices as their parents received 30 years ago. Everyone sympathises, but we don't want sympathy anymore. We want fair prices. We want action. Politicians who go to farmers' yards and doors are going to be told that forcefully and straight out.

The second issue that is going to dominate this Election in rural areas and constituencies is the realisation - both on the part of the farmers and the political parties that the farmers once supported - that this old relationship is finally over. Farmers feel, with a great deal of justification and evidence for their conclusion, that no party is prepared to represent them or defend them in a way that their economic, social, and cultural role - as well as the simple facts of the matter - entitle them to expect.

Farmers feel they have been abandoned politically and that they are therefore fully entitled to 'begin again' and chose candidates on the basis of who will stand up for their interests - the same basis on which every other sector in Ireland is allowed make their political choice. Farmers absolutely accept the need for change but just as absolutely, we reject the idea that farmers alone will have to change their way of life and farmers alone will have to bear the astronomical costs of changing the way we produce food. Any candidate that comes out with that glib message - and there'll be plenty - must be challenged at every opportunity and interrogated on what they actually know about farming and rural life - as opposed to what they pretend to know or care about.

ICMSA has never and will never endorse a given candidate or political party, but we will not tolerate a campaign where farmers are made the 'whipping boys' for anyone's pet projects or concerns. We have represented farm families for a long time; 2025 will be our 75th anniversary and I would strongly urge you as a candidate to read and consider the policies set out here in the sure knowledge that they are fair, workable, and necessary. To our members around the various constituencies, I know that you will make your views known to every candidate and convey your expectations that they recognise and will act on the issues identified in this document.



Denis Drennan

President ICMSA





Priorities for the future of Farming

1. **Development of a time-lined Government and EU strategy to deliver farm incomes comparable to other sectors.**
2. **Retention of the Nitrates Derogation and a review of Nature Restoration Law & other EU Environmental measures.**
3. **Increased CAP Budget directed to active farmers and away from 'land holding'.**
4. **Delivery of an Income Volatility Tax Measure for agriculture sector to address excessive 'swings' in farm income.**
5. **Government and EU Plan to reduce farm regulation in the next six months.**

Price, Income and Margin

- Family farming must be able to deliver an income comparable with other sectors of the economy and European and Government policy **must** reflect this.
- The EU must legislate to ensure farmers receive a sustainable price for their produce.
- The Food Regulator needs to have the power to enforce policies that ensure:
 - Farmers receive a fair price for their produce and are not subject to unfair trading practices dictated by processors or retailers.
 - The implementation of a Food Price Monitoring Tool (FPMT) that would improve transparency across the food supply chain and deliver a sustainable price for farmers.
 - Investigate price differentials, e.g.: lower Irish beef versus UK beef prices given that 47% of our 2023 beef exports went to the UK.
- Recognition of the total costs of food production – including regulatory costs - and the adoption of policies that ensure retail prices reflect the total costs of production and deliver a sustainable price to farmers.
- All imported produce must meet the same standards as EU produce and cannot be used to undermine and undercut sustainable EU food production systems.





Dairy

- The EU must legislate for a sustainable price for milk that will allow the family farming model to continue.
- EU and national regulations must reflect a policy imperative of keeping that family farm model and reducing the regulatory paperwork burden.
- The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine should resume their quarterly publication of the milk testing results carried out by milk processors.
- The TB programme will have to be reformed and appropriate supports introduced to support farmers impacted by TB.
- The Dairy Vision Group's proposed Reduction/Exit Scheme should be introduced as a voluntary option for farmers.
- The EU Voluntary Milk Supply Reduction Scheme should automatically be available once milk price falls below 90% of the average cost of milk production in the EU.





Beef and Livestock

- The Dairy Beef Welfare Scheme must be reviewed and a payment of €100 per head made to calf rearers and €100 per head to beef finishers, subject to certain conditions being met.
- The Beef & Sheep Vision Group proposed Suckler Exit/Reduction Scheme should be introduced as a voluntary option for suckler farmers.
- Transparency in beef & sheep pricing is essential and the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine should publish the range of prices in each grade paid by meat processors on a weekly basis.
- The Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine should inspect carcass grading and weighing scales at meat plants on a monthly basis and publish the results also on a monthly basis.
- The retention of live export is essential for dairy and suckler farmers in terms of ensuring adequate competition for livestock.
- The proposed Mercusor agreement should be rejected in full and publicly.





Nitrates

- The Nitrates Derogation must be renewed in 2026 and reflect the grass-based system of production in Ireland with proper consultation and input from the farm organisations.
- No further reduction in organic nitrogen limit is acceptable. Organic N limits must be retained at the current limits and revert to 250kgs of N per hectare if water quality improves.
- Existing Nitrates Action Programme measures and the derogation application process should be reviewed and simplified where possible.
- The blanket two-year exclusion rules for breaches under the Nitrates Derogation should be removed.
- Any additional measures that are needed to retain the Derogation rate must have realistic timeframes with achievable and quantifiable goals.
- A planning exemption should be introduced for additional slurry storage requirements on existing farmyards subject to defined conditions.
- An Inspection Charter covering all state and EU agencies – including local authorities – that can inspect farms.

CAP

- The CAP Budget must be increased in the next CAP period to reflect the cost of the demands being placed on farmers.
- CAP payments should be directed to active farmers and index linked.
- The system of inspections should be simplified with an opportunity to remedy a breach of regulation before a penalty is applied. It should operate under a Charter that covers all state – including local authorities - and EU agencies who can inspect.
- A Young Farmers Scheme and an Early Retirement Scheme should be run in unison and co-ordinated in a way that facilitates the smooth transition to the next generation.

Rural Ireland: Security, Infrastructure and Rural Renewal

- Planning policies must support rural population stabilisation and renewal and allow people from rural areas to continue to live in those areas.
- The obvious need to renew and reinvigorate our rural towns and villages is recognised and acted upon.
- A single State agency to address waterways management and flooding is required.
- Garda resources must be increased in rural areas and criminals that target remote and vulnerable communities must face the maximum penalty that their offences warrant.



- The launch of a strategy on mental health and wellness in rural areas.
- The provision of basic healthcare in rural areas is absolutely essential.
- The provision of a free annual hazardous waste collection facility and tyre recycling scheme.

Environment, Sustainable Farming and Renewables

- Climate change needs to acknowledge the sustainability of Irish agriculture relative to global counterparts and policy must recognise the issue of carbon leakage and the need to support sustainable food production.
- European polices - including the proposed Nature Restoration Bill - need to provide farmers with the necessary supports and develop a collaborative model as opposed to coercive or over-regulation of farming.
- Ireland needs an agri-environment scheme for 70,000 farmers, including measures to incentivise intensive farmers.
- A 70% grant based on up-to-date and realistic reference costings should be made available to all farmers for all environmentally related farm investments.
- Realistic and meaningful incentives for renewable energy schemes at farm level including the development of Anaerobic Digestion in Ireland
- A review of all EU Environmental Designations to simplify the restrictions placed on farms designated as SAC, SPA and NHA

Farming and Finance

- The introduction of a Farm Management Deposit Scheme that will assist farmers in addressing the excessive year-to-year income volatility evident right across the farming sector.
- The State must actively increase competition in the banking sector and specifically address the inflated interest rates charged by Irish banks by comparison to the rates charged in other comparable EU countries.
- The setting of energy prices in Ireland must become more transparent.
- Occupational Injury Benefit should be extended to the self-employed.
- The VAT rate for environmental-related farm investments should be set at zero.
- The current concerns in relation to reclaiming VAT on certain farm investments needs to be resolved in full.

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