

## Women in Agriculture Stakeholders Group

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**WASG opening statement to the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine scheduled for 16.30pm on Tuesday 21 September 2021 made by Hannah Quinn-Mulligan, WASG Chair.**

A Cathoirleach agus a dhaoine uaisle, ar dtús báire tá mé fhéin is an grúpa fíor-bhuíoch díobh go léir ó thaobh an cuireach a thabhairt sibh dúinn.

Many of you might already know me as an agricultural journalist but I also have the privilege to farm with my grandmother in Co Limerick.

Like many of you on the committee today, I had a farm childhood that was both blessed with warm summer days helping to bring in hay bales and cursed with the dubious honour of standing in gaps in the biting cold of winter.

Farming is in my blood and growing up all I wanted to be was a farmer like my grandmother before me.

Yet the reality of the day is that I am one of fewer than 500 young women across Ireland of my generation, under 35 years of age, who grew up to be farmers, and is in receipt of farm payments.

An even more frightening statistic is that there are currently more women over the age of 80 who the Department of Agriculture considers to be actively farming, than there are women under 40 who are considered to be actively farming.

This same figure is not shared by our male counterparts in farming, and it highlights the impact of a long-held tradition where farms were passed from generation to generation by way of the eldest son.

The family farm is sacred to rural Ireland, but just as no man is an island, the reality is that hardly any farm operates without the input of both partners on farms.

When my great-grandfather had to emigrate to England to work on the railroads to support his family, it was my great-grandmother who milked the cows every morning and evening and got their nine children off to school.

Women have always shared the workload on Irish farms yet the official recognition of that work has never happened. CSO figures show that some 70,000 women are getting up every day to work on farms in some capacity and

yet roughly just 16,000 women are in receipt of payments and just 3.8% of all farms are in joint male and female names.

The figures are not improving organically, and the primary aim of the Women in Agriculture Stakeholders Group (WASG) is to push the number of women farming in their own name and in partnerships to 25% by 2030 through the mechanics of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The group is made up of representatives from the IFA, ICMSA, ICSA, Macra na Feirme, INHFA, IOA, West Women in Farming and South East Women in Farming. It is completely voluntary and since coming together just over a month ago we have made our first CAP submission and met with senior officials in the Department of Agriculture to discuss it. We are also present on social media and have a mailing list, and the support from women of all ages and in particular young women has been overwhelming.

**Some of the key points of the submission are as follows:**

- The group expects the Department of Agriculture to lead the charge in addressing gender balance and set a target of going from the current 12% of farmers being female to 25% by 2030.
- Figures secured under Freedom of Information (FOI) by the group shows that less than 4% of the multi-million euro Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) payments were made to women – therefore the group proposes a 60% TAMS grant for all female farmers and joint partnerships with a named female partner.
- Figures secured under FOI show that just 3,173 (out of 19,576 applicants) took part in the Knowledge Transfer (KT) scheme. It's proposed that female only KT groups should be formed in the next CAP and groups with at least three female members should receive a top-up per participant.
- Partnership Tax Credit – to work along similar lines to the current Succession Tax Credit except where a named female partner is added to the farm, the farm shall receive a €5,000/year tax credit over a five year period. The partnership must have at least two members and the incoming female partner does not have to be a blood relative to allow for daughters-in-law, wives or partners to join.
- The Department of Agriculture must commit to plan and fund a National Women in Agriculture Dialogue as set out under Food Vision 2030.

We would like to thank you again for this opportunity to present our submission and we look forward to welcoming any questions you might have for us.