

Charlie McConalogue TD  
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine  
Agriculture House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

21<sup>st</sup> April 2022

Dear Minister,

You will be well aware that the production cost increases sheep farmers are now exposed to have very serious consequences for the sector. It is a vulnerable low-income sector dependent on direct payments for over 100% of Family Farm Income (FFI). To this end, there is an immediate need for interventions to support sheep farmers.

The updated Situation and Outlook report issued by Teagasc clearly identifies the seriousness of the situation. The average income on sheep farms in 2022 is forecast to reduce by 20%, based on increased production costs of 30%.

In addition, there is also huge concern among sheep farmers for the store lamb trade later this year. Hill sheep farmers, in particular, depend heavily on this trade.

Sheep farmers do not have the resources or the capacity in their income to take on the costs now associated with producing sheep meat. The sector already has challenges in providing a year-round supply of sheep meat for our key customers and forced changes due to the affordability of inputs could compound the situation.

Minister, set out in the attached document are the measures IFA sees necessary to address these issues on farms which will allow sheep farmers put in place their plans for the year ahead.

We are requesting you give this matter your immediate attention and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Cullinan  
IFA President



Kevin Comiskey  
IFA National Sheep Committee Chair

c.c. *Sinead McPhillips, Assistant Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Food and the marine*  
*Mike Magan, Chair, National Fodder and Food Security Committee*

## IFA Requirements for the Sheep Sector

### 1. Availability of key inputs such as **fertiliser, fuel and feed.**

There is an urgent need to provide an inventory of fertiliser and fuel supplies followed by a full appraisal of available and projected feed supplies for the remainder of the year and next winter.

### 2. All land must be utilised to produce food. Restrictions on land use under schemes must be removed to ensure farmers are facilitated in using all lands at their disposal to produce food. These include areas such as traditional hay meadows and low input grasslands in the GLAS scheme.

- **Traditional hay meadows**

- The facilitation for grazing must be extended past the 15<sup>th</sup> April to allow farmers utilise the potential of all grasslands at their disposal
- Farmers must be allowed cut the meadows prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> July to maximise the quality of the crop and facilitate earlier utilisation of the lands afterwards
- The limits on chemical fertiliser usage must be increased.

- **Low input grasslands**

- Farmers must be allowed harvest hay and or silage on these lands
- The limits on chemical fertiliser usage must be removed.

- **Emergency Catch/Fodder Crop Incentive**

- In order to maximise the amount of fodder produced in 2022, all options including fodder and cover crops must be implemented. The emergency tillage incentive is a welcome and timely initiative but livestock farmers with poor or limited access to machinery may not be in a position to plant tillage crops but the planting of temporary fodder or catch crops into grassland later in the season could be more feasible
- Fodder crop establishment in the late summer/early autumn may also provide a good opportunity for efficient use of slurry if available on farm
- A significant area of fodder or catch crops could be planted for grazing by sheep and lambs later in the season if financial incentives were available
- The fodder incentive scheme launched in response to the drought event in 2018 was successful with almost 20,000ha of catch crops planted. With significant concerns over the cost and availability of imported concentrate feeds in the second half of this year and as yet an unknown quantity of silage harvested, IFA believes a similar incentive should be given serious consideration by the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine
- A payment of at least €300/ha for the establishment and production of catch crops such as, but not limited to: kale, forage rape, tillage radish, redstart, Tyfon hybrid turnip.
- This level of payment would be required to cover the significantly elevated fertiliser and fuel costs that farmers are currently experiencing
- Crops should be sown to ensure a worthwhile yield of biomass is produced before winter.

### 3. **Direct financial support to sheep farmers**

Decisions to put ewes in lamb or purchase store lambs require a financial commitment into 2023 with no guarantee of a return. The stakes in the current climate are too high for sheep farmers to take these decisions without direct supports. The sheep sector already has issues with guaranteed levels of year-round supplies for our key customers, this situation cannot be exacerbated and decisions taken on farms in the coming weeks and months will determine our sheep meat supplies and the timing of them for the remainder of 2022 and into 2023.

IFA is seeking a direct payment for sheep farmers based on the latest production cost increases identified by Teagasc based on stocking levels on the farm for all inputs.

- Immediate direct financial supports must be provided to farmers to offset the increased costs for feed, fertiliser and fuel on sheep farms
- These supports must be paid directly to farmers based on their level of production
- The updated Teagasc Situation and Outlook report identifies the levels of input cost increases for sheep farmers and should be used as the basis to determine the levels of direct financial support per farm
- These payments must be provided without condition in order to allow each farmer address the situation on his/her farm that best suits the farm enterprise and land type.

The crisis fund of up to €48m which the Commission have provided €16m towards and allowed flexibility for 200% national co-financing must be used as part of these supports for sector

4. Guaranteed support for farmers investing in sheep production for the remainder of the year and into 2023. It is vital sheep farmers continue to finish lambs and hoggets in line with our well-established production systems. These practices require upfront investment in animals and feed which in normal times carries a degree of risk. This risk is now at levels that are not sustainable for the low margin sheep sector. Any disruption to the trade at the level of investment sheep farmers have made and will make, to produce sheep meat for the Autumn of 2022 and 2023 will have devastating consequences for these farmers.

There is a real concern the trade of store lambs will be severely disrupted and in turn our supply chain for sheep meat if there is a failure to put guarantees in place for farmers who ordinarily finish lambs for this Autumn and into 2023. Direct financial supports and guaranteed price returns must be committed to for these farmers to ensure production continues as normal for the remainder of the year and into 2023.

5. **Food security** must be protected and food producers valued

The direction of travel of policy makers at EU and national level has failed EU consumers and EU farmers. The relentless pursuit of a cheap food policy; erosion of supports for food production; and the trade-off of Irish and EU farmers in trade deals for the benefit of large corporations and industrialists has undermined Irish and EU food sovereignty.

The CAP, Green Deal and Farm to Fork have further undermined the ability of Irish and EU farmers to produce food. The damage done to productive farmers in these flawed policies must be reversed.

Irish and EU farmers must be supported directly for the production of food based on their levels of production. EU and national policy must value the vital role of farmers in providing security of food for the citizens of the EU, food which is produced to the highest environmental and welfare standards in the world. Sheep farmers must be provided with €30/ewe payment in the Strategic Plans for the new CAP.

Trade deals cannot be allowed undermine the viability of Irish and EU farmers by facilitating access for sheep meat produced outside of the EU and at differing production systems that do not meet the exacting welfare and environmental standards of Irish and EU sheep farmers.

**20<sup>th</sup> April 2022**