



# Feeding Ourselves

## Policy Workshop

June 28th 2021

Final Event Report



Building on “Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland”, a policy document co-developed by the Environmental Pillar, SWAN and Stop Climate Chaos Coalition, with farming, rural and policy perspectives.

**Editor:** ARC2020, July 2021

**Disclaimer:** The views given in this document are those of participants (named or anonymous) in the Feeding Ourselves policy workshop on June 28th 2021. They do not represent the positions of ARC2020 or its funders.

Cover image: Organic Belted Galloways in agroforestry. Image credit: Jane Shackleton



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## Introduction

This report compiles responses to a joint policy document on the future of farming and food in Ireland, adding farming, rural and policy perspectives to the collective voice of Ireland’s environmental organisations.

The document, “**Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland**”, was co-developed by the Environmental Pillar, SWAN and Stop Climate Chaos Coalition and released in April 2021. An achievement in itself in bringing together three of Ireland’s largest environmental groups, who together represent over 70 distinct organisations, it was the outcome of a lengthy collaborative process.

Importantly, it is a first step in an ongoing process of inclusive dialogue, with the end goal of building a policy framework for Irish food and agriculture that is in keeping with planetary boundaries. The document departs from the premise that there is a false divide between farmers and environmentalists; in the words of the lead author Catherine Devitt (borrowing from an Extinction Rebellion slogan): “We’re on the farmers’ side”.

This commitment to engagement and dialogue inspired a policy workshop that took place on June 28th 2021, as part of Feeding Ourselves, the annual gathering of small farmers, seed savers, cooperatives, community food advocates and anyone with an interest in good food, good farming and rural revitalisation.

The policy workshop was an online event anchored in Cloughjordan Ecovillage. Supportive but critical voices from farming, rural and policy were invited to critique and build upon the document. The objective was to create a space for constructive dialogue between socio-ecologically progressive farmers, rural stakeholders, policy analysts, and the environmentalists who led on developing the document in the first place.

Another objective of the workshop was to help close gaps by connecting farmers with policy experts. It was also an opportunity to identify policy drivers that start the process of developing a pathway for a just transition in Ireland.

The workshop opened with presentations by two of the key people involved in developing the document, after which selected respondents were invited to critique it. Remaining participants then joined the discussion in breakout rooms, and insights from these discussions were presented in plenary. To conclude, Talamh Beo presented solutions to some of the problems outlined, in their campaigns for the year ahead.

This report endeavours to present a comprehensive summary of the inputs from all participants in the workshop – based on submissions from speakers, notes taken by ARC2020 staff at the event, and a video recording of the event. Points made by speakers and other participants are attributed with permission; “Insights from the discussion” have been harvested anonymously from the discussion in the breakout rooms.

The policy workshop was organized by ARC2020 with the support of Good Food Good Farming and additional support from Cultivate and the Irish Environmental Pillar.

## Background



Milking cows. Image credit: Canva

## Background

**“Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland”** has ten chapters with an emphasis on severe failings – but also policy recommendations – in a number of key areas. These include the core areas the three umbrella coalitions are focused on – biodiversity, climate, air and water policy. However equal attention is paid to sustainable livelihoods, farm diversification, public health, sustainable consumption, food and nutrition security, overarching considerations and, importantly, the next steps.

With Ireland’s poor performance in climate, biodiversity and air and water quality, concurrent with the rapid growth in the dairy sector post quota abolition, it is unsurprising that much focus is dedicated to avoiding excessive fertilizer use and curtailing the growth of the dairy herd.

According to Irish state agricultural research agency Teagasc, dairy cow numbers will continue to rise until at least 2027, and by almost 200,000 head. The document emphasises the negative impact this growth has on both beef and tillage sectors, and the related loss of potential to provide for high nature value farming and for lower carbon food production: while, in emissions terms, the per kg performance of dairy is often cited as more efficient than beef or tillage, this is both contested by the environmental organisations (footnote 146 in particular) and is also “a distraction” as absolute emissions are rising, in a way that is spear-headed by dairy, the policy argues.

Noticeable too is the emphasis on what for Ireland would be genuine innovation, such as agroforestry, and on big impact climate and biodiversity measures

## Background

which could be supported by CAP, such as rewetting peatland and wetlands. Much focus is given to the potential for high nature value farming and its support via CAP. Rewilding is mentioned a surprisingly large number of times – 12 – but it is noticeably qualified as an approach that “must be based on a scientifically robust rationale, and an assessment of the potential ecological and social costs and benefits”.

The timing is very appropriate too, with the Environmental Pillar having rejected the government and industry led agri-food 2030 strategy process, which it had been involved with, as the only environmental stakeholder aside from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Agri-Food Strategy 2030 is Ireland’s next five year plan for agriculture which is currently out for consultation – and the CAP trilogues currently concluding.

### ARC2020 and Talamh Beo Perspectives

Talamh Beo, the farmers and landworkers organisation affiliated with European Coordination Via Campesina, has come out in support of “Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland”.

At the launch of the document, John Brennan, Manager of Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop and member of Talamh Beo, noted that a sea change is required in agri-food policy in general. “We as farmers in Talamh Beo welcome *Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland* being launched today. We are ready to make the transition to a farming system which enhances biological processes, regenerates ecosystems and builds people’s Food Sovereignty. We believe this document offers a better future to Irish farmers than a continuation of the agribusiness model. Currently our whole agri-food system is industry designed and led and we need to make it farmer and community led – this document gets us moving in that direction”.

Areas of synergies with farming interests include improving the traction of both high nature value farming and of results based schemes. 33% of the agricultural area in Ireland has High Nature Value (HNV) characteristics, the paper states, quoting research by James Moran and others, while adding that these farms must remain viable.

*“The State should reward farmers for the public goods HNV farmland provides and ensure the socio-economic viability of rural communities. Scaling up locally adapted and financially attractive results-based agri-environment payment schemes will be important for restoring biodiversity on all farm types...”*

*“Reward farmers for the public goods HNV farmland provides and improve its viability by promoting recognition and demand for these goods and services.”*

*“Scale up locally adapted results-based agri-environment payment schemes on all farm types. Scheme payments must be financially attractive and supported by improved monitoring and evaluation systems for biodiversity actions and outcomes. Schemes should support biodiversity, carbon sequestration and water quality including active rewetting and maintenance of bogs, riparian planting, agroforestry, continuous cover forestry and hedgerow conservation.”*

Such an approach may work well with the new Results Based Environment-Agri Pilot Project (REAP) proposal in the Department of Agriculture’s own policy proposals, whereby a results-based trial will bring in 2,000 farmers and will build on the EIP framework.

It is also noteworthy that CAP is referenced as a policy which “exacerbates income inequality”; land eligibility criteria can see farmers “penalised for keeping certain biodiverse landscape features on their land” and so on.

### What’s next?

The clue is in the title: the word “Towards” is a call for others to come in and work with the environmental sector to build out a just transition for agri-food and rural Ireland.

This process will help deliver “a detailed, target-driven roadmap that shifts Irish agriculture away from the commodity-driven, export-focused production of meat and dairy produce, and brings it in line with these EU strategies and with national obligations on climate, water and biodiversity.”

## Background

This is important because the document, while good at outlining the problems, limits and recommendations, is not comprehensive – that rewilding gets more focus than either horticulture or organic farming will not win hearts and minds of food producers thinking about diversification. It is also short on CAP details and integration, which it acknowledges, pointing to upcoming work to be done. It is also not a comprehensive just transition plan for the sector, with for e.g. scenarios outlining how farm numbers and viability, the economy, and rural Ireland would be impacted by various implementations of just transition. All of this, taken positively, means engagement with wider stakeholders is needed, which will be fruitful for adding to this document.

With impeccable timing, coinciding with the Department of Agriculture's own consultation for its industry-led but environmentally tepid five-year plan, the gauntlet has been thrown down. In particular, Bord Bia, Teagasc and the EPA have been named and targeted. Indeed, the role of the EPA in this government agri-food strategy development, when it has been so critical of Irish agri-food policy to date, must surely now be under pressure: will the EPA stand over yet another agri-food plan that will not align Ireland with the Paris accord, or the most basic of pollution targets and environmental law? Will the EPA stay in the government-led process, and, moreover sign off on a final document with targets as weak as a 10% reduction in methane emissions by 2030, as is currently in the draft version? This target is basically the same target as was in the Teagasc plans from 2019, as if EU and Irish government targets have not changed since then. For all its solid research and verbal posturing, where will that leave its credibility?



## Speakers

### Speakers



#### Catherine Devitt

Catherine Devitt is lead author of “Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland”. An environmental policy consultant, Catherine was with the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition at the time the joint policy document was developed.



