

EQUINE FARMING SUBMISSION CAP 2023-2027


ON BEHALF OF THE EQUINE FARMING TASKFORCE
& MAYO ROSCOMMON BREEDERS GROUP

DRAFT INTERVENTIONS FOR CAP STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

As outlined by Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Schemes II (TAMS II) documentation, **farming** is defined as follows:

*“farming” includes dairy farming, livestock production [including deer, goats, (pig and poultry production which is subject to calculation of production units)], **the training of horses and the rearing of bloodstock**, the cultivation of grass and tillage crops, including horticultural crops whether under protected cropping conditions or in the open;*

Despite the prominence of horses in the above DAFM definition of farming, Horse Stocks are the only equine specific item funded under TAMS II. Based on a published DAFM S156 document, dated January 2016, in relation to ‘Minimum Specifications For Horse Facilities And Fencing’ there appeared to have been an intention by DAFM to include a suite of equine specific measures. These included; [6] Horse Housing (Loose Boxes, Stalls, Loose Housing), [7] Horse Stocks, [8] Shelter and Run / Exercise Area, [9] Lunging Areas, Exercise Areas, and All-Weather Gallops, [10] Mechanical Walkers/Exercisers.

In addition to this, DAFM specification document S148 titled ‘Minimum Specification For Farm Fencing’, revised August 2019, includes six options of ‘Horse Fencing’ covered within these specifications; Post and Rail fences, Rope and Tape fences, Specialised Horse Chain Link Fence, White Polymer Monofilament Fencing, Electrified High Visibility Plastic covered Horse Wire & Proprietary PVC Post and Rail fencing (see F.2 on Page 16 of DAFM document S148).

As outlined above, there appears to have been several instances, in the lead up to and during the most recent Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), of inclusion of equine facilities and fencing in various farm schemes. However, with the exception of Horse Stocks, none of the remainder of these facilities or fencing options were activated or made available to farmers with an equine farming enterprise. It is unclear how such a situation arose, and it is virtually important that the same omission of equine farming and equine specific measures does not happen in CAP 2023.

Equine farming is extremely complementary to, and in line with, the nine specific objectives outlined in the report ‘Ireland’s CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 - Public Consultation on Proposed Interventions’. Examples of this will be outlined throughout this submission, which aims to highlight the major roles that Equine farming can play in achieving the CAP 2023 objectives, and demonstrating the need for significantly increased support of the equine sector.

EQUINE FARMING & IRELAND'S EQUINE SECTOR

According to the Livestock Breeding, Production and Trade Division of DAFM, records in March 2021 showed that there were "26,950 active herds with equine herd type records in AHCS".

Statistics provided the Central Statistics Office in June 2021 indicated that a total national average of 12.23 % of Utilised Land Area was associated with Equine (breeding and production), with the highest rate, 14.3%, in the West of Ireland. (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

As indicated in the 2018 report 'Untapped Potential - Unlocking the Economic Potential of the Irish Sport Horse Industry', the horse sector in Ireland consists of two distinct components – the 'Thoroughbred Sector' and the 'Sport Horse Sector'.

This report highlighted that, in 2016, the total direct and stimulated expenditure of the Irish Thoroughbred Breeding and Racing Industry totalled €1.84 billion, with core industry expenditure comprising €914 million of this, with secondary expenditure of €927 million as the initial expenditure filters its way through the economy. Total employment from the core Irish Breeding and Racing Industry, off-course betting and arising from secondary expenditure resulted in 28,900 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs.

At the time this report was produced, it estimated the sport horse population at 135,715 animals; there were 14,830 active breeders; 46,799 people were involved with sport horses; there were 14,057 full time job equivalents (FTEs) in the sector; and it made a contribution of €816 million per annum to economic activity. The most important aspect of this contribution is that most of the jobs are rurally based. The sector supports considerable rural employment, heritage and social culture. The important point is that with increased funding and improved structures, this contribution could increase substantially. (Untapped Potential - Unlocking the Economic Potential of the Irish Sport Horse Industry, 2018)

The Executive Summary and Key Finding of the 'Untapped Potential' report states that: "There is every reason to believe that if the proper funding and management structures are put in place, the sector could comfortably increase its economic and employment contribution by at least 50% within a decade. This would translate into an increased contribution of over €400 million to the economy and an additional 4,800 direct jobs and 2,200 indirect jobs. The export contribution should be capable of being doubled from €48 million.

