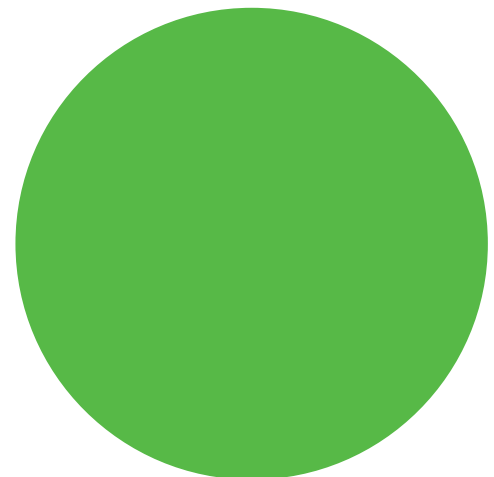
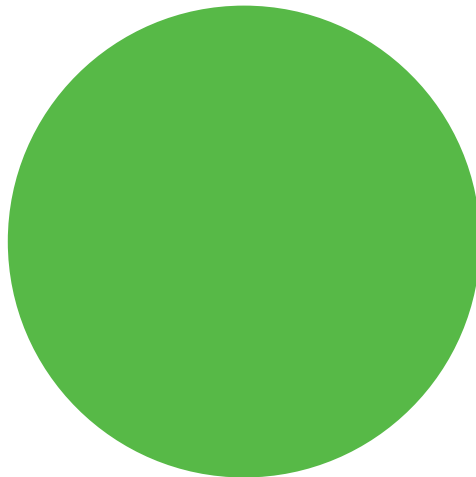
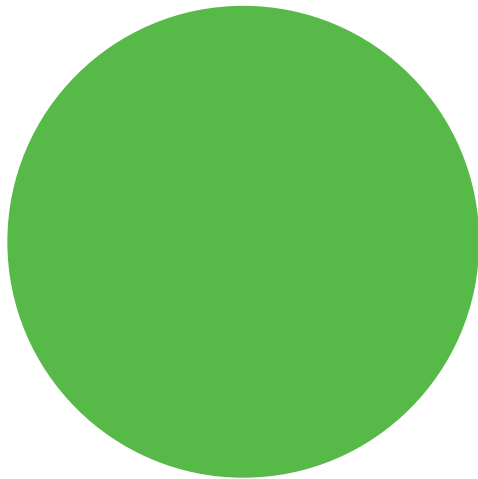




A Local Food Policy Framework





“We want 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. That means creating pathways for local food production through a positive policy framework which incorporates income supports, labour and finance incentives, pilot projects for land access and short supply chain supports and infrastructure.”



Why Local Food Producers are important:

Small-scale local food producers selling directly into local markets provide multiple benefits to the local environment, community and economy:

- The production and consumption of food in short chains and webs means increased economic and social activity in rural areas
- Agroecological growers and producers have a low environmental impact and a small carbon footprint, while providing multiple complimentary benefits
- Agroecological farming systems have the potential to restore space for local wildlife areas and biodiversity while regenerating ecosystems
- Local producers marketing their produce directly can supply, fresher, nutrient dense foods directly into local households, meaning better diets for people in the locality
- 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

The supports outlined here for a local food or seed producer are aimed at levelling the playing field between local food producers

and a highly subsidised cheap food import/export model. It is time for the added value that comes from local and short chain food systems to be recognised and supported.

A local food policy framework can help build food sovereignty, while increasing community engagement in food systems, from production to distribution. It can also provide the local food production skills and training for a new generation of local food producers.

Food Sovereignty is a framework for building food and agricultural systems which puts land, people and communities first. It looks at how farmers and citizens can work together to find solutions to the common problems of climate change, biodiversity loss and falling farm incomes.

What we need:

- 1. Institutional recognition for Local Food Producers**
- 2. A Local Food Policy framework**
- 3. A multi-department, integrated approach to reviving and climate proofing our rural communities**





1. Institutional recognition for Local Food Producers:

In order to access supports through the Local Food Policy Framework, we propose the creation of a new "Local Food Producer" status for those who meet a given number of criteria.

These criteria are outlined below:

What do they produce?

Local Food Producers produce food and seeds in short supply chains for their local community, building food sovereignty and community resilience while reducing the environmental and carbon footprint of our current industrialised and export / import based systems.

- Local Food Producers should produce food (primary production) as their primary economic activity
- Local Food Producers produce meat, dairy, fruit, veg, honey, mushrooms, fish, seeds and other primary produce for their local community

What is their route to market?

