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Calleary calls for urgent action on fodder crisis

Urgent Government action to tackle the fodder crisis problem in Mayo and along the west coast was called for by Fianna Fáil Deputy Dara Calleary.

Met Éireann figures for this year indicate fewer dry days between July and October than there have been in a number of previous years, he said. “The top ten Met Éireann stations for rainfall are all along the west coast and one of the highest was in Newport in my county of Mayo. Land is sodden and cattle have been housed long before they should really be. Fodder has been depleted and its price has escalated if one can get it or have it transported to the west coast.”

By waiting, the Minister is denying the fact that we have a problem and he will force farmers to sell stock at a time they can least afford to do so, said Deputy Calleary. “He will force them from having an income beyond January. We need to act now, as to do so will avert not just a farm crisis but an animal welfare crisis. That will come not in 2018 but later this year. What we need now is not an informal chat with Teagasc but a co-ordinated approach from the Department to tackle the problem in Mayo and along the west coast.”

In response, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed said he had been very conscious throughout these last few months of the difficult weather conditions and their effect on the agriculture sector.

“It is important to emphasise that my Department operates an emergency helpline for animal welfare cases,” he said. “I urge any farmers facing an emergency animal welfare situation and who may be in need of support to contact the helpline for advice and, if needs be, emergency assistance.”

Last month he said the European Commission agreed to his request for an advance payment of the 2017 basic payment scheme. “I took this action in response to the poor weather conditions we are discussing here this evening and also in response to market difficulties caused by currency fluctuations, among other issues,” he said. “This advance translates into an increase from 50% to 70% in the rate for the basic payment scheme to those farmers whose applications were confirmed fully clear. Issuing of these payments commenced as early as possible, or in this case after 15 October, and balancing payments will be made with effect from early December. There will also be an increase permitted to the advance for Pillar II rural development schemes.”

“However, be assured that my Department and I, in conjunction with Teagasc, will continue to monitor the fodder position closely throughout the coming winter months,” he added.

Government accused of playing down rural crime

The issue of rural crime is real but this Government consistently plays down the problem, telling the public that the figures are actually going down rather than up, Fianna Fáil Deputy Lisa Chambers told the Dáil.

What is going down is the reporting of crime, not the crime rate itself, she said. Speaking during a debate on a Fianna Fáil motion on rural crime, she said it had a number of key objectives.

“The first is to help gardaí,” she said. “Two aspects of this are increasing Garda numbers and reopening stations. We need to do this. The second objective is helping communities to help themselves. This comes in the guise of increasing resources to produce CCTV footage, not by putting cameras everywhere but by putting them in key locations where gardaí can obtain information to help find criminals when they carry out crimes.”

On the tracking of machinery and parts, she said farms, in particular, are being targeted because they have valuable machinery, plant, livestock and diesel. Sophisticated gangs are targeting farmyards.

“We need to address the deficiencies in our legal system,” she said. “With regard to bail laws, we need to tackle the re-offending by people who are on bail. It must not be allowed to happen. It is reasonable to bring in electronic monitoring to reduce re-offending in this regard. If people who get legal aid and who are subsequently convicted come into money later, the State should be reimbursed. This is a reasonable suggestion that would be supported across this House. It would let people know that we take crime seriously and are not soft on criminals.”

Speaking on the same motion, Deputy Dara Calleary said in Mayo there is a need to take account of the presence of the international airport and to allow extra gardaí to be stationed there. “We need to upgrade Swinford Garda station to a 24-hour facility. It is in the middle of the county in east Mayo where there is no 24-hour station,” he said.

“In the context of CCTV, I agree that we need community schemes but we also need to invest in mobile CCTV vans that can move between areas and operate in partnership with local authorities in the context of litter prevention,” he said. “We must get serious about repeat offenders. Why is it that when certain people are released from prison, there is a spike in the number of burglaries? There is a constant pattern in this regard that we must address. We need a sense of ownership of this issue, particularly at this time of year.”