

JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND THE MARINE

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Submission on the Future of the Beef Sector

Data on the incomes of people involved in beef production contained in the Annual Teagasc National Farm survey indicate that income difficulties in the beef sector are not new phenomena.

While not wishing to exclude anybody I believe it might be wise for the moment to look at National Farm Survey income figures for farms in the 50ha to 100ha sector as these are likely to reflect more commercial type enterprises requiring full time employment

Before the collapse in prices in 2018 Family farm incomes which includes remuneration for all farm work undertaken by a farmer and his family in 2017 on these larger beef farms in 2017 was just above €30,000, most of which was comprised of subsidy payments

Ten years earlier in 2007 the income on similar sized farms was around €23,000 all of which was comprised of subsidy payments.

So we see that low incomes in cattle farming are not a new phenomena.

What we also see is that a concerted policy of increased production and growth initially set out in Food Harvest 2020 and repeated in Food Wise 2025 which claims to identify “ambitious and challenging growth projections for the industry over the next ten years including:

85% increase in exports to €19 billion;

70% increase in value added to €13 billion

65% increase in primary production to €10 billion and

The creation of 23,000 additional jobs all along the supply chain from producer level to high end value added product development”

has not helped the lot of cattle farmers on iota, in fact empirical evidence shows that the exit of farmers from the beef sector is accelerating.

Glib statements such as;

”The objective of the committee’s consideration of this topic is to identify the policy adjustments which are required to ensure that the beef sector continues to play a key role in the export-led growth of the overall agri-food industry”.

which contain no mention of what a farmer may expect to earn for his or hers year’s work, displays a disturbing lack of understanding of the role of beef producers as the foundation on which the multi €Billion meat export industry is built.

I believe that it doesn't have to be like this, there has to be a better way!

I always remember something which a chief agricultural officer from India said to me at a UNEP Conference in Montreal some years ago. What he said was, “When I send my advisers out to speak and advise farmers I tell them to listen to the farmer”

Perhaps it’s time that those responsible for our farm policy started to listen to Irish farmers

We all know that in Ireland we are blessed with having the best land and climate in the world for producing really good food and we are also fortunate have some of the best agricultural research facilities in the world.

Rather than ongoing efforts by our policy makers to encourage farmers into making large unsustainable investments in their low margin beef enterprises, efforts should be put in place to facilitate low cost low input beef systems

Every farmer knows that every farm, indeed every field is different, each having its own talents and ability to produce various crop types or livestock production enterprises.

Utilising this local knowledge, farmers both full-time and part-time in conjunction with some of the more experienced people in our advisory services could draw up plans specifically aimed at the most efficient, low-cost/low input production system for their farms based not on output but efficiency and profit.

I believe that setting up systems such as these would at least allow farmers to retain their EU Basic Payment which would be a great start in building a sustainable foundation for rural Ireland and our very important agri-sector.