#### Matteo Metta

CAP Policy Analyst, ARC2020. Researcher on impacts of digitalisation on agriculture, forestry, and rural areas.



#### Oonagh Duggan

Oonagh Duggan is Head of Advocacy at BirdWatch Ireland. She led on developing “Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland” for the Environmental Pillar.



#### Saoirse McHugh

Rural & environmental activist and grower based on Achill Island.



#### Bridget Murphy

Land Use, Tenure and Agrarian Reform activist with a dedicated focus on gender. A member of Talamh Beo core group and until recently a sheep farmer, based in Co.Sligo.



#### Suzanna Crampton

Regenerative farmer and blanket designing shepherd based in Co. Kilkenny.



#### John Brennan

Organic cattle and sheep farmer, Manager of Leitrim Organic Farmers Coop, and a member of Talamh Beo core group.



#### Davie Philip

Facilitator, trainer and community climate coach at Cultivate. Coordinator of the Open Food Hub at Cloughjordan Community Farm. Chair of OFN Ireland. Board Member of Talamh Beo.



#### Alan Matthews

Professor Emeritus of European Agricultural Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland with interests in agricultural policy, trade, climate and Brexit.





Apple blossom. Image credit: Oliver Moore.

# *Presenting the Joint Policy Document*

*To set the stage for the workshop, Catherine Devitt told the story behind “Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland”. Bringing together three of Ireland’s largest environmental coalitions/networks to jointly develop the document was a valuable process to strengthen the movement more broadly. It involved the groups defining positions on areas such as herd reduction. Developing the document was a long process involving many decision-making platforms. It was about sharing resources and building a collective voice.*

## Process & Purpose

*Catherine Devitt*

Birdwatch Ireland led on initiating the document in October 2019. It followed on from previous work by Stop Climate Chaos and the Environmental Pillar on debunking myths<sup>1</sup>, but this time with a focus on solutions. The document is science-led and strong on peer-reviewed literature for recommendations. It tackles misinformation.

Departing from the premise that we're on the same side, the document was a response to the divide between environmentalism and farming.

It aims to identify synergies between climate, water, air, ecosystems and communities – to find win-wins in the big areas of water, climate and biodiversity. Catherine noted that we can probably go further.

To an extent the document was timed to coincide with the agri-food strategy (the sections of the document are aligned).

It's a first step. The purpose was to progress *towards*; more than a starting base. The groups behind the document do want inclusivity and dialogue beyond that.

Not just policy: how to change hearts and minds. Enable rural communities to thrive within planetary boundaries.



Cereal field. Image credit: Oliver Moore

<sup>1</sup> [Not So Green: Debunking the Myths around Irish Agriculture](#) (Environmental Pillar and Stop Climate Chaos, 2016)



## Climate & Environmental Relevancies for Farming & Policy

### **A Policy Framework Aligned with Ecological Limits and Environmental Commitments**

The overarching goal of the document is to bring food and agricultural policy into line with both the limits of our ecosystems and Ireland's environmental and climate commitments at national, EU and international level.

### **Protect and Restore Biodiversity on Farmland**

To support ambitious restoration of biodiversity on farmland and at landscape scale, Catherine highlighted two proposals in the document:

- a) to reward farmers for the public goods provided by High Nature Value (HNV) farmland (and to ensure the socio-economic viability of rural communities).
- b) to scale up locally adapted and financially attractive results-based agri-environment payment schemes.

### **Agriculture Delivers its Fair Contribution of 51% Reductions in Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2030 ...**

To achieve this aim, one recommendation is to implement regulatory, voluntary and combined measures to limit and reverse recent dairy expansion.

Other recommendations include a revised roadmap for agri-related emissions reductions, and a declining cap on total national reactive nitrogen usage.

### **Protect and Restore Peatlands and Woodlands on Farms**

An unequivocal call to cease the drainage of wetlands and peaty soils, and to end all peat extraction.

### **Urgently Improve Air Quality**

The key recommendation is to establish a roadmap to bring Ireland into compliance with binding commitments on ammonia.

### **Halt and Reverse Water Quality Decline**

Perhaps most relevant for farming is the recommendation to conduct risk assessments of all intensive farms (greater than 130 kg livestock manure nitrogen/ha) in sensitive catchment areas. On a broader level, a national plan is needed to coordinate and support on-farm measures to intercept pollution pathways.

### **Support Sustainable Livelihoods and Incentivise Farm Diversification**

A key recommendation here is to develop a farmer and community-centred Just Transition action plan for the sector that includes diversification options with environmental co-benefits.

### **Contribute Meaningfully to Food Security and Nutrition**

Zooming out to Ireland's responsibilities at global level, the document calls for implementation of clear principles and oversight mechanisms to ensure that the commercial links to the global food economy do not undermine Ireland's international development commitments.

### **Contribute to Public Health and Sustainable Consumption**

Ireland's food production policy should promote global health and environmental protection. In terms of national food policy, this means incentivising and supporting a greater dietary intake of organic produce and plant-based foods that are sustainably produced.

### **Facilitate Inclusive Dialogue and Participation for an Alternative Model for Agriculture in Ireland**

The document concludes with a call for ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue where there is genuine commitment to deliver an alternative, fairer model for Irish agriculture.



## Where We Are & Where We Want To Be

*Oonagh Duggan*

Oonagh Duggan followed on from Catherine's overview of the document, with a review of where we are, where we want to be, and how this document can help us get there. She noted that all of these groups coming together was an achievement in itself.

Fairness for farmers is an overriding concern for Oonagh on a personal level as she hails from a dairy-farming background in the Golden Vale, Co. Limerick (although dairying now is unrecognisable compared to the 1980s). Supporting the livelihoods of farmers is really important.

### Where are we now?

We've a very degraded environment: catastrophic decline in populations of farmland birds which is an indicator of environmental degradation, declining water quality, declining habitat quality and resilience, insects including pollinators, and water-dependent species. Meanwhile emissions for agriculture (greenhouse gases and ammonia) are on the rise. There is weak implementation of environmental laws and regulations.

Most farmers don't think our agri-food policies deliver<sup>2</sup>.

### Where do we want to be?

Specifically on farming, the document calls for diverse agriculture (more tillage + horticulture, less focus on livestock). It's a vision of farmers with good livelihoods producing food for the nation (not 'feeding the world').

On the environment, farmland biodiversity needs to be restored, with rewilded areas, lots more woodland, and restored peatlands including farmland birds. The document envisions healthy, semi-natural grasslands and restored rivers, lakes, estuaries, and good drinking water.

On climate, emissions reductions should be in line with the target of 51% reduction by 2030. We need resilient farmers as they are at the frontline of climate change.

On food, the document recommends healthier diets with less meat and dairy, more fruit and vegetables. Food processing jobs should be part of any just transition. There should be integrity in the messaging on the impact of food production.

Business As Usual is bad for the climate, the environment and biodiversity. This is why we need to build an agri-food policy framework aligned with ecological limits and environmental commitments. Nor does it serve many farmers either according to a consultation on the Agri-Food Strategy 2030.

### Key policy and regulatory hooks

- **Agri-Food Strategy 2030** – i.e. Business As Usual (the Environmental Pillar pulled out of the Agri-Food Strategy 2030 Development Committee)
- **EU Green Deal** – by now severely weakened

**Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** and the Irish CAP Strategic Plan as Common Agricultural Policy doesn't line up with it – conditionality, eco-schemes, and Pillar II Agri-environment-climate Measures (AECMs) (needs to step up with financial support for a transition to a resilient but agroecologically sound policy - possibility of legal challenges to new CAP)

- Ireland's Climate Bill and carbon budgets – could be more far reaching, but will only take effect post-2027.

### How do we get there?

#### Recommendations to bring about a more sound policy framework

- The EPA should be tasked to assess and monitor the full environmental impacts of food production at farm, catchment & national level.
- Bord Bia's Origin Green Programme should be discontinued (the metrics don't align with those of EPA/NPWS – mismatch between global message and reality at home)
- The legal mandate of Teagasc should be reviewed and reoriented to an agroecological model.

<sup>2</sup> 2019 public consultation on Agri-Food Strategy 2030

## Presenting the Joint Policy Document

- Ireland needs a roadmap to meet the National Emissions Ceiling Directive.
- The National Parks and Wildlife Service needs staffing and funding so it can do its job.

Expecting in the coming period is a new forestry policy for Ireland, a nitrates review, and a new biodiversity strategy with restoration of species, habitats, ecosystems at its core.

### What now?

The conversation on just transition needs to start now. We need farmer champions for change, they're out there but don't have a voice as much as others. And we need public engagement: ask people what they want from agriculture. Society is paying for those subsidies and for the clean-up.