Local Food Producers must show they are supplying local markets and consumers within their area as much as possible. They should be encouraged and facilitated to develop short supply chains when possible.



- Direct sales (Direct sales from farm gate, Community Supported Agriculture, Reko rings, Local Markets, Open Food Network, Cafes, Restaurants etc)
- Wholesale for further resale (Local shops, Supermarkets etc)

How do they produce?

The aim is to produce nutrient dense local food to substitute current imports and reduce the carbon footprint of food, while building soils and regenerating ecosystems. Talamh Beo support Agroecological farming systems.

In many local and short supply chains certification may not be required when there is a strong local relationship and trust between local producer and customer. However in some cases organic certification should be required:

- Producers marketing direct should use chemical free production methods and agroecological and biological farming systems but do not require certification
- Producers supplying more than 50% wholesale (for further resale by shops etc) should require organic certification

What is Agroecology?

Agroecology encompasses a broad spectrum of agricultural practices based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales. Agroecological farming is embedded and adapted to the ecosystems, communities, and soils of the places where it is practiced, incorporating a social and geographical element which makes Agroecology different according to people and place. Permaculture, Regenerative farming, Agroforestry, Organics and Biological farming can all be considered part of the broad family of Agroecological land use practices.





2. A Local Food Policy Framework:

Outlined below are the crucial supports and actions Talamh Beo believes essential in order to develop and accelerate the growth of our local food systems and short supply chains.

A. Income supports for stimulating local food production:

While many farmers receive payments under the existing system, there are also many farmers who fall between the cracks. This does not make their work any less valuable. In addition, farmers currently supplying wholesalers or the mart and failing to cover their costs of production have little incentive or support to instead supply local markets directly with fresh produce.

Many of the farmers involved in pioneering short supply chains, agroecology, regenerative farming and farming for nature and biodiversity find themselves under-rewarded for their work. Smaller scale farms supplying local markets directly with meat, vegetables, milk or other farm produce are often in receipt of little or no payments.

This puts these local producers at a disadvantage when they are directly competing with a cheap (often subsidised) food model, and means they are not rewarded for the work, time and energy they invest in developing their local community focused food system. The same farms provide social goods such as nutritious food into their communities and biodiverse landscapes for on farm biodiversity as well as contributing to social diversity in rural areas.

Many of these farming models – production for local markets, farming for nature and regenerative farming – are highly valued by citizens and broader society, but the farmers themselves struggle to make a living from their production and many earn far below the average industrial wage. It is time to redress the imbalance in farm payments and introduce a specific payment aimed at supporting and stimulating local production in Ireland.

We propose:

The establishment of a new direct payment linked directly to sales into local markets by registered “local food producers” of up to 15,000 euro per annum.

- *“A Local Food Producer” must meet the criteria listed above (sales, produce, routes to market etc) and are paid 50% match funding representing their sales into local markets to a maximum of payment of €15,000 euros. Local Food Producers must make a minimum of 5,000 euros of sales, and match funding is paid up until 30,000 euro.*
- *The Local Food Producer Payment is not dependent on the BPS system and farmers receiving a direct payment should continue to do so*
- *Organic farmers can receive the Local Food Producer Payment as a top up to their existing organic payments*
- *These sales can be from either food or seed production*

Example A: Farmer A sells vegetables and fruit valuing 15,000 euros through a Community Supported Agriculture project. Her Local Producer payment is 7,500 per year

Example B: Farmer B has a mixed farm and sells 5,000 worth of beef direct through a box scheme, his Local Producer payment is 2,500 euro

Example C: Farmer C has a dairy, poultry and pork farm which sells direct as well as to supermarkets and through their website. They have sales of 125,000 euros. Their payment is 15,000 euros





B. Finance

Farmers supplying local markets and establishing new on-farm enterprises for short supply chains (horticulture, poultry, mushroom growing, micro dairying, direct sales of meat etc) often struggle to source effective finance options for their initiatives.

Financial institutions serving the farming sector focus on large scale, long-term investments in commodity, export and processing orientated production and have little or no availability of finance for new entrants, smaller scale operators or new enterprises which do not fit a prescribed format.

It is incumbent on the government to provide a vehicle to help finance new and existing local food start up initiatives with low or zero interest loans backed by government guarantee to support the establishment of new producers in local areas.

