

IRISH ORGANIC FARMERS' AND GROWERS' ASSOCIATION

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IOFGA SUBMISSION ON THE CAP REVIEW 2013

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.

Despite the current economic situation organic farming is a growth sector throughout the EU. Indications that this growth will continue well into the future are widespread. Organic farming meets environmental and social concerns expressed both by the public and policy makers in the EU.

The post 2013 reorganisation of CAP must focus on maintaining and developing multifunctional agriculture and organic farming meets the requirement of this. It is only by adopting this multifunctional approach that it can be demonstrated that the public money in the EU is being spent in the best interests of its citizens.

Organic farming offers a systematic solution to the main future challenges of climate change, biodiversity, soil protection and water management. It has a proven track record in its sustainable use of natural resources coupled with a strong economic performance.

While organic farming is still relatively small in Ireland compared with other European countries (just over 1% of utilisable agricultural land is certified as organic compared with 4% which is the EU average) it has added considerable value to the rural economy in Ireland. Organic farming is innovative and market orientated and it secures jobs while maintaining sustainable agricultural production. All of these criteria have been outlined as important for Irish agriculture in previous policy submissions regarding the CAP.

The organic farming sector is well regulated and has delivered public goods in areas such as food safety, preservation of

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landscape, care of the environment and animal welfare. Therefore more funding should be allocated towards the development of the organic sector. Research activities in organic agriculture and food production can have a significant impact on technology progress and economic performance and this area requires more funding within the EU.

Policy measures must also ensure that the benefits of organic agriculture are not threatened by the introduction of GM crops and products in the EU.

The current system of payments based on historic payments has led to a system whereby the majority of payments are concentrated in the south and east of the country where farms are typically larger. The rejection of the system of placing a ceiling on the amount of money in any one payment was rejected prior to the Health Check however IOFGA feel that this is an area which should be revisited and we would recommend capping payments at €50,000. We would also favour the introduction of a flatter payment system whereby money would be redistributed towards the west and north of Ireland where farms are traditionally smaller. We feel that this would benefit a greater number of farmers and is better allocation of public money.

Organic farming fulfils much of the criteria outlined in Pillar 1 however it also meets requirements for Pillar 2 with particular reference to climate change, renewable energy, biodiversity and water management. Therefore the significance of organic farming in Ireland moving forward should not be underestimated and IOFGA are requesting that adequate funds be allocated to the sector. The new scheme must support low-carbon farming it should provide incentives for encouraging farming practices and soil-management that minimise carbon emissions and maximise carbon storage in soil. Organic farming encompasses these practices and this type of farming will be essential if future challenges are to be met successfully.