



Irish Rural Link
Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann

Submission to Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector

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Contact

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Rialtas na hÉireann
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Overview

Irish Rural Link (IRL) is the national network of rural community groups, representing over 600 groups and thousands of individuals committed to socially, environmentally and economically sustainable rural communities.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Draft National Climate & Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and Beyond. While the Agricultural sector is one of the main contributor to Green House Gas (GHG) emissions, it can also provide many of the solutions to reducing such emissions and for a more sustainable food supply. Engaging with farmers, food producers, especially small farm holders and smaller food producers, who are often the hardest to engage with, they can become the innovators of new, cleaner and more sustainable ways to adapting to climate change and having reduced emissions in the atmosphere.

Ensuring that a just transition approach is included in this Roadmap is crucial. No farmer, food producer or land owner can be made worse off or penalised if the changes needed to be made are unaffordable to them. There must also be whole of Government support and policy cohesion within the Roadmap.

Part 1: Implementing Changes Now

The majority of the actions outlined in Part 1 on the consultation paper are measures that are in place in the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) and Irish Rural Link are in agreement that these actions should continue.

Q1. Are there other actions that could be considered for inclusion to further enhance progress and credibility of agricultural actions? Is there more that farmers and the food industry itself can do?

- Engaging more with farmers, especially small farm holders is needed and some education and awareness raising is still needed to inform them of how making these changes are not only beneficial to the environment and contribute to reduction of emissions but can also improve the quality of their farm and farm produce – hence improving their livelihood. By educating them more, there is also the potential of encouraging family members to take over the family farm and gain an interest in the sector.
- As technology improves, new and innovative ways of farming can also make it more attractive and less laborious. Again, this can help better take up of inheritance of farms but also attract others from non-farming backgrounds into the sector.

- Better selection of bulls should be included in Action 3 as part of the enhanced dairy and beef breeding programs as this is also a key factor for improved beef production.

Q2. Have you any feedback on how uptake of these actions can be encouraged and facilitated?

- The knowledge transfer programme that is currently in place has helped farmers to upskill and encourage efficiency and continuous improvement of their farm and in turn the agri-food sector. This should be extended, simplifying participation of the scheme is also needed to engage the hardest to reach or small farm holders.
- Mentoring programme between local farmers may also help farmers make adaptations. If a neighbouring farmer has made changes, it can be an informal way of encouraging others to make the changes – if they can see the benefits that the neighbouring farm has gained by making these changes, it can be an incentive for others to make changes.

2. Enhance the development of sustainable land management practices for delivering 26.8 Mt CO₂eq abatement through LULUCF actions over the period 2021 to 2030.

Q3. Are there other actions that could be considered to maximise the contribution of sustainable land management? Is there more that farmers and the food industry itself can do?

- High Nature Value Farming (HNV) is a practice of sustainable land management that protects biodiversity and species. With over a third of farms in Ireland vulnerable, there is an opportunity that HNV farming could be practiced on such farms.
- Restored peatlands not only store two to three times more carbon than forestry, they also improve water and air quality and protect both plant and animal species that are important for soil quality. The DAFM must collaborate with DCHG and National Parks and Wildlife, where restoration and conservation measures are taking place on raised bogs. There is also an opportunity to engage with private peat landowners that are not designated areas of conservation to encourage restoration and conservation of this land and use it for carbon sequestration.

Q4. Have you any feedback on how uptake of these actions can be encouraged and facilitated?

- **Carbon Credits** for uncut bog/restoration of bogland and forestry. Landowners are encouraged to plant forestry with grants etc, but carbon credits must also be introduced. At present private peat landowners and those with turbary rights that are not cutting their bog or wish to restore it, should receive carbon credits.

MoorFutures

IRL and Community Wetlands Forum have continued to call on the introduction of a MoorFutures style carbon credit.

MoorFutures are a way to raise funds for the rewetting and restoration of peatlands and wetlands. Essentially, they are a type of carbon credit used as an instrument for financing peatland protection, ecosystem services and biodiversity, through private investment. MoorFutures offer corporations an opportunity to offset their carbon emissions while investing in the biological diversity and the multiple benefits of peatlands and wetlands. MoorFutures create trust because projects are carried out in the local community and the buyer can visit the site easily; supplier and buyer are in direct personal contact. They started in Brandesburg state in Germany in 2012 with other states following suit. With the amount of peatland and wetland across Ireland, there is an opportunity now to explore such a scheme to help Ireland achieve its climate targets¹.