Early morning weeding. Image credit: Jessica Schoening of Cloughjordan Community Farm





#### What's missing?

- Data
- Successful programmes
- Long-term vision
- Social sustainability
- Land consolidation
- Power shifting innovation
- Seed production
- Aging farming population
- Bioeconomy
- Food waste
- Fisheries
- Citizen's Assembly on Climate Action
- CAP – what has worked and why?

Calf, Co. Sligo. Image credit: Oliver Moore

# Responding to the Joint Policy Document

*Following on from these presentations, selected respondents were invited to assess, critique and build on the document. Remaining participants then joined the discussion in breakout rooms.*

*The responses recorded below broadly reflect the chapter headings used in the document (Farmers, Environment, Climate, and Inclusive Dialogue) – with the addition of two further themes that arose during the workshop: Framing and Food Sovereignty.*

*Overall, these were supportive voices that welcomed the document. It was a positive step in building the dialogue between environmentalists and farmers. There is a need for coherence across sectors.*





Cut grass in field beside beech forest, Co. Tipperary. Image credit: Oliver Moore

# *Framing*

*A shift in language can go a long way. Several respondents highlighted the need to be more precise around key concepts and definitions. By reclaiming food and farming there are opportunities to flip the script on the ‘manufactured divide’ between farmers and environmentalists. We need a new narrative of sustainable and just transition.*

## New language needed

John Brennan

### Corporate agribusiness ≠ agroecology

Instead of using the word ‘agriculture’, we need to explain the difference between current ‘best practice’ corporate agribusiness farming (and its destructive environmental, social and long term economic effects) and agroecological farming (with regenerative environmental, social and economic effects). It stops the ‘farmers or agriculture is being demonised’ reaction when it is understood that it is not what we are doing but how we are doing it that is creating problems and needing change. It is critical that the farmer and the broader public understand it is the system of farming that is under attack and not the farmer. The farmer has been following ‘best practice’ advice which is causing environmental and social harm.

#### Insights from the discussion: CAP

- Big picture structure of CAP is fundamentally wrong as regards externalities
- Scrap area based payments under CAP as they lead to big getting bigger
- Need a Basic Income for farmers

#### Basic failure of CAP

*Madeline McKeever, organic farmer & seed grower*

“The basic failure of CAP is to reward land-owners in proportion to the land they own. The consequence of this CAP policy has reduced the number of farmers across Europe – I know from my peninsula how many are gone.”

## Framing



Hare, Co. Sligo. Image credit: Bridget Murphy

### Regenerating, not rewilding

Using the term 'regenerating ecosystems' instead of 'rewilding': 'Regenerative' resonates with farmers, who understand that we need healthy ecosystems to farm in. 'Rewilding' in comparison is seen as land abandonment or a criticism of decades of hard labour following 'best practice', 'modern', 'productive' farming. A shift in language can go a long way in bringing farmers and environmentalists together.

#### Insights from the discussion: Language has to be challenged

- Abuse of terms like 'sustainable'
- Belittling of small-scale farmers with terms like 'hobby farmer'

#### Insights from the discussion: Success stories

- Avoid an all-out attack on farmers
- More acknowledgement of successful programmes. How do they fit together?
- 'Restoration and rewilding' should include reference to projects such as BRIDE

#### Insights from the discussion: What are we teaching farmers?

- Roles of Teagasc, farm advisory and other public bodies need to be reviewed
- Farmers are essentially subject to a consistent and sophisticated propaganda campaign that has brainwashed many of them into thinking they have few options





Sheep, Co. Sligo. Image credit: Bridget Murphy

### Science and Nature/Biology

There is a strong emphasis on ‘science’ in food and farming – especially around competitiveness, efficiency and innovations. We need to see a clear understanding of the nature that underpins any process before science is applied as a solution.

*Examples:*

- The science: Incorporating biochar into soil increases carbon content vs Nature/Biology: The biochar first needs to be inoculated or else the effect is not positive.
- The science: Trees sequester CO<sub>2</sub> vs Nature/Biology: The wrong tree in the wrong place (ecosystem) can create CO<sub>2</sub> and ecosystem damage.

#### Insights from the discussion: Role of state bodies

- Need to review the remit of all state bodies involved in food, agriculture and land use, including a review of who is represented on their boards, working groups etc. and what their role and reach is.

#### Insights from the discussion: Role of industry

- The role of industry in driving strategy but also in drawing up ‘sustainability’ and ‘best practice’ guidelines etc. needs to be carefully examined and queried.

#### Insights from the discussion: Agriculture’s climate impact

- Statistics on agriculture’s share in greenhouse gas emissions and climate impact should be at the top of the document
- Cross check these statistics against Origin Green report to reference where there may be difference of data to back up these figures

## Food policy rather than agri-policy

Saoirse McHugh

*We shouldn't accept the current power relations; they can be changed through CAP and their alteration is just as vital to a healthy food system as a reduction in nitrogen is.*

We need to think in terms of food policy rather than agri-policy. CAP is a limited toolbox, and the separation of agriculture from society has allowed some of the worst results of the CAP occur. But this can be reversed. Equality can still be baked into the policy.

Land consolidation needs to be directly addressed, since access to land is vital to having a diverse and resilient food system.

Taxpayers fund CAP to ensure safe and cheap food, so access to food is key.

### Insights from the discussion: Power relations

As Saoirse rightly pointed out, most of the issues come down to power. We also need much more transparency in our food system.

## Just transition for farmers

Prof. Alan Matthews

Just transition is defined as 'no farmer should be left behind' – what does that mean? That no farmer will be worse off as a result?

### Insights from the discussion: Vision & Strategy for Food

Ireland needs a national vision and strategy for food that is much broader than just the environmental aspect, although obviously this is a massive and urgent part of it. This document is a great start in addressing what needs to change in terms of the environmental impact of our agricultural policy (it is certainly an agricultural policy document rather than a food one), and while it touches on public health aspects, there are many more issues that would need to be addressed. Of course, this may be outside the remit of the environmental group who authored this report, but the question is who can spearhead this?



Apples. Image credit: Oliver Moore



Gooseberries. Image credit: Jessica Schoening of CloughJordan Community Farm

# *Food Sovereignty*

*Food sovereignty needs to be front and centre in the Agri-Food Strategy 2030. Where farmers see cheap food as a public good, food sovereignty offers an answer. We need to stop 'feeding the world' and start feeding the nation. By creating an enabling environment for localised food systems, we must aim to make nutrient dense, local food available to all.*



## Agribusiness, or agroecology?

*Bridget Murphy*

We need everyone to understand there are two choices for what agriculture can look like in the future - agribusiness or agroecology.

One model supports the small / family farm, farming extensively with nature, producing local healthy food from thriving ecosystems, implementing the SDGs, mitigating against climate disruption, with gender mainstreaming front and centre etc. This is the agroecological model.

The other model supports developing the industry and its markets, having high external input farms which deliver cheap primary products of which 90% is exported through free trade deals. This model looks to innovations and efficiencies to lower the environmental and social damage.

The latter is the model Ireland is currently pursuing with high environmental and social costs. It is industry designed and led. We need to see farmers, communities and the consumers design and lead an agricultural model and land use practice that meets their needs and future vision.

In a nutshell, food sovereignty needs to be front and centre in the Agri-Food strategy.

### Insights from the discussion: Food waste

- Food loss and waste should be examined throughout the food chain in Ireland and strategies put in place to tackle this at source (and not left to be 'solved' by supermarkets and charities in lieu of tackling real issues of food poverty and insecurity).

## Access to land and access to food are vital

*Saoirse McHugh*

In any agri-food policy it will need to be made clear how food will be made available to everybody while ensuring a fair price for farmers, be it through strict controls on supermarkets around contracts, food waste, or public procurement. Planning needs to incorporate food production.

Dispersal of power within the food system will be vital for any positive changes to be made. Not just farmers are involved in food production. For example in meat factories, COVID-19 has literally cost lives.

Focus on re-establishing local, small-scale processing, food production, and coops. This would require a revisiting of health and safety regulations but would allow so much independence; it would weaken the stranglehold some processors have on Ireland's agricultural policies, create rural employment and encourage localised food cultures.

### Insights from the discussion: Food Security

- Ireland was recognised as 2nd most food secure country in the world by the FAO
- This is not accurate on the ground of actual security of local food production for local food demand



Cauliflower. Image credit: Jessica Schoening of Cloughjordan Community Farm

## Nutrient dense, local food

*Suzanna Crampton*

Nutritionally dense food sourced locally is very important. Importation of out-of-season foods should be at a minimum. We can not turn a blind eye to exporting environmentally damaging agricultural practices to poorer countries. One example being Almería, Spain which has 26,000 hectares of plastic houses for our out-of-season vegetables.

