



I thank the Chair and the committee for the invitation to speak on behalf of the Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association.

Our starting point for the discussion here today is to answer the question 'what will happen if we do nothing - simply carry on with our current agricultural policy and practices of intensification, concentration and specialisation?'

The answer is rather bleak.

Climate change is already affecting people, ecosystems and livelihoods all around the world. We farmers have felt the effects of wet winters, late springs, fodder crises and drought conditions. Our costs have gone up, our earnings are down, our suckler market is under threat from an expanding dairy sector. We work two jobs to keep our families fed. We have Brexit and Trade Agreements creating uncertainty in the markets – which themselves are in turmoil with trade wars. We're finding it increasingly difficult to make a livelihood, and our next generation are not inspired to follow in our footsteps.

Globally we are seeing the world responding to the position it finds itself in. There's an attitude moving towards the abandonment of working together for the global community. Some countries want to be great again; others want to circle the wagons. The EU is working on an army. Migrants are on the move; globally they are on the roads in their millions looking for safety, security and employment. The fear and lack of a workable vision that people are feeling is expressing itself through the rise of the right wing and an ever increasing acceptance of fake news and research to avoid tackling the hard questions facing the global community. Global and National governance is strained and facing severe challenges.

And then there are the fines. Inaction on greenhouse gas emission levels and renewable energy targets could see the EU levy fines on Ireland of up to €600 million per annum after 2021.

That adds up to a lot of instability at home and abroad. Doing nothing and driving on a livestock expansion does not seem to be a sensible approach for the economy, the environment or the Irish society at this point in time.

Our beef and dairy herds have made a significant contribution to the modern Irish economy, but it has come at the high cost of biodiversity loss and considerable pollution from chemicals and fertilisers. Agriculture is a significant contributor to water pollution with the most widespread water quality problem being high nutrient concentrations and afforestation. If climate change, biodiversity

loss and pollution costs are included in the true cost of producing beef, dairy and sheep-meat, much of Ireland's agri-food sector would instantly lose its economic viability.

Looking forward we have to do the math. Once the targets for Foodwise 2025 are met, will the industry stabilise livestock numbers and profit, or will they look to further increasing growth and all that comes with it? According to the EPA, our agricultural emissions have risen each year - 3.5 % in 2016, 3.7% in 2017 and 2.9% now in 2018 due to 26% increase in dairy numbers since 2013. Emissions decreased in the transport, power generation and household sectors (2018). Growth in the livestock sector is taking us in the wrong direction for reducing emissions. This is not only happening in Ireland, globally meat and dairy production use 83% of farmland and produce 60% of agriculture's emissions. One third of the food produced is wasted.

Ireland is off course in meeting its 2020, 2030 and 2050 climate commitments and targets. Yesterday in the Climate Change Performance Index we ranked 48th out of 56 countries, with a score of 40.84 far below the EU average of 60.65. We are now ranked the worst in Europe. We're also failing to meet our obligations under the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats Directive and the Bird's Directive, and are behind in tackling our commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals. We talk about having to farm this way to feed the world's growing population. At the same time we are struggling to find markets for our beef and dairy and the farmer on the ground is no better off for his labours. We need to rethink how we feed the world, for it is no use doing so at the expense of our land, water, air, biodiversity etc.

Ireland continues to propose off-setting its agricultural emissions through the expansion of its outdated commercial forestry model, whilst at the same time continuing to industrially extract carbon-rich peat for burning and horticulture. Peatlands are a massive store of carbon, they cover less than 3% of the global land surface but store more carbon than is contained in the vegetation of all the world's forests. Ireland has peat soils covering 20% of the country. In their healthy state, bogs will not only store carbon but they will continue to absorb carbon dioxide as they grow. Extracting peat or draining peatlands and planting them with forestry turns a sink into a massive source of emissions. Stopping peat extraction, re-wetting and restoring bogs and peatlands and maintaining them in good condition must be a priority land use policy going forward.

