

Climate Change issues specific to the Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Macra na Feirme

**Submitted to:
The Joint Committee on Climate Action**

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Introduction

Chairman, TD's and Senators, good afternoon, Macra na Feirme welcomes the opportunity to present the views of young trained farmers on this complex issue of climate change and to provide our perspective on the recommendations by the Citizens Assembly to the joint Committee on Climate Action. My name is James Healy, Macra na Feirme National President and I'm joined here today by Derrie Dillon, Macra na Feirme Agricultural Affairs Manager. This year chairman, Macra na Feirme celebrates 75 years of representing, supporting and developing young farmers to help them overcome the challenges they and their communities face. Environment and climate change are a challenge but are also an opportunity, and young farmers are willing to play their part by embracing new science, technologies and management practices that will help make us climate leaders.

Carbon efficient agriculture

Today young farmers are establishing their farm businesses in the context that Ireland is a world leader in the area of sustainable auditing and carbon foot-printing under the Origin Green program. The targets set out in both Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 shape the future of agriculture in relation to production levels and our environment. The multifunctional role and multiplier effect of farming means that along with the production of food, the EPA Environment Assessment in 2016 states that farmers and farming can provide valuable ecosystem services to society such as safe clean water, regulation of nutrient cycles and enhancement of biodiversity etc.

Vitaly, when discussing the contribution agriculture has to the total Irish GHG emissions, it should be remembered that Ireland has a very small cohort of heavy industrial contributors of GHG emissions when compared to the rest of Europe. This exaggerates agriculture's output of GHG's relative to our European colleagues and is often used to portray Irish agriculture in a negative light. Telling the full story on climate change is very important, for example, Irish dairy emissions are the lowest in the EU – just over 1 kg of carbon per kg of milk solids produced and our emissions are continually declining on units of food our farmers produce.

From a carbon credit perspective, agriculture does not always receive its fair share of credit. For example, grassland which is an acceptable carbon sink from a scientific point of view

and recognized by the FAO, is not currently an accepted mode of carbon sequestration for the IPCC. Ireland is making decisions on GHG policy for agriculture in the absence of this key abatement resource.

Citizen Assembly climate recommendations

Macra na Feirme appreciates the complexity of developing policies and strategies to address climate change. Therefore, the short timeframe the Citizens Assembly had to consider and make recommendations on this critical issue, is a cause for concern. Time doesn't permit me going through all the recommendations of the Citizen Assembly, however, I would like to elaborate on recommendation 5 & 6. Macra na Feirme has highlighted in our pre-budget submissions the need for action on developing positive policies around planning permission and REFIT tariffs for renewable energies. These along with financial tools are required to help stimulate greater uptake of on-farm renewable energy projects including biogas from anaerobic digestion and the installation of solar panels on farm buildings. To achieve greater investment in the sector, farmers who want to join together in collaborative projects should be facilitated to apply collectively under grant aid schemes to allow them achieve economies of scale. All feed sources for biomass production should be indigenous to encourage development of the supply chain.

Abatement measures in agriculture

On abatement measures at farm level, the Teagasc Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MAC curve) includes a range of scientific advancements and measures around grassland management, the inclusion of clover in swards, nutrient management planning, and sexed semen to name just a few.

The three fundamentals to achieving the above measures are education and advice, policy and CAP supports to help gain traction among farmers for these measures. A widespread uptake of Nutrient Management Planning could achieve a 10% reduction on GHG emissions and a 15% reduction in Ammonia emissions according to Teagasc. The key to unlocking this potential is understanding how farmers digest, use and process this scientific information but environmental sustainability can't be taken in isolation, it is also linked to the farmers

economic sustainability and equally important is the farmers social and mental sustainability.

We are sometimes made to believe that emissions reduction can only be achieved by reducing farming activity. This type of messaging is incorrect and must stop. The Farm Advisory service, Knowledge Transfer scheme, BDGP, TAMS, etc have helped to engage farmers in a positive way and have benefited emission reduction. Education, training and innovative industry projects have also played a significant role. For example, Macra na Feirme Young Farmer Skillnet runs a very successful Young Beef Farmer Sustainability Programme that focuses on many of the farm practices that contribute positively to addressing climate change.

Macra na Feirme disagrees with recommendation 11 of the Citizens Assembly report in relation to a carbon tax on Irish agriculture. It would be a blunt, counter-productive instrument diverting output to places where carbon emissions and costs per unit of food are higher. Climate change is a global issue and must be considered in such a context.

Common Agriculture Policy addressing climate change

Irish Agriculture is exploring and developing proactive approaches to decreasing climate change impacts such as:

- Feeding strategies that maximise the efficiency of grass-based production systems;
- ICT in agriculture to aid delivery of sustainable intensification;
- Improvements to animal health and welfare;
- Sustainable land management that contributes to climate change mitigation and sustainably management of soil and forest carbon sinks.

In terms of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, Macra na Feirme favors a move towards a combination of results based and management based payments as part of environmental and climate measures.

There are many benefits of result based payments, which include:

- Directly linking payments to outcomes

- Reaching more specific goals
- Creating a common goal between farmers and conservationists
- Coherence in policy instruments at national and European level

In summary, it would be beneficial if future CAP measures focused more on outcome rather than input driven and thus reward productive and lower GHG intensity farmers.

Solutions outside the farm gate

Macra na Feirme has commissioned research into exploring the development of a framework for Continual Professional Development in the agriculture sector. Upskilling and developing human capital on climate change in the agricultural sector could return very significant dividends. Also, from an industry perspective a significant number of solutions are possible. For example, encouraging further research into the manufacturing process of fertilizers could yield significant improvements similar to those possible with the use of protected Urea.

Conclusion

In conclusion chairman, young farmers are the new environmentalists, reducing their carbon emission through a range of scientific, technological and management advancements per unit of food produced. Most importantly whatever route is chosen, young farmers need a 'Just Transition' period. Ensuring farmers have adequate time and funding to reduce their emissions without sacrificing the rural population and rural economy is vital and should be the focus of this committee. To that end, a tax on agricultural production would actively draw funds and resources from those who need to be supported to reduce their emissions intensity. Support, engagement and encouragement of our farming community to address climate change will deliver greater dividends for the environment and the people that live in our communities.

Thank you