

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Opening Statement by Bord Bia Chair Designate Larry Murrin

April 10th, 2024

Good evening Chairman and committee members.

Thank you for the invitation to speak here today. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to engage with this important group as chair designate of Bord Bia.

Firstly, if I may, a little about myself and my experiences, which I believe lend themselves to the role. I have been involved in the Agri-food industry for over 40 years, having co-founded Dawn Farm Foods in 1985 with John and Peter Queally. We are a family-owned export business now based in Naas that specialises in supplying pre-cooked ingredients to other food businesses in more than 50 markets around the world.

Between 1985 and 1990, although still an SME, Dawn Farms created growth opportunities and laid the foundations for some key client relationships which endure to this day. Supported by the IDA and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine in 1991, we relocated to Naas, Co. Kildare to facilitate anticipated future expansion. Since that time, the business has expanded many times as its client and export base has constantly grown. Today, Dawn Farms employs 1,000 people in Ireland and is the largest cooked protein ingredient supplier outside of the US. Our products are served in more than 40,000 Food Service and Retail outlets daily.

During the late 80's and early 90's, CBF, Bord Bia's predecessor agency had been helpful in terms of market intelligence. However, once Bord Bia was created in 1994, we started to benefit from a more focussed approach to customer and market development. Bord Bia was capable of providing appropriate market intelligence that readily supported a high growth organisation such as Dawn Farms. Over its 30 year existence, I have first-hand experience of the value of Bord Bia and how it has greatly assisted in Dawn Farm's efforts to scale.

Supports offered included the development of on the ground contacts using insights provided by Bord Bia to create differentiation strategies and customer alignment. We have been continually assisted in translating insights into business opportunities which have grown into strategic partnerships, enabling us to enjoy long term trading relations with key customers around the globe.

11 years ago, we were delighted to be involved in Origin Green, a pioneering initiative which has continued to champion the importance of sustainability for the Irish food, drink and horticulture industry. In my opinion, Origin Green, will prove, to be one of the most important strategic initiatives ever conceived by a government agency in Ireland.

Over my 40 years in the Irish agri-food sector, I served as Chair of Food & Drink Industry Ireland for 12 years, and was President of IBEC in 2014/15, as well as being involved in many other strategic, advisory and advocacy roles. I have always admired the work of Bord Bia and have sat on the Consumer Foods Board for many years. I am delighted to take up the role of Chair of Bord Bia to add my experience to the organisation and the industry as it continues its journey of adding value to all aspects of the Irish Agri food industry.

Over recent years, our industry has experienced many challenges including the long-running Brexit issue and the high impact Covid Pandemic, the ensuing Global Supply Chain crisis, and the Ukrainian conflict which has in turn triggered a prolonged inflation spike which has had a significant impact on consumers especially in Europe not to mention the human cost of the tragedy itself.

The challenge for the agri-food sector is to navigate these obstacles and remain resilient.

Climate change remains our biggest challenge, and the need to recognise the short and long term effect not just on Food Production Systems but ultimately on consumer behaviour and buying choices. This will be the key focus for the next decades, and all stakeholders must play their part.

Bord Bia's strategy throughout these uncertain, challenging times has remained core to its operations: focusing on value creation and value capture. The current Bord Bia strategy, 'Nurturing a Thriving Future', was launched in January of 2022, alongside its 10-year vision. It is closely aligned to Food Vision, and focuses on five main pillars:

1. Firstly, **building Food Brand Ireland (our reputation) with customers and consumers, and further developing its proof points.** Origin Green, Ireland's national sustainability programme, will be at the heart of this activity where Bord Bia will continue to build its strengths in sustainability. Origin Green is concentrating on further building trust through Sustainability and Quality Assurance Schemes. Farmer engagement is also critical to the delivery of this ambition and Bord Bia is working closely with the farming community, farm organisations, and other state agencies to help navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.
2. The second strategic pillar looks to **provide better and more effective ways to connect and build partnerships with clients and their customers.** This pillar recognises that the very nature of doing business has changed, which has been accelerated by Covid-19 and the disruption it has caused. Bord Bia was agile in its response to the pandemic and that agility has and will remain central to its operations.

The emergence of the next generation of digital technologies is a game-changer for both business-to-business and business-to-consumer marketing. Bord Bia is committed to some of the more 'traditional' ways of doing business, for example participating at key international trade shows – putting people together with people is a crucial platform for generating and building business for Irish companies.

However, the industry is also embracing opportunities to connect with customers in new ways, through digital marketing and other emerging technologies. Delivery of this ambition will touch every aspect of the strategic plans – from how Food Brand Ireland is represented around the world, to how we help clients develop their own brands.

3. The third area of strategic focus is around **nurturing industry talent and developing client capability.** This includes providing relevant and useful supports and skills training to the industry, as well as delivering talent programmes. Bord Bia's Talent

Academy ensures a pipeline of talent for the industry, upskilled on relevant areas such as sustainability, business development, marketing, insights and innovation.

As part of this programme, Bord Bia recently established an executive education programme aimed at senior management and board level executives within the Irish food, drink and horticulture industry. This programme looks to empower companies to embrace the opportunities within the sustainability challenge, and to embed sustainability within their own business strategies.

4. **Championing insight-led innovation and brand development** is the fourth area of our strategy. This is being completed in three ways: Firstly, through thought leadership grounded in consumer and market insight. Secondly, through the development of innovation partnerships with the Food Science community. And finally, through on-going bespoke research projects aligned to our specific sector by sector strategies. Consumer led insight and innovation is a key driver of growth in what is a more competitive export landscape.
5. And lastly, the fifth and final pillar, looks at **supporting and enabling the organisation and its stakeholders to execute strategy** through continuous learning and development, best practice corporate governance, and physical and digital infrastructure.

As Chair of Bord Bia, I look forward to further advancing the aims of the industry through activating Bord Bia's strategy and by ensuring the organisation continues to be progressive, knowledgeable, and ambitious. Food, Drink and Horticulture has a central role in our country's future. There is no doubt that further challenges and opportunities will present themselves over the coming years. I look forward to providing leadership, support and guidance to the industry by supporting Bord Bia's executive in their ambitions to deliver the strategy outlined, all the while navigating challenges with agility.

I would like to conclude by thanking you for inviting me to address the committee this evening. I am happy to respond to all your questions, and if I am unable to provide the required detail, I assure you that I will follow up with the committee.

Thank you for your attention.

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