The monoculture blocks of commercial forestry impact negatively on rural communities, habitats, biodiversity, water and soil quality. This outdated model contributes little to sequestration, biodiversity or species habitat – especially when the proposal is to plant them on the peat soils considered 'marginal' by the industrial agricultural mindset.

We need to see a change in national forestry policy. Ireland's forests need to be long term, predominantly native and natural woodland – providing a long term carbon sequestration function along with creating habitat for biodiversity, a resource for the nation and a legacy for generations to come. This requires a change in the remit of Coillte as per the 1988 legislation that established the forestry body. Ireland's forestry programme is 100% exchequer funded and the fines for not meeting renewable energy and greenhouse gas emission targets will be 100% tax payer funded. As the Irish people are paying for the forests, the forests should belong to the public and provide public good. A suggestion too would be to modernise the Board of Coillte to reflect some of the skills that will be needed for the future – especially around environmental and change management expertise.

In order to meet the challenges presented by climate change, Ireland needs to chart a different course away from agricultural intensification and expansionism. We need to see a decrease the level of dairy numbers. Even if the level of efficiency increases, it has to go hand in hand with a numbers decrease. We have to have both. This is what happens when we leave things to the last minute. We reduce our options.

Our next question, then, is ‘what opportunities and benefits are there for us if we decide to take on the challenge of climate change? Can the green economy provide a livelihood strategy for farmers?’

Limiting warming to 1.5 or 2 degrees will require rapid changes on an unprecedented scale across all sectors and systems of the Irish and global landscape between now and 2030 / 2050. We need to see these changes as economic opportunities for farmers, entrepreneurs and society at large.

The task at hand for farmers, counties, countries and the globe is to stop adding any further emissions in to the atmosphere and to capture carbon out of the atmosphere and store it. Saying we will wait to see other, bigger, more polluting countries deliver before we are prepared to try, or that other countries will produce milk and beef with a heavier footprint than ours so we are doing the world a favour intensifying - is not good enough. If we want to be seen as a global leader in climate change, then we are going to have to lead by example.

The Citizens' Assembly made three proposals relating to agriculture in their third report. These are:

- Taxing greenhouse gas emissions from the agriculture sector and rewarding agricultural practices that sequestered carbon;
- Making the measurement of and reporting on food waste mandatory at every part of food chains; and
- Supporting land use diversification, with specific emphasis on afforestation and organic farming.

Dr Pierre-Marie Aubert from the IPCC reported here on Wednesday 21st November that these proposals “are not enough in the light of the results of the Special Report on Climate Change which presents three pathways to get to a carbon neutral world by 2050.

- First, there is a need to massively reduce the level of emissions from the agriculture sector to zero in a maximum of one or two decades.
- Second, the agriculture sector has to contribute massively to carbon sequestration. The removal capacity of the sector must be increased.
- Third, the land and agriculture sector has to support other sectors through the production of biomass that can be used for either energy or material production.

When taken together, all of these objectives will greatly affect current land use.

This, in turn, will impact on at least three other aspects, namely:

- biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- food production, food security and food system organisation; and
- adaptation of the agriculture sector.

The way in which we deal with these three objectives simultaneously will impact on the other three aspects.”

The government wants changes because of international commitments, targets and agreements – and also changes are needed for the stability and long-term wellbeing of the Irish society. Consumers want changes because they are no longer happy with food that is based on cheap commodities whose production damages their health and the environment. Our farmers want changes because the current way of doing things is not providing a stable or sustainable livelihood.

The INHFA's approach going forward is led by common sense as opposed to other more sophisticated agricultural models.

This is not to say that science and technology are not important in our approach, however, making the right choices about what we are facing requires wisdom, a vision for the future, values, and the fact that we choose to care about the farmers, our environment, our health, our culture and identity and our future. Unfortunately, as there is quite the shortage of research into the complex socio-ecological system underpinning agriculture in Ireland, we need to proceed with common sense.

We would like to see predominantly monoculture agricultural production systems being replaced by a multifunctional approach and by that we mean:

An approach that understands farmers are not just producing commodities - they are taking care of the health of the society by providing natural food. They are taking care of the health of the ecosystem by preserving biodiversity and environmental services. They are taking care of the health of rural communities generating an adequate income for their families. And then, they are preserving the cultural heritage of the society in terms of tradition and historic landscapes.

