

IRISH ORGANIC FARMERS' AND GROWERS' ASSOCIATION

Main Street, Newtownforbes, Co Longford

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PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2008

In April 2008 the Minister for Food and Horticulture Trevor Sargent launched the Organic Farming Action Plan 2008-2012. The Plan was introduced following a consultation process with stakeholders in the organic sector. The plan is to provide the impetus to achieve the 5% target of land certified as organic which was set by the Programme for Government in 2007.

IOFGA welcomes the introduction of the Organic Farming Action Plan as one of the key measures in overseeing the expansion of the organic sector. The organic sector is growing rapidly and shows no signs of suffering due to an economic downturn. It is essential the sector is able to supply the growing demand for Irish organic produce. We would like to see the government introduce an energy calculation scheme for agriculture combined with a conversion support organisation, a consumer education campaign and also a separate organic agency. This would ensure that the organic sector develops in a sustainable manner.

ENERGY SAVINGS

While the government have introduced the Organic Farming Action Plan to expand the organic sector we feel it is essential that the government devise a national strategy to address the challenging issues of food security and climate change.

Oil cost just over \$70 a barrel in 2007 and global concerns were raised about a "resource constrained future". However this seemingly distant threat became a reality in 2008 as the price of crude oil doubled to over \$140 a barrel, notwithstanding its recent reduction it is still predicted to reach \$200 a barrel by the end of this year. This illustrates that the dominant model of industrial, oil dependent food production is not a sustainable option for the future.

What is apparent is that 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 productivity must be maintained without a dependence on artificial nitrogen and fertilisers. The current dependence on nitrogen to produce food is not sustainable and we need to make a serious move to fully embrace organic methods of food production. (See appendix 1)

IOFGA are the largest organic certification body in Ireland and we have seen a huge growth in the sector in the past 5 years. This interest is coming both from consumers and food producers. The organic market is projected to grow to €400m by 2012. Currently up to 70% of organic products sold in this country are imported we would like to see this situation reversed by 2012 and ensure that Irish producers are in a position to supply up to 80% of the market domestically.

IOFGA would like to see the following resources and initiatives introduced by the government:

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- **Energy calculation:** There is a need to establish a standardised scheme for calculating energy efficiency in agriculture. The research would highlight the inputs and outputs in organic farming this would include comparisons with conventional agriculture. The model devised would develop a standard methodology for this type of research. IOFGA propose that this research project would initially be a 2 year project funded principally by the Research Fund Stimulus Programme. IOFGA will administer the project and external expertise will be consulted when necessary. This research project is an essential tool in calculating the economic and environmental output from organic agriculture for the whole island on an annual basis. It provides Ireland a unique opportunity to understand the economic, ecological, and commercial savings that organic farming offers. IOFGA are requesting that the government allocate €5m towards this study.
- **Conversion support:** The period of conversion to organic farming is an essential period for farmers and it is our considered opinion that €5m should be given to establish an organisation to offer advice and training for farmers to ensure that they become efficient organic food producers.
- **Organic Agency:** IOFGA would like to see a separate Organic Agency introduced to oversee the development and growth of the organic sector. The current national organic development groups do not have a dedicated budget. A single organic agency with a budget is the most effective way to achieve the targets set for 2012. IOFGA want to see €4m allocated towards the development of such an organisation.
- **Consumer campaign:** to introduce an integrated food and energy production campaign in Ireland. The importance of the use of local resources and local consumption will be an integral feature. Consumers need be encouraged to move towards supporting local organic food production systems that do not have a negative impact on the environment. People will also be encouraged and trained to grow their own food to cut down on food miles. IOFGA estimate that this campaign would cost €2m and can be co-ordinated run by the Organic Certification Bodies nationally.

The benefits to the economy of the development of the organic sector are many:

- Mitigating effects of climate change by moving away from the dependence on scarce fossil fuels for food production which will have enormous financial implications in the future for both the government and tax payers
- Move towards development of national food security

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- Generation of employment as organic agriculture is more labour intensive therefore providing employment in agricultural production and associated enterprises
- Development of further employment in processing and retailing organic goods as the sector develops
- Widespread adoption of environmental sustainable agricultural policies will ensure that there are many economic, social and environmental benefits to the economy.

It is the considered opinion of IOFGA that the government lay down the correct foundations for the sector to develop and achieve its full potential in Ireland. IOFGA recommends this submission as we believe that the adoption of the proposals in the budget will provide the impetus for the proper development of the organic sector.

APPENDIX 1

Conventional agriculture and climate change:

- The manufacture of nitrogen fertiliser is the main use of energy in agriculture; accounting for 37% of total energy use*

*<http://statistics.defra.gov.uk>

- Globally agriculture is the single largest source of the greenhouse gas, nitrous oxide – which is over 310 times more damaging than carbon dioxide
- The fertiliser industry is the largest industrial user of natural gas in the EU
- Each tonne of fertiliser made, gives off 6.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent greenhouse gases
- Fertiliser manufacture is also a major user of water, consuming 37 tonnes of water to make 1 tonne of nitrogen fertiliser

(Soil Association, Press release 2008)