

**Organic Strategy Forum Meeting**  
**Venue: NEEC Centre, Ag House, Dublin 2 – 10:00 am**  
**Date: Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

**Chairperson:**

Padraig Brennan

**Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine Representatives:**

Seamus Barron, Kevin McGeever, Colm Hayes , Jack Nolan, Kevin McGeever , Laura Nolan , Vincent O'Byrne

**Delegates**

Julie Roche, Tom Starr, Úna Ní Bhroin, Seamus McMenamin, Catherine Morrison, Annie Flahavan, Nicola O'Connell, Emma Walls, Alisha Ryan, Fergal Byrne, Teresa Morrissey, Sinead Moran, Elaine Leavy, Kathryn Roche, John Curran, Henry O'Donnell, Gillian Westbrook, Gillian Richardson, Sean McGloin, Dermot Callaghan, Stephen Connolly

**Apologies**

Minister Hackett, Stephen Blewitt, John Purcell

<u>Item No. On Agenda</u>	<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Decisions Taken/ Clarification Given</u>	<u>Action Required</u>	<u>Action by Whom</u>	<u>Timeframe for Action</u>
1(a)	<i>Introduction by Chair</i>	<p>Chairperson introduction to group outlining his experience within the food, drink and horticulture sector.</p> <p>Chairperson highlighted the ambition for the organic sector in Food Vision 2030 with target of 7.5% of land to be farmed organically with this being supported by increased funding of €256 million under the next CAP.</p> <p>Ambition for the Forum outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proactively shapes future direction of the sector</li> <li>- Identifies and tackles challenges and guides potential supports to address them</li> <li>- Outlined the critical importance of each participant being engaged and highlighted the collective responsibility of group to assist the sector in delivering consistent growth</li> <li>- Initial focus is to achieve momentum within the group with 4 further meetings in 2022</li> <li>- Outlined the need to prioritise issues to help focus the work programme for the period ahead</li> <li>- Intention to have timebound actions arising from meetings with accountability a core principle of the Forum</li> </ul>			
1(b)	<i>Introduction by Assistant Secretary</i>	<p>Introduction by Assistant Secretary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thanked all participants for attendance</li> <li>- Conveyed apologies from Minister Hackett</li> <li>- Highlighted need for forum group to hit the ground running</li> <li>- Outlined Departmental priorities vis-à-vis new CAP strategic plan</li> </ul>			
2	<i>Presentation by DAFM</i>	<p>Presentation by Kevin McGeever on Organic production stats from 2017 to 2021</p> <p>A query was submitted for a further breakdown on Oats / Cereals on the matter of regional variation etc</p>	Further breakdown to be made available to group	Organic policy unit	May 19th
3	<i>Presentation by Bord Bia</i>	<p>Bord Bia presentation by Seamus McMenamin.</p> <p>A number of questions were received from the group</p> <p>Possibility of exporting vegetables was raised - It was noted that 2/3 of vegetables consumed in Ireland are imported and that needs to be the immediate focus.</p> <p>Seamus highlighted work surrounding the retail toolkit and marketing activity with positive feedback received from retailers and client companies.</p>	Follow up with individual queries	Bord Bia	By May 19th