We farmers own, inhabit and manage the land on which climate change mitigation and adaptation will be delivered. Farmers are the first line of defence in tackling climate change and the associated issues of water catchment management and habitat for biodiversity etc.

Climate change, environmental and renewable energy targets must become the new quota system for farmers.

The services of ecosystems cannot be replaced; they must be protected and respected. Once an ecosystem or part of an ecosystem collapses, the ability to earn off of it will end. Without healthy, thriving ecosystems, we will not have a healthy agricultural economy or a healthy, stable society. So, farmers must be seen to be delivering ecosystem services that are for public good and should be paid for more than just the production of a commodity for example lamb, beef, dairy, grain or wood fibre. High Nature Value farming can also provide a means of supporting livelihoods through extensive / low intensity farming with environmental foci.

In our CAP submission, we propose 30% of Pillar 1 be allocated for an eco-scheme which is paid as a flat rate payment and is mandatory for all farmers. As the CAP under discussion is going to incorporate more results based schemes, a baseline must to be established from which to calculate future results. We thus propose a measurement of the carbon footprint of each farm of origin covering both sinks and sources of emissions.

Regarding Taxing greenhouse gas emissions from the agriculture sector – we believe the ‘polluter pays’ principle must apply. It’s not fair for the tax payers to be paying for agriculture’s emissions. The true cost of what we are producing needs to be transparent.

Rewarding agricultural practices that sequester carbon – we suggest that farmers are paid on an annual basis for sequestering carbon through afforestation and reforestation of predominantly native species; agroforestry; restoration of degraded ecosystems especially bog and peatlands; agricultural practices with biochar and soil sequestration; bio-energy combined with carbon dioxide

capture and storage etc.

We urge the government to open up the hemp market to farmers. This source of wood fibre is quick and easy to grow, uses no fertilizers and pesticides and has multiple uses from plastic, paper, fabrics to animal feed and fuel. Wood processing plants like Medite, SmartPly and Masonite and timber mills can be given a 15 year conversion lead-in as monoculture plantations of mainly non native conifers are phased out.

We would like to see research undertaken and innovation around farm machinery for the future.

We propose a hive of managed bees be considered a livestock unit with a generous area given for forage so as to include the wild pollinator. With one-third of the country's wild pollinators under threat of extinction, rough grassland, heather, willow and gorse provide valuable habitat and forage.

In terms of the National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030, we would like to see clean electricity from renewables, no imported biomass from 3rd countries (especially off products like palm husks), the ability to produce energy and sell it back into the grid, and local communities invested and participating in the energy system.

Of course there are groups locked in to the existing agricultural approach who would resist change or need to be supported through the process with information, advisory resources and knowledge transfer to make the necessary changes. In part some of the resistance will relate to sunken costs – “I can't stop now otherwise what I've invested so far will be lost” and about the loss of future profits.

These groups include agricultural colleges; the big companies producing the products and services required by high-input agriculture; bureaucratic and administrative structures; farmers associations aligned with industry; and political lobbies. It is critical that agricultural colleges and farm advisory services are brought up to speed both in terms of their curriculum and the advice for farmers on changes in dealing with peatlands, forestry and high nature areas.

Regarding climate change and agriculture specifically

Further Adaptation oriented policy options include :

- (i) Policies to encourage adapted crop development and farming practises,
- (ii) Crop and income loss risk management policies,
- (iii) Policies to promote soil conservation and land management,
- (iv) Irrigation and water resource management policies and
- (v) Disaster risk management policies.

And among mitigation-oriented policy options, priority is given to the following:

- (i) Policies to promote conservation agriculture,
- (ii) Water catchment management policies and
- (iii) Livestock reduction and management policies.
- (iv) Preventing deforestation and supporting afforestation (right tree, right place, right management). Increasing native woodland will create a more stable carbon sink with greater environmental benefits to species.
- (v) Agricultural land, peatland and wetlands storing and sequestering carbon.

Thank you