### Insights from the discussion: Dietary Changes

The policy document recommends a reduction in meat and dairy consumption and an increase in fruits and vegetables.

- What would be the financial impact of the recommended dietary changes?
- What would be the biodiversity impact?
- How realistic are the recommended dietary changes?
- What is the expected timeframe?
- Who should lead on this?

## An enabling environment for localised food systems

*Davie Philip*

We need to produce and consume food in a way that regenerates soils, builds biodiversity, secures farmers' livelihoods and helps us cope better with the uncertainties facing us.

Enabling small-scale local production of food, fuel and fibre offers the most comprehensive solution to the interlinked issues of climate change, biodiversity loss and overconsumption.

As noted in the document our current policies lock farmers and citizens into an unsustainable commodity driven food production system with long vulnerable supply chains.

A multitude of systems for developing and organizing short supply chains are emerging, these include Community Supported Agriculture, local farmers markets, box schemes, direct selling and other initiatives which aim to reorganize food distribution so farmers receive a fairer price for their production and citizens can become more involved in their food systems.

These projects decentralise food chains, ensure solidarity and fair prices, strengthen the local economy and provide the building blocks for a new local food infrastructure based around community-scale food production, distribution and processing.

Cooperatives have traditionally played an important role in aggregating value. While many older coops have transitioned to agribusiness companies, a new wave of smaller scale, more locally-orientated collaborations, producer groups and cooperatives can bring the benefits of pooling resources, including increased bargaining power, in the hands of producers, while giving citizens a chance to directly support the kind of agricultural production they want to see.

### Insights from the discussion: Seeds

- Without seed there isn't food, yet no mention of seed production (food and grass)
- High volume of seeds are imported
- Lack of support for Irish seed production
- No mention of International Plant Treaty to which Ireland are a signed member through DAFM, supported by Irish Seed Savers, TOPS, and the National Botanic Gardens Dublin

### Insights from the discussion: Supply Chain

- Farmers don't control all aspects of the food they produce
- Need to change the food pattern
- Need for transparency in the food supply chain

### Insights from the discussion: Green Public Procurement

Why has the government not implemented green public procurement guidelines for food? This would both have significant direct impacts and provide important leadership/signalling

Localised food systems will require an enabling environment which provides supportive regulations and mechanisms for establishing or protecting food systems which are embedded in local and regional economies.



### Insights from the discussion: Exports

What is Ireland's role in not only supplying meat and dairy to new and emerging markets but also in driving demand in those markets through marketing campaigns?

For the last year Davie has been working on establishing the Open Food Network (OFN) - this is a global response to the increasing sense that there is something fundamentally unsustainable with our food system. Already established in 20 countries, most recently in Ireland, OFN is an open source, community owned, online market platform. This strengthens local economies and enables food producers to sell directly through virtual shops and markets, giving people access to secure and fairer ways to source their food directly from local growers and producers.

### Insights from the discussion: Foreign Aid

What is the Irish government's role in promoting so-called 'sustainable intensification' in other countries?

User owned digital platforms like OFN – far from a novel and optional 'add-on' to existing markets – actually represent a critical 'public infrastructure.' Without this, local food systems will struggle to overcome the economic and public health challenges that the post-COVID era presents. This is especially so in smaller rural towns and villages - the OFN model uses appropriate digital tools, tailored to community benefit, to enable consumer producer relations and exchange.

### Insights from the discussion: Food footprint

What is the environmental (and social) impact of our diets and all of the food we import in the countries where it is produced?



Bee in lupines. Image credit: Canva

# *Environment, Biodiversity and Water*

*A first step in the journey to regenerating our natural environments could be a moratorium on habitat destruction. Another policy tool available to deliver on environmental objectives is a more strategic use of organic farming. Livestock can be a tool to restore biodiversity and soil health.*



Dandelion. Image credit: Oliver Moore

## Moratorium on habitat destruction

*John Brennan*

John Brennan proposed a moratorium on habitat destruction due to farmers complying with current CAP ‘eligible hectare’ and ‘best practice’ regulations until the new CAP comes into effect.

Penalisation of farmers for having so-called “scrub” in field corners – which in essence are natural habitats – must be halted.

It is proposed to have this changed for the new CAP in 2023 but it should also be amended for the interim phase of CAP – a moratorium on anything ineligible now so that we can protect that habitat from being removed

by farmers wanting to have maximum land eligible for payment in future (eg if 2021 is used as a reference year).

This works mostly against farmers on marginal land in the western areas of the country and generally against those with the lowest CAP payments.

Using a case study approach we can show farmers using nature-based solutions for climate mitigation whilst at the same time having those solutions measured and deducted from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) as ineligible. This needs to stop.





Sheep, Co. Sligo. Image credit: Oliver Moore

## Livestock as a tool to restore biodiversity & soils

*Suzanna Crampton*

There is now a growing discussion among conservationists about the need to restore and rewild degraded ecosystems by leaving land free from livestock.

It would be a huge mistake to take herbivores out of the equation. They must be used as a tool to restore biodiversity. Soil in over grazed areas is also degraded in many ways, like organic matter and microbial life.

There is now extensive research around the world (and as close as Wales) which has proven that use of livestock appropriately restores biodiversity much more quickly than taking them entirely out of the equation. Herbivores are an integral link in many woodland, pastoral, marshland and mountain biodiversity cycle. The ruminant internal microbial life needs to be shared with the soil – they're integrally connected. This also keeps very important natural food cycles in the biodiversity loop.

In Ireland there are at least 40 different types of dung beetles. These need to be on the land that needs restoration. Dung beetles that dig burrows are part of the soil's mineral cycle; their overwintering larvae are food for woodcock & snipe. Suzanna has seen their

numbers increase around her as her dung beetle population has grown over many years. Annually certain kinds of dung beetle larvae emerge as adults and the population explodes in time for when first young birds fledge. The second population boom is when teenage bats emerge to hunt on their own. Young birds need this high protein, easy-to-catch food to finish growing and store fat.

Ireland is way behind in this thought process of using controllable herbivores to rewild landscapes in a healthy way. There is now an international job market for these kinds of land manager environmentalists who use livestock as a tool. The tools (sheep, goat, cow or horse) also earn an income for whichever project they are being used for. Their meat has become sought after due to its premium flavour because of the browsed biodiversity they have eaten. This is an added bonus rather than paying out for human labour which is often the most expensive part of any project.

Proper education is needed about soil health and the difference between a monoculture sward and a multi-species sward.

## Risk of undermining low to medium intensity livestock production

### Policy perspective

Emphasis on those farms below the derogation threshold (e.g., stocking rates 130-170 kg of livestock manure nitrogen per hectare) has the potential to indirectly accelerate further livestock intensification

#### Insights from the discussion: Livestock

- Animals are an integral part
- We need more extensive livestock farming
- Many Irish farmers have been drawn down a narrow road
- Need to bring back rural, environmental aspect

This does not pre-judge there may be issues in specific catchment areas, but at the same time the focus needs to be on having stocking rates appropriate to a farm's land holding capacity. Inappropriate stocking rates affect water quality but also have ramifications for biodiversity (management of grasslands), climate (methane emissions), etc.

The document refers to a mix of policies, but there is a risk of squeezing out farms of medium to low intensity who are actually part of the solution and institutionalising more intensive production systems and focusing on end-of-pipe solutions.

#### Insights from the discussion: Derogation

- Nitrogen Derogation will have to go
- Derogation farmers aren't producing within the eco-limits; let's not allow it to be part of greenwash, especially on climate and absolute emissions.
- There are non-derogation intensive farms which have similar levels of stocking and environmental dangers

#### Insights from the discussion: Woodland

- Transition to broadleaf forestry and corridors on farms and along water courses





Free range organic pigs. Image credit: Oliver Moore

## More strategic use of organic farming

### Policy perspective

More strategic use of organic farming in delivering on environmental objectives (including beyond the organic standards).

More details needed on how to increase area of organically farmed land – government target of 7.5% is a starting point, and the budget needs to correlate with this expected expansion to 2027. Key policy incentive is the organic farming scheme which must be attractive for farmers and opened on a regular basis.

### Insights from the discussion: Water Quality

- Extensive farming as a solution
- Mortgages to help farmers out of debt (examples of this in Europe)



## Environment, Biodiversity and Water

In addition, there is a need to take advantage of the environmental performance potential of organic farming through Agri-environment-climate Measures (AECM) to support the achievement of environmental and climate objectives.