To achieve this potential a number of areas need to be addressed. These include; Infrastructure & Facilities; implementation of various recommendation from Reaching New Heights and the Indecon report; investment in Education; more support for Young Riders; Knowledge Transfer Programmes; understanding and adoption of Best International Practices; strong professional focus on Breeding; higher standard competitions; enhanced expertise; Central Intelligence Systems; greater focus on Horse Welfare; and greater public promotion of the sector."

EQUINE FARMING & THE CAP STRATEGIC PLAN OBJECTIVES

In March 2015, ‘Reaching New Heights: Report of the Irish Sport Horse Industry’ was launched by then Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Simon Coveney, at the Irish Army School of Equitation in Dublin. The report contained a range of recommendations for the development of the sport horse industry, over the following ten years. To achieve the vision for 2025, six key recommendations were outlined:

1. Improving Herd Quality: Improve breeding structures to allow Ireland produce horses which are recognised in the top of the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH) rankings
2. Deliver an education and training structure to deliver on the goals of the strategy.
3. Improve the sales capacity across the entire industry
4. Increase participation and improve the experience of participants in the sector
5. Develop and enhance the structures to improve the welfare of horses
6. Deepen institutional capacity to effectively deliver on the goals of the strategy

At a minimum, five of the six key recommendations from Reaching New Heights (RNH) have significant crossover with the nine specific objectives outlined in the report ‘Ireland’s CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CSP)’. With greater parity for equine farming and the equine sector, many of the objectives of both above reports can be achieved.

RNH recommendation 2: Deliver an education and training structure to deliver on the goals of the strategy.

A core component of this recommendation in 2015 aimed to ‘Establish a Knowledge Transfer Equine Programme (K.T.E.) along the lines of the existing successful Dairy Efficiency Programme and Beef/Sheep Technology Adoption Programmes’.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

The inclusion of Equine in the most recent Knowledge Transfer (KT) programme (2016-2019) was incredibly positive for equine farmers, individually and collectively, and its inclusion in CAP 2023 is strongly supported. The benefits of participation were significant, both economically and socially. The Equine KT programme resulted in a number of collective initiatives, which were of significant benefit to those participating farmer/breeders, and also to the sport horse industry as a whole.

The Mayo Roscommon Horse Breeders Group (MRBG), a progressive group of breeders from the West of Ireland who participated in the past KT programme, identified early in the scheme that in order for their equine farming breeding programs to be more commercially viable and sustainable long term, certain key areas needed to be addressed. These included:

1. The upgrading of broodmares to meet the demands of the market and the disciplines of Showjumping & Eventing.
2. improve marketing to directly connect grassroots breeders and producers to the international market place. (CSP objectives [b] enhance market orientation and increase farm competitiveness both in the short and long term, including greater focus on research, technology and digitalisation & [c] improve the farmers’ position in the value chain)

Keen to understand the market requirements (CSP objective [c] improve the farmers position in the value chain) MRBG Established Edition 1 of The Breeders Select Foal Sale Ireland in 2018 which has grown progressively to approximately 190 foals inspected in 2021 for Edition 4 of the sale, taking place in Glenamaddy Equestrian Centre on the 9th October 2021. A transparent linear assessment selection system, and a carefully implemented strategic marketing plan, has allowed the sale to grow the average foal price from €2,250 (Edition 1) to €5,200 (Edition 3), with a top sales price of €10,000 in 2020 (Edition 3).

Having observed the lack of control over the value supply chain in other farming sectors, and the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, MRBG established IHC Auctions Ltd (Company Registration No. 683950) in June 2020, trading as The Irish Horse Centre (IHC) (www.ihc.auction). This is an online hybrid marketing and auctioneering platform with a vision: ‘*Connecting the International Equestrian Community with leading Irish Breeders and Producers*’. The platform has approximately 1,000 registered users since its establishment (June 2020), with 20 different countries worldwide represented, resulting in 30% of 2020 sales to overseas markets, bringing foreign direct investment to Ireland’s rural economy. (CSP objectives [b] enhance market orientation and increase farm competitiveness both in the short and long term, including greater focus on research, technology and digitalisation, [c] improve the farmers’ position in the value chain & [g] attract and sustain young equine farmers and other new farmers and facilitate sustainable business development in rural areas)

Income generated by the platform is reinvested back into support and education for the participating breeders/producers, and into international marketing and promotion of the Irish horse and equine farming in Ireland. The platform provides MRBG with valuable sales data and market analysis information. It is envisaged that the platform will guide Irish breeders and producers towards improved, market-orientated, breeding programs and promote the viability and sustainability of equine farming to the wider farming community, providing a worthwhile agricultural diversity option for many.