- Continuation of the GLAS Scheme is needed and engaging with farmers to take up the scheme. Also supporting farmers and food producers who wish to diversify to organic farming, HVN farming or diversify the land for other uses is needed.

3. Contribute to sustainable energy and decarbonisation of energy systems

The agricultural sector is well placed to greatly contribute to sustainable energy and move away from dependency on fossil fuels. As outlined in the consultation paper, increasing biomass from forestry and biomethane will play key roles as well as pv panels. This is where agriculture can play a key role.

Q5. Are these actions sufficient, or are there others you would suggest? Is there more that farmers and the food industry itself can do?

- While IRL welcome the development of anaerobic digesters and the use of grass and possibly food waste in these to produce bio-gas, the Department and indeed Government must take into consideration, that not every household or area of the country is connected to the natural gas grid, so other alternative energy sources need to be explored. Anaerobic digesters could also allow farms and food producer reduce waste and produce their own energy.
- Decarbonising of fossil fuels also needs to be explored further and examples of such are happening across the country, with Arigna fuels being one such example.² The use of grass etc for anaerobic digesters however, as gas is not available to many homes in Ireland, especially in rural homes, this needs to be improved.

¹ <https://www.moorfutures.de/>

² <https://www.arignafuels.ie/2019/11/wdc-investment-fund-supports-arigna-fuels-and-its-move-towards-a-renewable-future/>

- Farm buildings are a prime location for solar panels. It would also allow the farmer produce their own energy. However, they need to be encouraged to take this up by allowing any excess produced be sold back to the grid.

Q6. How uptake of these actions can be encouraged and facilitated?

- The initial cost to the farmer making a change will always be a problem but there also needs a shift in mind-set to make the changes away from fossil fuel burning. There needs to be an element of trust in alternative fuels, meaning there is still a need for education and awareness raising on climate change and the adaptations needed in the agricultural sector to reduce emissions. What financial gains can be made by the farmer by making the changes and realising the importance of making the changes should be highlighted.
- Supports to install Solar Panels or anaerobic digesters could encourage individual take up of these, but more important is being able to sell excess energy back to the national grids.

Part 2: Acting in Partnership

Collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders will ensure more engagement from all the necessary stakeholders. While the consultation papers mentions some of the organisations that will be consulted, farmers and food producers on the ground must be engaged with also.

Action 24 states that the Roadmap will engage with farmers and communities to address behavioural barriers and ensure a just transition to land use change. While farm advisors are in a good position to do this but also a mentoring programme as outlined in previous sector could also help with behavioural change and change in mind-set.

Part 3: Preparing for the Future

Q11. What are your views on these six guiding principles in preparing for the future? Are they sufficiently comprehensive or are there others you would add?

Just Transition must be included as one of the guiding principles in preparing for the future. The agriculture sector can play a prominent role and provide many of the solutions in reducing GHG emissions. However, with the average farm income at approx. €23,000 and with one-third of farms vulnerable (Teagasc, 2019)³, no farmer can be made worse off by adapting to climate change. Supports, including advice and mentoring must be put in place.

³ Teagasc (2019) ‘National Farm Income Survey 2018’
https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2019/NFS-2018_final_web.pdf

Guideline 6: Continuing to invest in R&D and knowledge transfer services to drive innovation and adoption of best practice.

There is an opportunity for a more collaborate approach to this and making better use of not only agricultural colleges but also Institutes of Technologies on how new and innovative technologies can be used in the agricultural sector. There is at least one IT college in every region of the country and linking farmers and farm groups in with these could help to identify the best practice of farming for an area, which benefits both the farmer, landowner and the environment.

Q12. Innovation is now widely recognised as a key driver of long-term growth and sustainable development and addressing of challenges such as Climate Change. What type of approaches and processes could assist the Irish agri-food innovation system to address economic and societal challenges and facilitate increased networking, collaboration and investment?

Taking a regional approach to this should be explored, especially in terms of networking and collaboration and again including IT colleges in how new and innovative technologies can be used in the agri-food sector.

There also needs to be a piece included on the quality of the food produced in the agri-food sector and education around the importance of dairy and beef in a healthy and balanced diet.

Irish Rural Link the Organisation

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 600 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities' interests.

'Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society'

Irish Rural Link's aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21st century.
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.
- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities

'Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.'