Currently Organic farmers have to forgo payments on organic land to enter into specific Green Low-Carbon

Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) actions, while participation in the new Results Based Environment-Agri Pilot Project (REAP) scheme classified as double funding even though outcomes go beyond organic standards. These disincentives are counter-productive in developing organic farming and incentivising greater environmental performance.



Cows grazing in Cobh, Co. Cork. Image credit: Canva



Tractor spraying. Image credit: Oliver Moore

# Climate

*The joint policy document calls for public money for public goods; the ‘polluter pays’ principle is the other side of the coin. Fossil fuel and biofuels should be the main issue – not livestock. Fiscal incentives/disincentives are available as a tool. The role of ecological and high-tech (lab-based) innovation should be emphasised.*

## Polluter pays

John Brennan

Apply the ‘polluter pays’ principle to complement payment for results-based delivery of ecosystem regeneration.

Many farmers ask the question: “Why do the polluters get all the support and the farmers delivering the solutions do not get paid?”

Divide farms into three groups:

1. Those polluting: give advice and support (like **ASSAP**) on how to move from polluting to clean
2. Those moving from polluting to clean: give advice and support and payments to assist them to make the transition
3. Those delivering the goods get the highest payment – in layman’s terms rewarding good outcomes, not bad – e.g. clean water, carbon sequestration (trees and soil), High Nature Value (HNV) habitats and protecting stocks e.g. wetlands, peatlands etc.

At present, and through **Ag Climatise**, the polluters will be given the supports and payments to help them pollute more efficiently. This is not in line with a just or fair approach.

### Insights from the discussion: Polluter Pays

- People pay anyway - cheap food but compulsory taxes to clean up mess
- Licence the chemicals not the organic; make the others do the work for the damage

## Fiscal incentives/disincentives

### Policy perspective

At farm level: Revenue from taxation on inputs could be used to fund transition measures and research and innovation.

At consumer level: VAT rates for certain food categories e.g. organic fruits and vegetables

This option is available to Revenue – currently 13.5% VAT rate on food, 0% VAT on fertiliser.

### Insights from the discussion: Water Quality

- Extensive farming as a solution
- Mortgages to help farmers out of debt (examples of this in Europe)





Swan in wetlands. Image credit: Canva

## Missing emphasis on need for innovation investment

*Prof. Alan Matthews*

As a disclaimer, Alan stated that he comes to the sustainability debate from a climate perspective. The need for innovation may be less important in nature restoration and conservation, but he suspects not.

In other sectors, technological innovation has been crucial to the success of the green transition (renewables in energy, heat pumps in the built environment, electric vehicles in transport). In the document innovation is mentioned twice and only in passing.

Technological innovation will also be essential in the food and agriculture sector (reducing methane and nitrous oxide emissions as we will always have a level of animal agriculture, but also agro-forestry, alternative land uses etc.).

Alan sees a role both for ecological and high-tech (lab-based) innovation. He recommends including a separate section on this in future versions.

### Insights from the discussion: Innovation

- Public funding for research and innovation, and public investment in capital projects etc., in food and agriculture needs to be reviewed.
- Is public funding for research and innovation really tackling and solving problems?
- Who is driving the research agenda?
- What is considered innovation in food and agriculture and who controls it? The perennial problems of routes to market, logistics, distribution etc. for producers persist and there is little investment in innovation in these areas.

## Biofuels blind spot

*Suzanna Crampton*

Fossil fuel and biofuels are and should be the main issue not livestock. The combustion engine is what's the most environmentally disruptive human construct; biofuels being one of the blind spots environmentalists have. 70% of Brazil's soy crop goes towards biofuels. Once oils are squeezed out for biofuel production the waste product of bean protein becomes livestock feed. This can be tracked back as a developing industry since the 1970s fuel crisis. What to do with the byproduct after oils were squeezed out is linked to housing and intensive feedlot production. Brazil has actually imported tons of soya for their biofuel industry in the last few years as they're not able to grow enough hence rainforest destruction increased.

So rainforest destruction has been done in the name of the combustion engine, not food production for cattle. Cattle are used to restore soil microbial life in rainforest soils after which the soya farmers move in to plant the money crop. This is also why rainforest destruction occurs as a huge percentage of palm oil is used for biofuels. Likewise maize in the USA is mostly harvested for corn syrup and biofuels.

### **Insights from the discussion: Trade**

- Need figures for carbon footprint of exports and imports to address total impacts of all food production



Fym shovelling. Image credit: Jessica Schoening of Cloughjordan Community Farm

# *Farmers: Fairness, Diversification and Just Transition*

*The joint policy document does not set out to provide all the answers on diversification or Just Transition. Dialogue with a range of stakeholders is particularly important, with a focus on fairness for farmers and social as well as economic sustainability. So where to start? Focus on the good, and expand out from there (agroecology, organic farming, multi-species swards). Scale up existing solutions. Actual food production is diversification! We need to be realistic about the costs of Just Transition, and challenges such as access to land.*



## Social sustainability

*Bridget Murphy*

Include the missing component – social sustainability: there is nothing about social sustainability in the agri-food strategy or our response. Current thinking that once economic sustainability is met, social sustainability follows needs to be flipped. The industrial model of agribusiness is decimating rural social life, the small family farm and community. Agroecology provides the solution here. It is useful to note the link between the absence of women and the lack of attention to social sustainability.

### Insights from the discussion: Flip the script

- Solidarity: Link up with trade union movement (e.g. Bord na Mona workers)
- Tackle rural/urban divide: Community energy projects can also address access to land issue ([TASC report](#))

### Insights from the discussion: Farmers under pressure

- We need to design a transition giving farmers space to diversify and turn around
- How do trade agreements put more pressure on farmers?
- Farmers left behind - convergence - unjust foundation
- Small share of added value is captured by the farmers



Hay bales, Co. Tipperary. Image credit: Oliver Moore

## Diversify Diversification!

### Rethink the specifics of the diversification message

*Prof. Alan Matthews*

Diversification of land use will be important to meeting climate targets, but the message in Section 7 on diversification and the tillage sector lacks credibility and undermines the message in the rest of the report.

The argument for horticulture is that because we import a lot of it this means there is scope to produce more at home. This ignores:

- **CAP rules.** We must maintain the share of permanent grassland in our total agricultural area.
- **History.** Tillage and horticulture areas have been declining for decades, despite Irish growers having highest yields (8.2t/ha barley, up to 10.2t/ha wheat) in EU
- **Labour issues.** In every country horticulture depends on immigrant labour, local people don't want

to do this work (COVID!). Technology is solving this issue (look at videos of vegetable harvesters on YouTube, but also look at the size of fields and farms)

- **Economics.** Even large tillage farms are not super profitable, even with direct payments.
- **Impact.** Current area under horticulture is tiny, even 10-fold expansion would not make a dint on land use shares

#### Insights from the discussion: Horticulture

- Horticulture is important, contrary to what was said by Alan Matthews about tillage and horticulture - it's failing because of the system
- Need for food sovereignty, building livelihoods, pro labour intensive vs fossil fuel driven



Summer harvest. Image credit: Jessica Schoening of Cloughjordan Community Farm

## Farm specialisation or diversification?

Matteo Metta

From a socio-economic perspective, farmers' livelihoods can rely on the selling of agricultural production, public subsidies and payments, on-farm diversification activities, and off-farm incomes. Although on-farm diversification is neither risk-free, nor a silver bullet solution, it can move Irish agriculture away from the current productivist path, which is increasing farmers' dependency on supply chain actors (financial providers, trade intermediators, manufactures) or public subsidies (Pillar I and II's per-hectare payments).

Up-to-date statistics on farm diversification (other gainful activities related to the agricultural holding) in Ireland broken down at NUTS-2 or lower levels are not available in EUROSTAT. The Farm Structure Survey 2010 reports that 9.2% of agricultural holdings in Ireland were engaged in other gainful activities across the country, against an average of around 13% across the 27 Member States<sup>3</sup>. This share was stable in Ireland between **2013** and **2016**.

The main on-farm diversification activities performed in Ireland are forestry work, contractual work (using holding equipment to help other farms, landscape maintenance, agricultural and environmental services) and agri-tourism.

The number of farms who are engaged in processing of farm products is very low.

Besides the importance of integrating agriculture with the society and environment, there are three economic considerations worth exploring for the sustainability of farmers livelihoods in Ireland:

1. How much value added are farm diversification's gainful activities bringing to the farmers' income?

Unfortunately, update statistics are not available on EUROSTAT. More research in national statistics may be needed not only to describe the existing situation and long-term trends, but also to find out

room for improvements and create an enabling environment to farm diversification.

2. How much of agri-environmental payments under CAP Pillar II account for the farmers' income, vis-à-vis the direct payments under Pillar I?