Equine farmer participation in the KT programme also led to creation of two additional key industry events in 2019; the Sport Horse & Thoroughbred Stallion Show and the Loose Jumping & Fences (sport horse auction) Selection event.

Recommendations for KT (equine) in CAP 2023:

- The proposed KT programme needs to take account of the practical realities of sport horse breeders in Ireland, with topics focusing on the breeding, production and marketing of horses playing a significant role in the syllabus.
- Due to the modest number of Equine KT facilitators involved in the previous programme (less than 10 active equine facilitators), we would like to see those facilitators consulted by DAFM in order to best structure the proposed KT programme
- Greater flexibility is needed with regards to the days in which group meetings can be held. The inclusion of weekends would allow for Equine KT meetings to take place alongside major shows/competitions in the industry, closing the current divide between the breeding and sport aspects of our sector.
- Under the ‘Proposed Eligibility Conditions’ for the new KT Programme, it is stated that KT Facilitators must also be FAS approved. At present the list of Farm Advisory System (FAS) lists in excess of 880 Approved FAS Advisors. To the best of our

knowledge, not one of these advisors are Equine specific. None of the equine facilitators from the past KT programme are currently Approved FAS Advisors. As things stand, the proposed requirement for all facilitators to be FAS approved would currently exclude all past/existing Equine KT facilities.

- It is important that any set requirements for new entrants into the KT programme does not lead to the exclusion of any farmer/breeder who previously participated in that group
- Where farmers operate agricultural enterprises in more than one sector, allow them to participate in more than one KT programme, and provide full participant and facilitator payments for both sectors .

RNH recommendation 3: Improve the sales capacity across the entire industry

This recommendation is of a similar nature to CSP objective (c) **improve the farmers position in the value chain**, and equine farming examples of this are mentioned above. In addition to this, support for equine farmers to establish and improve facilities to better raise and produce their horses would enable them to produce a higher value product and increase the potential of selling their horses direct to the customer from their home farm, providing a great financial return. Of particular importance in this area are indoor and outdoor arenas to better train and market horses.

RNH recommendation 4: Increase participation and improve the experience of participants in the sector

The availability of infrastructure supports would also be of benefit to a variety of equine businesses throughout rural Ireland, allowing them to improve their offering to customers . Equestrian sports are unique in that different genders and ages regularly participate and/or compete with one another, be that individually or on teams.

The ‘Untapped Potential’ (2018) report found that “There is a strong consensus across the industry that the primary objective of the sports horse industry is to breed and produce horses for profit capable of competing at the highest levels in equestrian sport and also provide the foundation for leisure and recreation industry in Ireland and abroad. The industry is a substantial business engaging people from all walks of life, both young and old, from hobby to professional levels.”

Equine farming, and participation in equestrian sports, very favourably compliments CSP objective (h) **promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including circular bioeconomy and sustainable forestry.**

Young (Equine) Farmer Supports

The 2007 industry report ‘Profile of the Irish Sport Horse Industry’ suggested 10% of breeders surveyed (1,550 responses) were less than 30 years of age. The 2017 industry report ‘Economic Contribution of the Sport Horse Industry to the Irish Economy’ highlighted that just 8.1% of breeders surveyed (1,200 responses) were less than 30 years of age in 2016, while almost 23% were over 60 years of age.

“Meetings with key sector participants have made it clear that the show circuit in Ireland is in need of capital investment and reorganization in light of the nature of the competitive draw of facilities abroad. Directly allied to this is the export of the country’s talented young riders, which if it continues, will further weaken both the show circuit and horse producing capabilities.” (‘Untapped Potential’, 2018)

Offering supports to young trained equine farmers is essential to support talented young people to stay and set up their operations in Ireland. This would assist in securing the future of the many private enterprises distributed around rural Ireland.