We propose:

The establishment of a new finance category for local food producers aimed at stimulating and supporting local, agroecological production on the island of Ireland. This finance category would incorporate loans, VAT and insurance

- *Loans would be backed by government guarantee, with low interest rates and have a long term of repayment*
- *Loans would be aimed specifically at supporting the establishment of production for short supply chains*
- *Loans would be available for small scale primary production infrastructure, machinery and potentially land purchase.*
- *Insurance: Local Food Producers need insurance equity as many farmers are unable to engage in public events on their farms due to overly expensive insurance costs*
- *VAT: Local Food Producers adding value to their own on-farm produce should pay a reduced VAT rate on the sales of those products. Where at least 80% of ingredients are sourced from their own farm*

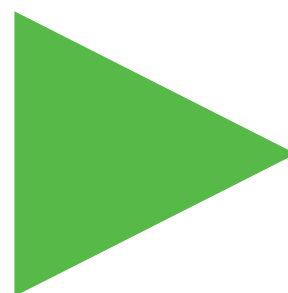
C. Labour and social aspects

We need more people on the land growing and supplying our local food systems to ensure our community resilience and future food sovereignty. This requires supporting the direct labour requirements of Local Food Producers and the upskilling of future local farmers by connecting them with existing local producers. We need to be training our local food and seed producers whether they are just starting their journey or are seasoned and established by facilitating the exchange of skills and experience between both.

An ageing farm demographic and rural depopulation mean there is an urgent need to stimulate the local and rural economy in particular. Bringing labour back onto farms for peak periods such as lambing and calving, harvest, haymaking as well as other labour intensive periods can also mean more opportunities for rural exchange and integration.

We must also acknowledge the role women play in the rural economy and in ensuring functioning farms across the country - work which is largely unacknowledged and unpaid. This is even more evident among single parent farming families and carers who are often bearing the weight of child/elderly care on one income and off one labour unit.

Local food producers have experience and skills to share, with many people currently out of work who need to retrain or find new employment. Local producers offer rewarding work in nature that can also have positive environmental and social benefits.





We propose:

A series of new measures and schemes developed between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Social Protection which encourage labour activation, retraining and offer pathways for new food producers in local areas.

- ***Introduce a new “Farmbridge” program which would subsidise employment on farms supplying local markets (registered local food producers). Participants would receive a weekly 250 euro welfare support payment and between 50 and 100 euro from the host farm. Farms would ensure the work also involved a training element***
- ***Establish a department funded apprenticeship scheme for local food production. The scheme should run for a minimum of 1 year and focus on production for local markets. Participants in the Farmbridge scheme could avail of the apprenticeship scheme as an additional training module***
- ***Allow Local Food Producers to host participants in the Rural Social Scheme***
- ***Increase the amount you can earn before a reduction in the Farm Assist payment and streamline this payment for local food producers. The existing system is overly onerous and does not recognize the production and distribution systems used by many small scale food producers***
- ***Establish an optional “local food credit” top up for people on low incomes or in receipt of a welfare payment which can only be used to purchase from registered local food producers***
- ***Build partnership opportunities for Local Food Production between older farmers and new entrants***

D. Access to Land and Young Farmers

For new entrants not from established farming families, land can be the first barrier to establishing a new local food production business. At the same time an ageing farming population looks for solutions to ensure the continuity of people on the land. Every rural townland wonders how many farmers will still be around in twenty years time.

In order to develop a coherent local food policy framework, access to land is vital, particularly for young and new entrants into farming. Local Food Production also offers an opportunity for older farmers to share their valuable skills with a new generation, and ensures the continuity of farms and their viability, further benefiting rural communities.

We propose:

The development of a land access strategy incorporating social innovation, farm organizations, community groups, local authorities and a new Irish Land Trust all working to develop local agroecological food production in Ireland

- ***Claims for land payments through the CAP should be limited to 32 hectares to discourage hoarding of land or absentee ownership***
- ***Establish a public land purchase mechanism to give first option to local farmers/communities when land in their area is placed on the market in order to prevent land concentration and absentee ownership***
- ***Introduce long term leases specifically orientated for agroecological farming***
- ***Public bodies/local authorities should make existing land they own or if needed acquire land and make it available for long leaseholds for agroecological farming projects in urban areas***
- ***Land availability for young farmers: make small plots available through CAP - provide a payment to lease land for agroecological food production on a per hectare basis to encourage more availability of land in rural areas for local food production***
- ***The establishment of a voluntary land trust which takes land into trust and facilitates long term leases to new entrants for agroecological food production, as well as supporting inter-generational land transfer***





E. Short supply chains

Short supply chains are key to the development of a functioning local food system. Short supply chains are built on trust and citizen participation – bringing people closer to where their food comes from and a deeper awareness of how it is produced. Short supply chains offer multiple social, environmental and economic benefits while building community cohesion, stimulating rural networks, reducing isolation and above all providing high quality, nutritious food to communities, towns and cities across the country.