Numerous public subsidies and payments are currently available for farmers and their aggregation can be a significant source of income (inequalities?). A unique beneficiary code – **as is used in other EU countries and policies** – would help to understand the aggregate sum of public support received by each farmer, thus creating an informed dialogue among various stakeholders, and improve the targeting and fairness of CAP support across the Irish territory.

3. How much value added is captured by Irish farmers along the food value chain if they rely only on agricultural production?

Irish farmers only capture less than 20% of the value added in the food chain (i.e. 18.1% in 2016)<sup>4</sup>. This is definitely low in absolute terms, but also below the long-term EU average of roughly 25%.

It is Ireland's food and drink **manufacturers** who capture the largest share and this share grew between 2008 and 2015.

Need to reverse this unfair value distribution and for more actors to move together in this transition towards a food supply chain with more wins for farmers.

<sup>3</sup> Farm Structure Survey 2010, page 257

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/by\\_country/documents/analytical\\_factsheet\\_ie.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/by_country/documents/analytical_factsheet_ie.pdf)



### Insights from the discussion: Value Chain Analysis

- Value Chain Analysis is required on key Irish agricultural products to examine not only the share of economic value that goes to each of the actors, but also where environmental, health and social values are created and lost. This kind of data, properly analysed and shared publicly in a digestible way, could reveal a lot about who is really benefiting from our agri-food model and what impacts agricultural production and outputs are having both at home and in their end markets.
- In relation to the above, a review is required of not only our agri export policy, but also our foreign/aid policies in the area of food and agriculture.



Vegetable harvest. Image credit: Jessica Schoening of Cloughjordan Community Farm

## The Irish CAP Strategic Plan

Matteo Metta

The new CAP Plan could offer a strategic and well-funded package of instruments that can truly support farmers' livelihoods and a fairer agri-food chain in Ireland, through:

- **On-farm diversification under Pillar II:** Investments, cooperation, advisory, business startup, LEADER. The combination of these interventions can put the farmers at the centre of the rural economy, culture, life, and mainstream a shorter food supply chain (fewer intermediaries; farmers gaining higher shares of added value). Key targets can be expressed in terms of share of farmers in Ireland involved in direct selling or food processing, but also other related farm activities like agri-tourism services, leisure and education, health, wood processing, renewable energy.
- **Producer organisations under Pillar I:** Operational programmes and funds under sectoral interventions can be tailored to more agricultural cooperatives from farm to fork. Due to highly selective criteria set by the Irish Department of Agriculture (not by Brussels!), only four big producer organisations are recognised in Ireland. Recognition criteria for producer organisations can be revised to welcome and finance more consumer-producer cooperatives. This can offer great opportunities for farmers to grasp the advantages of economy of scale and scope in the agri-food chain.
- **Mentoring and training opportunities from farm advisory services:** Public organisations like Teagasc are pivotal in supporting farm diversification from the technical, knowledge, entrepreneurial, and motivational point of view. If farm diversification becomes a serious priority for the future agenda of Teagasc and the Irish agri-food strategy, higher shares

of resources and funds can be allocated to continue hands-on trainings, knowledge sharing, mentoring, ICT assistance and software development, capacity building, and other public services that can turn farm diversification into a viable alternative for farmers who are stuck into a path of unprofitable and environmentally damaging farm specialization. A good existing example is the weekly webinars held by Teagasc on 'Farm Business Options'.

Besides the Irish CAP Strategic Plan and Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, a comprehensive set of European and national policies can be arranged to create an enabling environment in which farmers capture more value added along the agri-food chain, with pull factors for farm diversification activities.

Some examples can be the EU Cohesion policy, which can create the physical and digital infrastructure adapted to the rural economy (e.g. roads, cycling paths, energy grids, broadband), or the National Strategy on outdoor recreation, which is currently under consultation in Ireland.

### Insights from the discussion: Assessing CAP

- What has worked to date?
- What hasn't and why?
- Gaps that need consideration with proposed outcomes for inclusion

## Multi-species swards

*Suzanna Crampton*

A multi-species sward leaves more money in the farmers' back pocket than a high input system: more education is needed around this.

### Insights from the discussion: Success stories

- LEADER - 15% of farmers are engaged in farm diversification, but the bureaucracy level is very high for farmers
- Locally led identification of needs
- EIP-Agri for innovation
- Multi-actor approach
- Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)



Wetlands in Connemara

## Land consolidation

*Saoirse McHugh*

Saoirse proposed the **creation of a land observatory** in Ireland which would not only track ownership and price but could also study the effect different policies have on land ownership patterns. Moving to a system where price is not the only consideration when somebody is buying land but first refusal is given to young/first time ecological farmers prioritising positive land use. This will make environmental action easier and fairer.

### Insights from the discussion: Land consolidation

- Collapse of family farming
- Where does land go?
- Institutionalisation of Irish farming is hard to reverse

### Insights from the discussion: Solutions

- Focus on the good, expand out from there
- Twin track approach to solutions
- Scale up existing solutions - a lot is happening despite everything!
- Focus on organics
- Capabilities approach: enable people to do things they value
- Develop policy drivers and detailed analysis for Just Transition and diversification



## Fuzzy arguments around Just Transition

Prof. Alan Matthews

The key question is whether the green transition is going to cost farmers money and, if so, what to do about it.

### Insights from the discussion: Case study

- Example of Just Transition: Hemp Cooperative of Ireland allowing farmers to produce value added crop and allow them to keep doing what they do best

Just transition is addressed in the report as providing money for farm diversification to tillage and horticulture – this means nothing to most (beef) farmers.

Sustainable production means internalising negative externalities where previously farmers could dump pollution for free; inevitably it will raise costs.

There is a need for a realistic assessment of:

- what are potential diversification options and alternative revenue streams
- which farm incomes should be protected
- how existing transfers might be better targeted
- can sustainability be rewarded? This is not easy!

### Financing a Just Transition for Farmers

*Kate Carmody, organic dairy farmer*

“We have lots of academic research on Just Transition and a lot of money going to consultants and academics but it seems to me that if we cannot address the financial issues facing farmers, we will end up with nothing.

Most farmers that I know of in the dairy sector are caught in a financial treadmill as they have to service a high cost based system. Low interest loans provided by the EIB are excluded to them as the model for them is the usual big is beautiful model. Most farm borrowing is short term at high rates, for example 5 to 7 years at interest rates in excess of 5 or 6 %. This is totally unjust with current ECB rates and the fact that banks have more than enough collateral. We need low interest land mortgages that can be passed on with the land. This can be done in other countries and so I do not see why it cannot be done here.

We need more cooperatives and supports for them too.”



CSA vegetable harvest. Image credit: Cloughjordan Community Farm

# *Inclusive Dialogue*

*Inclusive dialogue is crucial to move towards a new agricultural and food policy for Ireland. We need to develop capacity in facilitating dialogue between sectors and in engaging citizens. Gender balance needs to go beyond women in a man's world: token inclusion of women has allowed a patriarchal mindset to predominate in narratives around farming.*

## Inclusive dialogue and participation

*Davie Philip*

Facilitating inclusive dialogue and participation for an alternative model for agriculture in Ireland is essential. Davie agreed that a transition to a sustainable agricultural system will not be possible without ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue. To do this we need to develop capacity in facilitating dialogue between sectors and in engaging citizens.

Davie appreciates what has been brought together and proposed in the excellent TASC report by Sean McCabe, 'The People's Transition: Community-led development for Climate Justice'.

The TASC report proposes a participative model of dialogue and climate action as an enabler of local development. It introduces new innovative approaches like participatory budgeting, community ownership and local wealth building, along with models of community supported agriculture, food and energy coops, organic and regenerative farming practices are all discussed as enablers to addressing converging challenges.

We urgently need bottom-up frameworks that put people and local communities at the heart of the transition which – if not fair and inclusive – will not be made at all.

As proposed in the recommendations - a plan for comprehensive, effective and inclusive public engagement and debate is needed, with adequate time and engagement mechanisms for incorporating public input into the policy-making process.

### **Insights from the discussion: Dialogue**

- Two pathways in Irish farming – both need to be engaged with
- Meeting farmers halfway: stop the polarising language, come with solutions



## Role of farming women

*Bridget Murphy*

Women are seen at the forefront of the climate, environmental and Human Rights movements, but when it comes to Irish Agriculture and its representative organisations, they are absent.

At present, organisations like ACORNS represent their female rural entrepreneur clients on agri-food strategy or CAP Consultative Committees – but farm women have no representation themselves despite owning 12% of farms and providing 57% of on-farm labour.

