

# IRISH ORGANIC FARMERS' AND GROWERS' ASSOCIATION

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## IOFGA Submission for the New Agri-Environment Scheme

The Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association (IOFGA) is the largest organic certification organisation in Ireland representing approx 1,150 farmers, growers and processors. It is responsible for certifying the organic provenance of its members produce and the IOFGA symbol indicates that a product has met the highest standard of organic integrity. IOFGA also works to inform the public about the benefits of organic food and to support the development of organic food production in Ireland.

Almost 900 certified organic farmers are currently in REPS 2 & 3 and are due to finish their programmes in the coming years. As participants in the REPS scheme these farmers have been a great example of commercial farming done with an environmental ethos.

Organic farming offers clear environmental benefits and many organic practices should be adopted in order to meet the challenges of climate change, biodiversity and water management as outlined by the EU Council Regulation 74/2009.

IOFGA recommends that the following measures are incorporated into the new agri-environment scheme;

- Clover swards particularly red clover should be introduced in **all grassland areas** on the farm not just in specific areas, this will greatly reduce the dependence on artificial nitrogen which has contributed hugely to climate change both in terms of its manufacture, and its application on the land
- A simple assessment system must be introduced in order to record the environmental improvements on each farm on an annual basis before payments are made, for example recording wildlife habitats and improved biodiversity on the farm
- Organic farming practices such as winter cover crops, shallow ploughing and increased organic matter from the use of manure increase soil carbon and reduce green house gas emissions. These practices should be essential to the scheme to meet the challenges of climate change
- The new scheme must support low-carbon farming it should provide incentives for encouraging farming practices and soil-

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- management that minimise carbon emissions and maximise carbon storage in soil. This should be done on the whole of the farm not just in specified areas
- Farmers who address on farm energy use by incorporating renewable energy technologies on the farm should be recognised in the new scheme. Incentives should be given for farmers to embrace technologies such as wind turbines, anaerobic digesters, heat pumps and solar panels on farms
  - Grassland farming should incorporate the following, traditional hay meadows, rich species diversity, and heritage varieties of herbs and wildflowers
  - Conservation of wildlife habitats on the farm and the introduction new habitats where possible
  - Rare breed animals should be encouraged
  - Protection of water courses
  - Hedgerows should be maintained on the farm
  - Trees are carbon sinks so therefore broadleaf trees should be encouraged throughout the farm

Agriculture like every other sector in the economy must cut its considerable greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80%. This must be done while at the same time maintaining productivity. The current dependence on nitrogen to produce food is not sustainable and we need to make a serious move to fully embrace organic methods to provide environmentally friendly food.

IOFGA feels that the incorporation of the above suggestions in the new agri-environment scheme will ensure clients start to address the important issues of climate change, renewable energy, water management and biodiversity.