The availability of supports for young farmers to invest in equine facilities, fencing and improved health & safety measures would encourage a great percentage of our younger people to stay in Ireland and to participate in agriculture - be that full time or part time. Support for young equine farmers could also extend to such measures as Installation Aid.

In order to further attract and retain young farmers in the equine sector, an Equine ‘Green Cert’ should be developed. The provision of training to equine specific advisors/facilitators, through the Farm Advisory System (FAS), would also greatly assist this sector.

Also worth considering is support for equine farmers, young or otherwise, to assist them in redeveloping existing farm infrastructure (building, etc) in order to help them diversify their farm enterprise, without the need for new building to be erected.

The implementation of such measures would aid the generational renewal goals of CAP 2023.

CSP objective (g) *attract and sustain young farmers and other new farmers and facilitate sustainable business development in rural areas.*

RNH recommendation 5: ‘Develop and enhance the structures to improve the welfare of horses’ went on the state that “Immediate attention should be targeted to breeders of all categories of equines to breed a product for which there is a market. Supports and networks to aid individuals to make informed decisions regarding selection, registration and production are required.”

One of six key recommendations of the ‘Untapped Potential’ report was to ‘Develop and enhance the structures to improve the welfare of horses. Lifetime care of the horse is vital for welfare. Identification systems for horses are also essential’.

CAP supports for equine housing, fencing and production facilities would greatly assist in this area. The implementation of an Equine Welfare scheme, with similarities to the Sheep Welfare Scheme and/or the Dairy Beef Welfare Scheme, could be considered to assist in this area.

CSP objective (i) *improve the response of Union agriculture to societal demands on food and health, including high quality, safe, and nutritious food produced in a sustainable way, the reduction of food waste, as well as improving animal welfare and combating antimicrobial resistances.*

RNH recommendation 6: ‘Deepen institutional capacity to effectively deliver on the goals of the strategy’. R 6.3: ‘Invest in development of equine facilities across the industry’

“Facilities recommended for support under future T.A.M.S. (Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme) funding are artificial insemination facilities and equipment, stabling manure and soiled water storage facilities, indoor and outdoor arenas (and surfaces), lunge rings and gallops, fencing, handling stocks, horse walkers, horse treadmills, horse swimming pools, and cross country courses / training facilities. Facilities for both private and business or competition use should be supported. Private individuals require better facilities to produce horses better individually. Business and competition venues have requirements to modernise and update facilities to improve upon the quality of the product being offered and improve participation levels.” (Reaching New Heights: Report of the Irish Sport Horse Industry, 2015)

CSP objective (a) support viable farm income and resilience of the agricultural sector across the Union to enhance long-term food security and agricultural diversity as well as ensuring the economic sustainability of agricultural production in the Union.

EQUINE FARMING & THE ENVIRONMENT

It has become clear that the environmental footprint of agriculture must be reduced. Equine farmers could have an important role in addressing the climate and biodiversity crisis. Equines have many environmental advantages, but the fragmentation of the sector and the lack of synthetic knowledge about their environmental impacts have excluded their inclusion in the CAP.

Rzekęć et al., (2020) highlighted the positive equine environmental impacts on the environment. This study identified five ‘green assets’, where equines show unique environmental advantages compared to other agricultural production systems. These green assets are linked to the nature of equines (grazing and domestic biodiversity), to their geographical distribution (land use), and to their use by human beings (tourism and work). In addition, a French study estimated that the methane emissions from horses to be on average 20.7 kg CH₄/horse/year, while the methane emissions from dairy cows was 117.9 kg CH₄/dairy cow/year (De Cara et al., 2008). Teagasc researchers have reviewed greenhouse gas emissions of equines and estimated the contribution of horses is negligible (0.4% of the total Ireland's Agricultural sector's emissions).

It is suspected that horses could have a wide range of environmental benefits related to biodiversity, on farms. Horses could be ecosystem service providers especially for land use and biodiversity conservation. In Ireland pollinators are in decline. One third of the 98 bee species on the island are threatened with extinction. To pollinate crops and wild plants for future generations, management of the landscape in a more pollinator-friendly way is required. This would create a network of diverse and flower-rich habitats. It is suspected that equine farms, specifically sport horse farms, are an oasis for biodiversity in the countryside especially in intensive farming areas. This is primarily due to the fact that equine farms are extensive and also apply low levels of chemical fertiliser. In addition, many equine farms have low stocking rates, with a wide diversity of grass species and hedgerows.