This issue was highlighted years ago and the IFA was the only farm organisation to respond with its Diversity

Report in 2019. To wait until 2025 to possibly see the IFA have 20% of women on their national council is too little and far too late for us women. Talamh Beo's core group is 6 men and 6 women, the only farm organisation to be anywhere compliant on gender representation. Sometimes, Bridget noted, as a woman on the outside looking in, it would be nice for organisations working with the Department of Agriculture and the main farming organisations to point this deficiency out.



No-dig plot gets its straw. Image credit: Jessica Schoening of Cloughjordan Community Farm

## Inclusive Dialogue

Bridget clarified what is meant by women – because it's not only to be able to engage, deliver and compete in a man's world. Women have been doing that quite successfully for generations. In that existing picture, yes, farming women want their rightful seats at those tables; so for example, in the CAP campaign to get agroecological representation to the table, Talamh Beo would like to see a good gender balance in the mix.

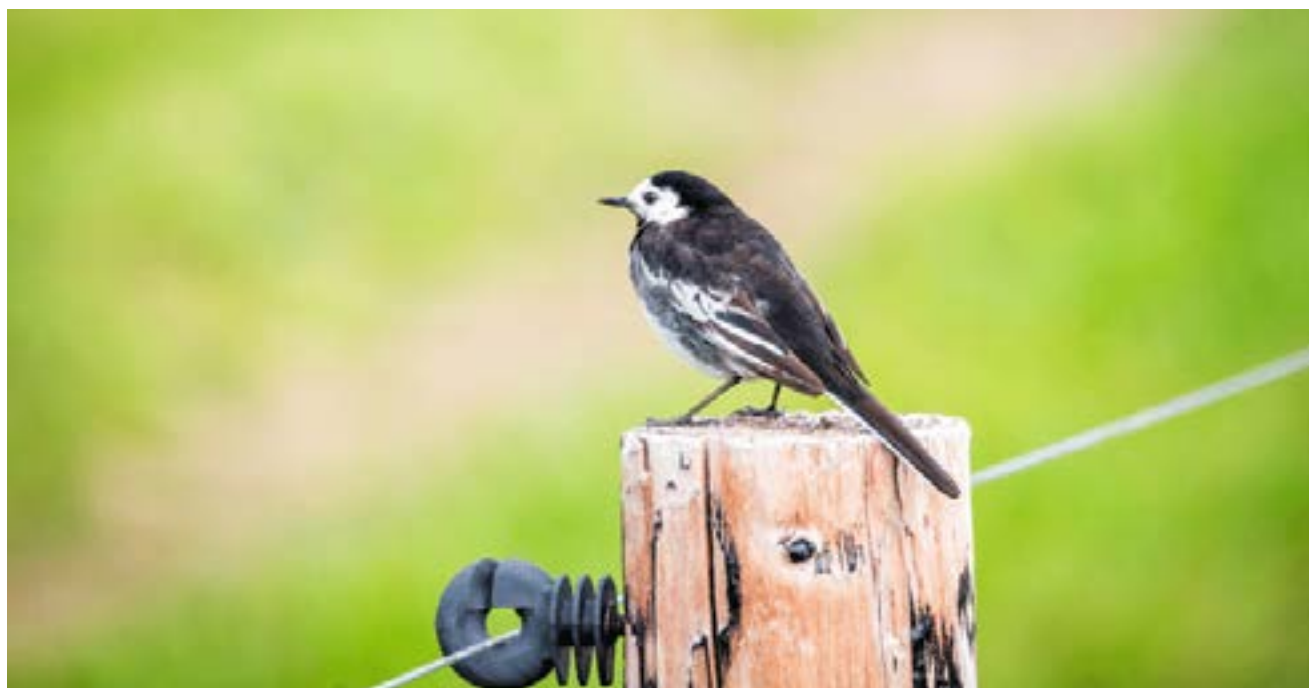
Bridget acknowledged that there are many amazing women with great opinions who are getting into mainstream media more often. However, individuals and opinions spotlight women but they do not get women to the tables – for that organisations based on social movements are needed.

When we say we want to get the women's world to the tables that decide farming policies and strategies, however, we mean something else. Bridget drew attention to the current language in the Farmers Journal: "Will civil war break out in Irish farming?" The patriarchal response to the CAP negotiations is based on fear and violence, championing competitiveness and uncontrolled economic and scientific growth. We want to see the divine feminine, noted Bridget, the women's response – one which is about identifying and

meeting needs in a non-violent way based on well-being and care and life rather than competitiveness and economic growth. This perspective is what we mean when we say we want women (and us as farming women) to be at the tables. At present it is non-existent. The Agri-Food strategy talks about setting up women's groups – we can safely assume it is about women in men's world groups they are talking about, not women's groups for and by women!

### Insights from the discussion: Participation

- Do we have the civil society groups to represent the other aspects of food that need to be addressed: health, social, cultural, as well as economic and environmental?
- How can we get public engagement?
- At a minimum there needs to be a review of how the Department of Agriculture (and indeed all departments) carry out public consultations and what efforts they go to to gather diverse opinions.



Wagtail. Image credit: Canva





Ewe and lamb, Co. Sligo. Image credit: Bridget Murphy

# *Some Solutions – Upcoming Campaigns by Talamh Beo*

*Bridget Murphy on behalf of Talamh Beo*



## 1. Local Food Policy Framework

Talamh Beo will be developing and rolling out a campaign to take forward its Local Food Policy Framework at both national and local levels.

Talamh Beo wants everyone in Ireland to have access to high quality, locally produced food. We also want farmers to earn a fair living from providing that food into their communities. To achieve this aim, Talamh Beo is developing policy to create pathways for small-scale local food producers to sell directly into local markets. This positive policy framework incorporates income supports, labour and finance incentives, pilot projects for land access and short supply chain supports and infrastructure.

### Why we need it

Local food systems have been eroded by a lack of investment in local food providers in Ireland – instead the focus has been on producing commodities for agribusinesses, mostly for export.

Small-scale farms producing for local markets have multiple benefits;

- The production and consumption of food in short chains means increased economic and social activity in rural areas
- Proportionally, small-scale organic growers and producers have a low environmental impact and a small carbon footprint
- Small-scale diversified farming encourages local wildlife areas and biodiversity
- Local producers marketing their produce directly can supply, fresher, nutrient dense foods directly into local households, meaning better diets for people in the locality
- Established, functioning local food production systems have the potential to provide increased levels of local employment
- Locally orientated, diversified farms are relatively resilient to economic instability, and more capable of adapting to uncertainties brought about by climate change and global market fluctuations, pandemics and other supply chain shocks

Farmers actually producing for local markets often struggle to source payments, encounter barriers in distributing their produce and lack an *enabling environment* to stimulate production in their sector.

### What it would do

A local food policy framework would provide a suite of measures – from income supports to social and financial instruments to create an environment which makes becoming a local food producer more straightforward, removing barriers and facilitating the choice of young people in selecting local food production as a profession.

It would provide institutional recognition and provide direct investment in the sector – in the knowledge that the investment will all go towards providing benefits for the public rather than private agribusiness companies.

An abundance of local production would create multiplier effects and opportunities in food processing and added value products for both farmers and citizens in rural areas, stimulating the rural economy.

### Why it's relevant to climate change and environmental organizations

Apart from the obvious benefits of short supply chains in reducing emissions from transport, cold storage and other emissions costs related to long supply chains, local food production is almost always undertaken on farms which prioritize agroecology, biodiversity and regeneration of ecosystems.

A revival of this sector would allow citizens to further engage in environmental protection, increasing awareness of the impacts of harmful agricultural practices and building a sense of shared ownership of the natural world and our duty to protect it.

One of people's instinctive reactions when confronted with the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss is to return to local provision – that collective intelligence should be rewarded with investment in a sector which has so many obvious benefits to citizen health, ecosystem health and rural livelihoods.



Radishes and potatoes

## 2. A rights based CAP Strategic Plan

Agroecology is mentioned in the CAP and in the eco-scheme options. Yet there is no agroecological input at any of the tables designing our CAP Strategic Plan (SP). This needs to be remedied as a priority. One of the first aims of our CAP SP campaign will be to get broad / collaborative support to represent agroecology at these tables.

Note the difference: we are not claiming to represent all agroecological farmers – but we are wanting to make sure agroecology as a practice is on the table and people representing regenerative, organic, holistic, permaculture etc. are there.

The broader aim of the campaign is to take forward the call by European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) for a rights-based CAP Strategic Plan. Here we want to see unpacked the roadmaps outlined in documents like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Decade of Family Farms (which

will run over the same time period - 2019 to 2028), and to create recommendations for a CAP Strategic Plan based on agroecology acceptable to a broad coalition of organisations.