		<p>It was noted that Organic produce comes across as the secondary message in the marketing materials.</p> <p>Queries were raised in relation to organic producers participating at Bloom without Origin Green membership. Seamus committed to follow up individually on this issue.</p>			
4	<i>Presentation by Teagasc</i>	<p>Elaine Leavy from Teagasc noted the work that the organisation is undertaking through webinars, Let's talk Organic etc with work also undertaken on seed workshops etc.</p> <p>Elaine also highlighted Teagasc plans to increase the level of advisory support available at a national and regional level.</p> <p>A question was posed in relation to those that attend farm walks regarding the availability of data to track those that attend and the proportion that subsequently convert to organic farming.</p> <p>A further question was posed in relation to funding for knowledge transfer groups. It was acknowledged that funding exists for KT Advisors under the new CAP and highlighted that the Strategic Plan that has already been submitted to Brussels.</p>			
5	<i>Presentation by Bord Iascaigh Mhara</i>	<p>Presented by Catherine Morrison</p> <p>Noted that Organic aquaculture is currently a very competitive market and that class A waters or equivalent can only be used now for Organic bivalve molluscs e.g., mussels, as directed by Commission Regs.</p> <p>The cleanliness and viability of water quality is of paramount importance</p> <p>Catherine Morrison of BIM noted that no feed manufacturer currently operates in Ireland.</p>			
6	<i>Tour de Table</i>	<p>A tour de table was undertaken with all organisations asked for their views on the priority areas for the Forum to focus on.</p> <p>The priority areas highlighted included the following:</p> <p><b>Education / Consumer Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Education for Growers/farmers is key.</li> <li>-Importance of Knowledge Transfer groups highlighted</li> <li>-Importance of creating and maintaining linkages between producer/ processor groups - Joint programmes</li> <li>-Research viability of Organic Seed</li> <li>-Education for Consumer is key to enable positive differentiation of Irish organic products.</li> </ul>			

**Barriers**

- Leakage of product to conventional market is an issue (more than 50% in some cases)
- Seasonality of product creates a limitation issue while production capability and scale remains a challenge
- Costs of retrofitting facilities were highlighted as a barrier for farmers considering converting to organic
- Importance of retaining existing Producers/Farmers is key and this requires confidence that there is a viable income from converting
- A number of export markets such as Germany are increasingly price sensitive, which creates challenges in exporting
- Water quality for fish produce an issue

**Opportunities**

- Dual payments would make Organic Farming more viable
- Increased visibility/communications in relation to the organic market, particularly the domestic market would help give producers confidence to convert and encourage consumers to purchase
- Organic requires a different approach to communications that incorporates its role in addressing the climate challenge and the local nature of organic produce while issues such as animal welfare can be a point of strength for the sector
- Increase of payments/ supports can be a key lever in encouraging more farmers, especially younger farmers, to convert to organic
- Dedicated Organic Village at Ploughing 2023 could play a key role in raising profile of the sector ahead of the next round of the organic farming scheme (NOTS has lead role)

Based on the tour de table the following points were noted by the Chairperson as the main issues that are facing the sector

**1) Education for Farmers/Growers** to equip them with the necessary skills is key.

**2) Positive Differentiation** – Consumer education is equally important and there is a need to positively articulate what is different about Irish organic food.

		<p><b>3) Business Case</b> – More needs to be done to articulate the business case for farmers and processors, including the market opportunities that exist and the supports available in order to help drive the direction of the supply chain and attract new entrants, particularly younger farmers.</p> <p><b>4) Scale &amp; Capability</b> – one size does not fit all and there needs to be an accommodation for big/ small operators if the sector is to reach its potential with recognition of the role of different supply chain models. For those aiming to export there is a need for support to help them build their capability.</p> <p><b>5) Supply chain co-ordination</b> – There is a need to optimise current volumes by minimising leakage of livestock into conventional. This is going to require greater co-ordination of supplies across different stages of production.</p> <p><b>6) Matching supply and demand</b> – There is work to be done to strike a balance between available supplies of Irish organic food and market development activities.</p> <p><b>7) Green Procurement</b> – there is a need to better understand the potential for organic in public procurement and learn from best practice examples across Europe.</p>			
7	<i>Any other Business</i>	<p>The Chairperson thanked the group for their positive inputs and noted that meetings would be organised for May, June, September and December at the Departments Offices in Backweston, Co. Kildare.</p> <p>A dashboard format would be used to capture progress updates at future meetings.</p> <p>It is intended that future meetings will focus on a single topic to help agree on next steps to address challenges or avail of potential opportunities.</p> <p>The agenda for meetings to be circulated a week ahead to include any pre-work required in relation to the ‘topic of focus’ for the meeting.</p> <p>The meeting concluded with lunch provided for Forum Members.</p>			