Given the positive environmental benefits related to equines as indicated by the above research results we propose that policy makers include an equine environmental scheme in pillar 1 of the new CAP. It is also important to highlight at policy level the potential value of

equine systems and to reward those who engage in positive steps to protect biodiversity, farm sustainably and protect water quality.

The provision of an equine herd health plan should be made available and encouraged with equine farmers. Primarily, a herd health plan starts first and foremost by using results of a faecal egg count test. Animals should be treated according to these results. This would greatly reduce the potential pollution into waterways, lakes and rivers due to improper use, and also reduce the risk of anthelmintic resistance.

EQUINE FARMING HEALTH & SAFETY

At the time of submission, the Equine Farming Taskforce had sought data on the current national health and safety statistics from Teagasc health and safety specialists. They reported that no national reports or statistics were available, and suggested further research be carried out on a national level, particularly as the horse is recognised as a farm animal with a high predisposition towards fight or flight behaviour.

However, one report titled ‘Equestrian Injury Presentations to a Regional Trauma Centre in Ireland’ (Abdulkarim et.al, 2017) reported the following:

A total of 149 equestrian related presentations were identified during the study period. There were significantly more females involved in equestrian injuries than males (58% versus 42%). Falling from a horse contributed to significantly more presentations and admissions than any other cause. 36% of presentations were associated with a radiological abnormality. Types of injuries identified included skeletal fractures (27.5%), joint dislocation/subluxation (5%), concussion (12.5%), and splenic laceration/intraperitoneal haemorrhage (1%). Admission or transfer to tertiary care was required for 18% of equestrian injuries. Only 43% of presentations were discharged back to primary care from the emergency department. The study identified a high incidence of morbidities associated with equestrian presentations. In addition they recognised populations at risk of specific injuries and described high-risk mechanisms of injury

Further CAP supports for on-farm investment should include tools and technology to support farm safety and encourage greater work-life balance. A particularly demanding and high risk period for equine farmers is during the foaling season. Farm technology support should extend to foaling alarms and foaling cameras. These allow equine farmers to manage their time more effectively, get sufficient sleep during these often busy and stressful periods and also reduce the risk of animals requiring assistance being missed during the birthing process, encountering unnecessary discomfort or difficulty.

Loading bays and ramps should also be a measure to consider funding, as the loading of youngstock into horseboxes can often be a high risk activity.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of the equine sector to the Irish economy, and its significance in rural Ireland, has not been rewarded in past policies and this needs to be rectified in CAP 2023. This is essential in terms of Health & Safety (during the breeding, housing, handling, and training of horses) and also in adding value to horses bred, trained and presented to the market on farms throughout rural Ireland.

It is our understanding that transitional funding is available until CAP 2023 commences, and therefore we wish to recommend that the suite of equine specific measures for facilities, fencing and equipment be activated and made available as part of that funding.

We fully support the implementation of a new KT programme, building on the learnings and success of the past programme. There is a need to create an equine specific, market orientated, syllabus covering areas such as horse breeding, production and marketing, for the upcoming KT programme. This should be done in consultation with key industry stakeholders, including the Equine KT facilitators involved in the previous KT programme. There is an existing need to provide training to equine advisors/facilitators in order for Farm Advisory System (FAS) approved advisors to be available to equine farmers.

In order to attract and retain a greater number of young equine farmers, and encourage generational renewal on Irish farms, an Equine Farming Green Cert should be developed. As with the KT programme, the syllabus should include key areas such as horse breeding, production, marketing and coaching.

Given the positive environmental benefits related to equines, as indicated previously, we propose that policy makers include an equine environmental scheme in pillar 1 of CAP 2023.

From environmental, farm diversification and social inclusion perspectives, equine farming in Ireland is well aligned with the ethos and objectives of CAP 2023-2027. We feel it should be supported accordingly.

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On behalf of the Equine Farming Taskforce & the Mayo Roscommon Breeders Group

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