We know peasant agroecological methods and family farming offer ready-made, proven solutions to climate and biodiversity issues. A clear shift of European policy and support for these practices would help avoid the various human rights, economic and social issues facing small scale farmers and agricultural and migrant workers.

The UNDROP represents an opportunity to transform food systems in a holistic way. This legal tool offers a ready-made, rights-based roadmap for EU institutions and Member States to ensure the objectives laid out for the future of EU agriculture, so that they can be achieved in a way that will truly 'leave no one behind'.

### 3. The voice of the agroecological woman farmer to the debate and negotiating tables

Talamh Beo women will be initiating a campaign aimed at creating a Women's Table, to which the Irish government, the Department of Agriculture and leadership will be invited to hear the perspective of wom-

en. The aim of the campaign is to identify a group of women acceptable to a broad coalition of organisations to represent this perspective at their table.



Preparing comfrey for nettle tea. Image credit: Jessica Schoening of CloughJordan Community Farm



#### 4. Soil Biodiversity EIP

Talamh Beo was recently successful with its Soil Biodiversity Literacy and Enhancement European Innovation Partnership (EIP). Now in the paperwork phase, it is looking to launch the project around the end of August 2021.

Sixteen farms / farmers will be engaged in a peer-to-peer learning project which will be carried out on the ground and shared over a digital platform in real time. Staying true to our core approach, we operate change from the ground on our farms – leading by example. We start with ourselves (sovereignty), and we acknowledge we must become literate and share the knowledge in a peer-to-peer manner.

The 16 farms have been chosen to cover different soil types; in different conditions (overgrazed, conventional best practice, recently organic or regener-

ative, long-term organic, regenerative, holistic land management practices); from different sectors and/or under different land use practices (e.g. extensive grazing, forestry/woodlands, horticulture, micro- and commercial dairy, High Nature Value (HNV), peatlands and wetlands, poultry etc.); over a good geographic spread (from Donegal to Cork and the midlands to a few in the east); and with an eye on gender mainstreaming.

Each farm will have baseline tests – above and below ground; choose an appropriate literacy course; share learning and experiences in a knowledge transfer (KT) group; host a farm walk; apply amendments (e.g. manure, inoculants and biochar), etc. What makes the project different is it truly designed and managed by farmers for farmers and will be blogged in real time.



Cows drinking. Image credit: Oliver Moore

# Conclusion

*“Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland” is a first step in a process of inclusive dialogue and participation that should bring us closer to a sound policy framework. In this report you can read what a group of farmers, policy experts and rural activists made of it. In particular, we asked these three groups to critique and add to it.*

## Conclusion

Responses to “Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland” found ample opportunities to flip the script and turn on its head much of the established narrative around Irish food and farming. It’s interesting how framing, and food sovereignty were introduced enough to merit their one section in this document of ours, and how wide and full the farming section here is too. Here are some key insights which we in ARC2020 would like to emphasise which emerged from the contributions and discussion.

*Let’s think food.* It may be more helpful to think of a food policy rather than an agri-food policy. Through the lens of food sovereignty, we can address imbalances of power in our food system. Without soil, there is no food. Without seeds, there is no food. We need to regenerate rather than rewild.

*Framing farming.* In any discussion of the future of food and farming in Ireland, the framing can make the difference between a false debate that pits farmers against environmentalists, and an inclusive and constructive dialogue.

*CAP isn’t fit for purpose.* We are invited to question the basic failings of CAP, which rewards the big players in agribusiness with poor value for the citizen. Meanwhile ‘unconventional’ small-scale farmers struggle to remain viable and to feed their communities. Why do eaters end up paying the price for polluting producers? As the Irish CAP Strategic Plan is debated, where is the agroecological voice at the table? It’s time for agroecological women farmers to build their own table. Farmers and rural communities are at the coalface of our climate and ecological crises, and at the front-line of solutions to these crises.

*Let’s build rural resilience.* Successful programmes such as LEADER and Community-Led Local Development point to the power of finding locally led solutions through inclusive dialogue and multi-actor approaches. Let’s grow these and build a real rural strategy premised on resilience.

*Organic solutions.* There are multiple benefits to deep agroecological approaches, and we’ve seen how well they can integrate into diverse, resilient rural places. Tried and tested practices such as agroecology, organic farming and regenerative agricul-

ture have the potential to significantly impact climate change mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity and other public goods, as I argued in [my recent submission](#) to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment and Climate Action (JOCECA). Organic farming should be prioritised for supports because of the range of public good that stem from it. Ireland needs to invest much more in potential alternative land uses that are suited to Irish agroecological conditions and attractive to farmers, as Prof. Alan Matthews argued in his [own submission](#) to JOCECA.

*Diversify Diversification!* We come away from this event’s discussion with a deeper understanding of farm diversification. There are reasons we have not seen huge growth in farm diversification and why dairy growth is dominating, but perhaps there are changes that can be made – in where value is added in the food chain and in how widely we think of diversification as an idea and practice. Diversification can be about far more than just introducing one extra agronomic practice.

Farm diversification in its broadest sense will mean adapting to the changing realities of climate, landscape, as well as rural and consumer demographics needs and interests - in this context we must build broad resilience for our farmers and rural communities. Practicing food sovereignty means supporting farm diversification in an ecosystem of innovations. Ireland’s agri-food policy framework can create an enabling environment for local food producers, empowering a number of farmers to look beyond the commodities market and to capture the added value that is currently eluding them, while making their part of the world that little bit more vibrant and interconnected. A local food policy framework, as envisioned by Talamh Beo, would secure fairer and more sustainable outcomes for our farmers, our rural communities, and our natural environment – and yield fresher, nutritionally dense, locally produced food in a living countryside that is accessible to all. Within this food sovereignty framework, we can ensure solidarity with producers in the global south is part and parcel of Irish practices and policies.

All of this said, it will not necessarily be easy - much more work, and hard decisions, are ahead. Thousands



## Conclusion

leave farming all over Europe every year, yet we can and must find a way to revitalise rural areas with farming at its heart. There will be a balance between some variation of business as usual and mixed, and more agroecological approaches, embedded as they are in wider supportive agri-food systems with value adding staying with farmers and rural communities. This will be a key terrain of dynamic tension and change in the years ahead.

*Appropriate digital distribution offers rural agroecological opportunities.* Good food should be accessible for all - we need to work to overcome structural inequalities at home and abroad, from food deserts to unfair global trading practices. Open Food Network offers a digital solution to the conundrum of direct sales for small scale agroecological producers in sparsely populated rural areas – as well as a non-proprietary community embedded tool to revitalise rural economies. Code is critical infrastructure, and we can - and should - own and operationalise platforms for our own community use.

*Looking out for land.* With family farming under enormous pressure, the spectre of land consolidation haunts Ireland once again. Low interest land mortgages and a land observatory, could help pave the way to a socio-ecological transition in rural areas.

There are lots of emerging ideas, important developments and the beginnings of pathways to that thing that gets called a just transition. It's not all represented at this one single two-hour event, but in general much more work is needed in mapping and enabling these pathways. A still wider group of rural and agri-food people needs to be engaged with. To this end, the Environmental Pillar's future planned agricultural policy endeavours should help enable progress. How Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan, the recently announced Our Rural Futures post COVID-19 blueprint, the climate, biodiversity and other policies are put into action, will play a cornerstone role in the months and years ahead too. As will the crises - and the resilience of our people.

*Oliver Moore (ARC2020), August 2021*

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### About ARC2020

The Agricultural and Rural Convention (ARC2020) is a Paris-based NGO and a network of agricultural and rural actors working together for good food, good farming and better rural policies in the EU.

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### About Good Food Good Farming

Good Food Good Farming is a civil society alliance of citizens, activists, farmers, bee-keepers, chefs and many more that are asking for a radical transition of EU food and farming policies.

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### About Cultivate

Cultivate is a practical sustainability organisation focused on active education - based in Cloughjordan Eco-village, Co Tipperary.

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### About the Irish Environmental Network

The Irish Environmental Network is an umbrella network that works to support environmental NGOs through access to funding and services. It consists of environmental NGOs that carry out their work through practical conservation work, campaigning, lobbying and raising public awareness of environmental and conservation needs.

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### About Swan

The Sustainable Water Network (SWAN) is an umbrella network of twenty-four of Ireland's leading environmental groups working together to protect Ireland's waters by participating in the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), Marine Strategy Framework and other water-related policy in Ireland.

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### About Stop Climate Chaos

Stop Climate Chaos is a coalition of 30+ civil society organizations campaigning to ensure Ireland does its fair share to tackle the causes and consequences of climate change.

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All contributions represent the opinions of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of ARC2020 or its funders.

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