



6th Dec 2021

CAP Reform Submission

To whom it may concern,

The BRIDE (Biodiversity Regeneration In a Dairying Environment) Project is a DAFM/EU funded EIP pilot project, set up to address the continuing decline in farmland biodiversity especially in an intensive farming area such as the Bride river valley in Co. Cork.

I would like to express my opinion on the reform of the next CAP and what that should entail based on my own experience as a dairy farmer and as Project Manager of The BRIDE Project.

The template which is used by the BRIDE Project is based on a landscape-scale approach whereby every farmer should be managing their land for both food production and delivery of ecosystem services such as biodiversity, higher water quality and increased carbon sequestration. Most of the CAP payment needs to go to environmental improvement and I would have a fear that because the present draft of the new CAP was designed over 2 years ago it is now not ambitious enough to deliver on the challenging environmental improvements that the agricultural sector need to make. Furthermore, because of the recent COP 26 discussions, the public will be demanding higher standards from where their food is produced, something that the intensive farming sector need to realise.

The objective of the environmental payment is to reach the target of 10% "Space For Nature" set out in the Green Deal and also the national Food Strategy 2030 initiative.

It should take the form of a one off capital payment of €5,000 to every farmer in the country to create new habitats such as planting new hedgerows and woodlands, excavating ponds, widening field and riverside margins, erecting targeted birdboxes, etc. etc.

A secondary and annual payment should then be paid based on the "Space For Nature" area on each farm and the ecological quality of the "Space For Nature". This is a Results-based Payment that is paid to farmers with higher payments going to farmers that deliver better and higher environmental standards. The BRIDE Project has devised scorecards that can be used by advisers and farmers to score farms based on their "Space For Nature" and its quality.

It is fair to all farmers as it is not biased towards large scale or small scale farmers, intensive or extensive or any of the different farm enterprises – it rewards those farmers that deliver environmental benefits to the public.

One of the learnings from the Project was the reluctance of farmers to change their land use from growing grass or crops to delivering other services such as growing trees for carbon sequestration or biodiversity, rewetting land for flood prevention or biodiversity, etc. etc. This

is not surprising as the cropping area is where they are guaranteed a consistent income (large or small) whereas the income from the "Space For Nature" area is only guaranteed through an agri-environment scheme and then only for its duration.

There is a real need for CAP to deliver a consistent and indefinite income to all farmers as an incentive to retain the natural habitats on their farms and deliver the environmental benefits that these provide.

The present CAP draft does not target the species that are in serious decline and I am afraid that not enough will be done to save some of our most threatened wildlife such as Corncrake, Curlew, Hen Harrier and other ground-nesting species from extinction.

Our present farming system is a model that is racing to the bottom to produce food at the cheapest possible price at a detrimental cost to the environment and rural Ireland. In all areas small farmers have to scale up or be left behind. Small farmers cannot compete with land purchase or land lease rates as only the biggest will survive leaving rural Ireland with less farmers but larger farms and a poorer environment. Smaller farmers need to have higher payments to compete with large-scale farming, in recognition of their value and contribution to the rural areas of Ireland.

In the aforementioned BRIDE template smaller farmers should get higher payments.

Abandoning land and letting the land go wild is not good for biodiversity or vibrant rural communities

In the ongoing discussion about the definition of a farmer and the payments for "armchair farmers" I think the owner of the land should get the environmental payment to improve it regardless of whether they farm it or not. Farmers who lease land will not put money for environmental improvement into land that they may not own in the future. It should be in the interest of any farmer to have 10% of their land in "Space For Nature" so that in time this will command a higher price for sale or lease. This will encourage all farmers active or otherwise to improve the ecosystem services their land delivers. An "armchair farmer" may not be willing to go milking cows or harvesting crops but they may be willing to manage their farms for ecosystem services.

I would also encourage the DAFM to make the changes that are necessary to make a new system work and really reform the next CAP - farmers will have to make changes and so should policy-makers. As farmers we cannot keep supplying milk, meat or cereals etc. to the public while also claiming to be Origin Green and sustainable, we are slowly but surely being found out by the consumer - the greenwashing isn't working. It is in everyone's interest to look after the environment so that Ireland can lead the world into a more sustainable food production system.

Regards,



Project Manager