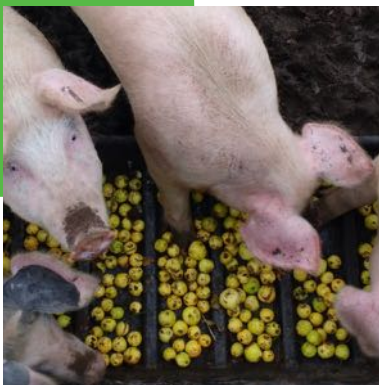
However, short supply chains can also place high levels of organizational work on the shoulders of farmers, who work to educate citizens in new systems for purchasing food. New entrants to local food systems also struggle to identify the best short supply chain option for their farm, and farmers may lack expertise in organizing distribution, creating a bottleneck for local food systems. It is important that farmers have access to the right information in order to develop the best model for their local food initiative. Community Supported Agriculture, Food Hubs, Reko, Food Collection, Country Markets, Farm Shops, Social media drop off points and the Open Food Networks are all direct sales options being developed around the country which would benefit from active government support.



We propose:

The establishment of Community Food Hubs which have a Local Food Facilitator who works to build links between farmers and consumers. Community food hubs would include representatives who are local food producers. Community Food Hubs would also organise public procurement for local producers as part of a community wealth building strategy

- ***Establish and fund a mentoring scheme which links farmers to new entrants, providing education on routes to market and running short supply chains effectively***
- ***Food hubs would provide information on supports and funding for farmers developing short supply chains, as well facilitating training peer to peer learning***
- ***Local authorities should fund Local Food Facilitators set up and support short supply chains by linking farmers to consumers and providing spaces for distribution***
- ***Establish New market trading laws and funding for local authorities to establish outdoor market trading areas in towns and villages. These covered areas can double up as outdoor events spaces***
- ***Organise public procurement as part of a community wealth building strategy***





3. A multi-department, integrated approach to reviving and climate proofing our rural communities:

The Local Food Policy Framework incorporates multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. As such it is relevant not just to the Agriculture sector but also, Health, Social Protection, Education, Local Authorities and other bodies.

This diversity of potential benefits could benefit from an integrated approach to the development of a Local Food Policy Framework.

- **The support of natural ecosystems (agriculture, environment, climate change, biodiversity)**
- **The social role farmers play in the rural world (agriculture, community, rural affairs, mental health, gender)**
- **The provision of healthy, nutritious foods to communities (agriculture, health, social justice)**
- **The provision of employment opportunities and personal and professional development (agriculture, education, training, social welfare)**

Short supply chains provide benefits in reducing emissions from transport, cold storage and other emissions costs related to long supply chains, and 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.

A local food policy framework can provide a roadmap for a new generation of farmers and landowners who can develop livelihoods while providing positively for the community. Farmers need to be part of the change - in order to climate proof our farms we need to:

- **Recognise that the most consistent and important market of all is the local market**
- **Create new opportunities for sustainable farm livelihoods in rural areas**
- **Work with farmers to introduce them to alternative ecological and biological solutions that they can implement into their existing farming practices**
- **Help farmers adapt to these challenges using nature based ecological and biological farming methods.**
- **Reduce or replace high cost industrial and oil based inputs.**

Help our farmers re-imagine a new way of farming for the future, which will re-inspire the next generation to return to the land and our rural communities.

We want more farmers in Ireland - and to ensure the valuable work done by many farmers on marginal or smaller holdings is recognised and can continue. This also means ensuring the specific challenges faced by some farmers, particularly women farmers are addressed and their farms defended and secured for the future.



TALAMH BEO is a member led organisation - we are farmers, growers and land-based workers who are organising for change in our food and agriculture systems

We want to create a better food system in Ireland, where all people have access to healthy, nutritious and affordable local food.

We want to farm in ways which benefit and restore natural ecosystems and build soils, leaving the land better than when we started.

We want to show solidarity with rural communities across Ireland and the world and ensure that living from the land and with the land continues into the future.

Talamh Beo is a democratically organised, member-led organisation. It is run by farmers who have direct experience of the issues they campaign on in their livelihoods and communities.

We believe that farmers and communities should be at the centre of decision-making for food and agriculture systems and developing agricultural policies.

We stand for a system which puts the power back into the hands of farmers, communities and citizens instead of corporate interests and industrial agriculture and food production



Talamh Beo is a member of the European Coordination Via Campesina

More info: www.eurovia.org

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