



**Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food
and the Marine**

on

The Agricultural and Food Supply Chain Bill 2022

June 2022



Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to make this written submission on an issue of major importance to both farmers and the consumer. Unfortunately, in making this submission both farmers and the consumer have over time seen their influence diminished in favor of ever-increasing profits for our major supermarkets and the larger multiples.

In a society driven by perception rather than facts, consumers have been sold on the myth of, a cheap food policy that is also sustainable. This myth ignores the financial and environmental costs of producing food while promoting waste and driving poverty.

At all levels of society especially with regard to our workforce, there is legislation in place to ensure workers are not exploited and are guaranteed a minimum level of pay through a minimum wage. Unfortunately, this principle doesn't seem to apply to our farmers and food producers, and while someone stacking shelves in a supermarket is guaranteed a minimum payment the same supermarket will willfully exploit farmers, safe in the knowledge that there is no legislation in place to prevent this.

As a consequence of this, we have seen an exodus from agriculture and potential young farmers not committing to an industry that cannot deliver any level of certainty. For those that remain in the industry, the ever-increasing demands placed on farmers are clearly a factor in farm accidents and fatalities.



All of this is a damning indictment of legislation, both in Ireland and across Europe. Our hope is that you and other legislators, care enough to address this, and maybe, this process can be a critical first step.

What needs to happen

The following are proposals the INHFA maintains can make a positive impact if applied.

- Outlined in the Bill are proposals to establish an Office for Fairness and Transparency in the Agri-Food supply chain. This we support and maintain that as part of its remit, it will be tasked with the role of establishing the ongoing cost of food products. It should consider all input costs for farmers and other primary producers including fixed costs and insurance. Moreover, it should allow for a fair profit margin for food producers.
- From once we have an ongoing price index for the cost of producing all foods then we will be in a much stronger position to identify and prevent below-cost selling.
- This new office should also have the power to prevent supermarkets from using any food product as a loss leader.
- We need to reassess conformity with regard to certain food products. An example here includes the size and shape of certain vegetables, the colour of eggs, etc. By applying stipulations around conformity farmers are losing out on products they have produced but are unable to sell. This costs money and also contributes to food waste.



- In recognising that supermarkets are banned from demanding payment from suppliers for promotions and shelf space since 2016 we need to ensure adequate resources for the Consumer Protection Commission to ensure the laws around this are being enforced. Giving the new Office for Fairness and Transparency in the Agri-Food chain control over this is another option that should be considered.
- We need a national and European awareness campaign explaining the important role of food production and the need to respect and acknowledge food producer's basic right to a fair price that reflects their costs and their work. Any such campaign should include our schools and all education centers. It should also focus on food waste, the quality of our foods, and why some foods such as organic cost more.

Conclusion

The establishment of the new office to regulate and control fairness in the food chain is a positive step. However, it will need to be adequately resourced and have enough power through legislation to act. Politically as the price of food increases this office may become an easy target for the multiples in their determination to maintain the status quo. – This must not happen.

We have outlined clear proposals that if implemented can ensure the shoddy practices driven by the multiples and larger supermarkets are brought to an end. In addition to this our proposals, through the awareness campaign can enhance the role and perception of farmers and other food producers who provide the most basic but essential role for all of society.