

CONTRIBUTING TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Section 18.5 of 2010 Report refers

COMMENT

The agri-food sector plays an important role in preserving the rural landscape and contributing to sustainable rural development. Farmers and the food industry are required to comply with high environmental standards laid down in national and EU legislation. In order to address these issues, the Government published the National Sustainable Development Strategy in 1997, which included a development plan for agriculture and the environment.

Ireland's commitment under the Kyoto Protocol is to limit the increase in greenhouse gas emissions to a maximum of 13% above 1990 levels in the period 2008–2012. In 1990 agriculture was responsible for almost 35% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions, but this proportion is declining.

Ireland must also meet the requirements of the Gothenburg Protocol on reducing the pollutants that contribute to acidification, eutrophication and ground-level ozone.

The EU has recently introduced regulations which require farmers to 'apply usual good farming practice' in order to qualify for certain EU funds. Good farming practice involves nutrient management planning, good grassland management, protection of water, proper use, handling and storage of pesticides and chemicals, and compliance with animal welfare and hygiene standards. Where applicable, wildlife habitats and features of historical and archaeological interest must be protected.

Under the Integrated Pollution Control licensing system operated by the EPA, agri-food companies are also obliged to abide by the strict environmental controls.

The Department of the Environment and Local Government is pursuing an ongoing programme of measures to tackle the country's litter problem. On REPS farms, litter is addressed in the REPS requirement that the visual appearance of the farm and farmyard should be maintained and improved. Where a plastics recycling collection facility exists, such as that provided by Irish Farm Films Producers Group, REPS participants are required to avail of it.

ACTIONS

- DAFRD will develop a detailed specification for good farming practice. Arrangements will be put in place to monitor compliance with good farming practice by applicants for certain direct payments and on-farm investment schemes.
- DAFRD will promote the participation of farmers in the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS). A target of 70,000 farmers participating in the scheme has been set for 2006, a significant increase from the current level of around 45,000 farmers.
- Farmers joining REPS will receive training with a strong emphasis on the implementation of good farming practice and other REPS requirements. Teagasc will institute advisory and training programmes to accompany the introduction of codes of good farming practice nationally and of bye-laws in certain catchments. Training courses for young farmers will have specific modules

which educate farmers about the link between agricultural practices and pollution.

- DAFRD is playing an active part in the development of the National Climate Change Strategy by the Department of the Environment and Local Government based on the guiding principles accepted by the Government including:
 - adherence to the principle of sustainable development;
 - achievement of sectoral equity;
 - maximisation of economic efficiency;
 - integration of environmental consideration into economic policy having regard to economic development and competitiveness considerations;
 - synergies with other policy imperatives.

The Strategy which is now close to finalisation will outline how Ireland's commitments on greenhouse gas abatement are to be met and agriculture will adhere to the requirements of the final strategy agreed by Government.

- Agriculture will play its part in delivering on Ireland's commitments in the Gothenburg Protocol.

DEVELOPING ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Section 15.5 of 2010 Report refers

COMMENT

The Government agrees with the Committee's finding that the organic market provides a real, if limited, commercial opportunity for Irish agriculture. Sales of organic food in Europe have grown significantly, albeit from a low base. In particular, the fact that 70% of organic food consumed in the UK is imported represents an opening for Irish suppliers.

Currently 30,500 hectares are devoted to organic farming methods. Recent growth in organic production has been facilitated particularly by the supports available under REPS, and assistance has also been provided under the Structural Funds in the Operational Programme for Agriculture Rural Development and Forestry (1994-1999). Further growth in the sector is anticipated in line with increasing market opportunities.

ACTIONS

- An Organic Development Committee will be established to draw up a coherent strategy for the development of the sector. The Committee will have representatives of the widest interests in the organic sector including those involved in production, marketing and distribution as well as in the areas of research, training, advice and regulation. The Committee will be established by 1 October 2000.
- Substantially increased funds for REPS in the period 2000-2006, which will enable up to 70,000 farmers to participate in the measure, will also have a significant impact on the growth of the organic sector.
- Additional funds for the organic sector have also been made available in the National Development Plan.
- DAFRD will endeavour to streamline the current arrangements for inspection and approval of organic production.
- Reports being prepared by Bord Bia in conjunction with Bord Glas on consumer demand for organic produce in Ireland, which

will be finalised shortly, will assist in identifying real opportunities in the home market for producers in the organic sector. The Western Development Commission is preparing a strategic action plan for the development of organic farming and organic food production in its region.

- Teagasc is fully committed to the development of a vibrant market-led organic sector. An organic milk research unit was established at Johnstown Castle Research Centre in 1999 to provide independent scientific information and advice on best practice in organic milk production. The research information will build on that already developed for organic meat production at Johnstown Castle.
- Teagasc will develop a national organic demonstration and training facility at Mellows College, Athenry. 160 acres of the college farm is being converted to full organic status. Courses are being developed for existing and new organic growers and for young people intending to make a career as organic growers or in servicing the organic sector.
- A top-level expert committee of senior research, advisory and training specialists in Teagasc is currently examining Teagasc's overall strategic approach to organic farming. The committee's report will be finalised in autumn 2000.
- Teagasc will also expand its liaison structures with the organic farming bodies.