

Number of organic farmers to rise by 40%

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The number of organic farmers in Ireland is set to jump by almost 40% later this year, as 500 new entrants complete their conversion.

The number of fully converted organic farmers will rise from 1,300 currently to 1,800 by the end of this year.

A huge spike in the number of applicants to the Organic Farming Scheme two years ago is coming home to roost as those farmers reach full organic status from May this year. A 60% increase in pay-

ment rates under the Organic Farming Scheme was the main driver behind the rush to convert to organic in 2015.

Conversion period payments rose marginally from €212/ha to €220/ha but maintenance period payments jumped from €106/ha to €170/ha. Most of the new organic farmers coming on stream will be cattle or cattle and sheep farmers, with tillage and dairy farmers in the minority.

While some farmers are concerned about how the influx of new entrants could affect the market and prices paid to them, the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association

(IOFGA) told the *Irish Farmers Journal* that processors have been working on developing new markets for organic beef.

"The two-year conversion period has given farmers and processors time to look at the market and develop additional outlets for Irish beef," said Grace Maher, of the IOFGA.

Demand for organic beef is particularly strong in the Nordic region, according to John Purcell of Good Herdsmen in Co Tipperary. "There are huge opportunities internationally for Irish organic beef," Purcell said. "Germany is one of the

biggest markets and we need to maintain and grow our presence there. One of the big supermarket chains could take all of the Irish supply base."

Good Herdsmen has doubled its cattle throughput from around 3,000 to 6,000 over the past five years, with around 60% of its output going abroad.

The national organic cattle kill currently stands at around 9,000, with Slaney Meats accounting for some 3,000 cattle and exporting the majority of its beef output.

Organic beef typically commands a price premium of 6/

kg to €1.20/kg higher than conventional beef prices.

Organic Farming Scheme
The full €6m budget for organic farming was soaked up by the unprecedented level of demand in 2015 and the scheme has remained closed since December that year.

"As it stands, the budget allocated for the Organic Farming Scheme in the Rural Development Programme has been exhausted," Joan O'Mahony from the Organic Unit at the Department of Agriculture and Food, Johnstown

Castle, told the *Irish Farmers Journal*.

"The situation is under constant review and should funds be made available from elsewhere in the Rural Development Programme, the Department would consider reopening the scheme in a targeted way," she said.

It is understood that if the scheme were to be reopened, only organic produce for which there is a clear market demand would be considered. Dairy and tillage would be the most likely areas to be targeted.



A LOT TO DIE FOR: John Angland feeding his pedigree Limousin cattle on farm at Portacarra, Oughterard, Co Galway. David Rutles

Glanbia spends €181m on sports nutrition

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Glanbia closed the deal on two acquisitions, costing

€50m, to move into the online retail channel, where it will sell direct to the consumer for the first time. The acquisitions are expected to bring in

€181m in additional revenue. The acquisitions are expected to bring in