



Macra na Feirme

Pre-Budget Submission

Macra na Feirme 2023



Table of Contents

Macra na Feirme Background and Priorities for Budget 2023	3
Executive summary	4
Summary of Proposals	6
Rural Infrastructure	8
Work Activation Measures - Youth Unemployment & Education	11
Youth Work Funding.....	13
Transport.....	14
Health.....	19
Energy Generation.....	21
Agriculture.....	22
Pathways to Farm Generational Renewal	25
Farm Income and Tax.....	26
Capital Taxes	27
Farmer Health, Safety and Wellbeing	31
VAT Returns	32
Sustainability Measures	38

Macra na Feirme Background and Priorities for Budget 2023

Delivering on rural sustainability to benefit young people and future generations

A Red C poll published in April 2022 highlighted that young people aged 18-34 reported the greatest impact of the rising cost of living on their quality of life. Within this age cohort 3 in 4 young people said their quality of life had reduced due to the higher cost of living. The impact for 9 in 10 young people is that they are less confident about the future due to the cost of living.

Young people in rural Ireland are particularly vulnerable, and Macra na Feirme is asking the Government to address the huge financial challenges faced by rural young people either in employment, unemployment or further and higher education and training in budget 2023.

Macra na Feirme has set out priorities and proposals across the following four key themes for budget 2023:

- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Environment
- Generational renewal in farming

Government action on addressing the series of policy proposals, as outlined in Macra na Feirme's pre-budget document, will help address the challenges faced by rural young people.



If realised, these proposals will mean that:

- Young people have access to essential supports, services and infrastructure.
- Rural young people are supported to deal with the impact of the rising cost of living.
- Long-standing inequalities for rural young people are being addressed.
- Generational renewal in agriculture is prioritised and financially supported and young people have a future in the sector.

Executive summary

Macra na Feirme pre-budget submission 2022 into 2023

Macra na Feirme in this pre-budget submission for 2022 into 2023 is crafting the individual asks off government around one central theme, that of rural sustainability. Macra na Feirme refers to itself as the heartbeat of rural Ireland. We are an organization of 11,000 members spread across 170 clubs distributed across 26 counties. We represent rural youth, rural youth are our members between 17 and 35, they are the future of rural Ireland, without them, rural Ireland as we know it will wither and die.

This submission as previously scribed is centred around rural sustainability, we want our members and those who are not our members to have a realistic chance of living and working where they chose. We are calling for the choice to live in rural Ireland to be a realistic option for all, we want rural Ireland to be sustainable.

To arrive at this submission, we have interacted with our members across the length and breadth of this land in order to ascertain the issues that affect their ability to live and work in rural Ireland. As a result of this interaction, we have arrived at four central pillars:

- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Environment
- Generational renewal in farming

As is clear from the above list, each of the four pillars is a necessity to create rural sustainability. Without access to affordable housing in whatever form it takes, people will not be in a position to live in rural Ireland. Housing without infrastructure is of no use, we saw after the collapse of the so-called Celtic tiger thousands of newly built homes that were subsequently bulldozed



as there was no market for them. There was no market as rural living in some of the localities was not viable due to a lack of infrastructure and indeed employment. We have seen over the last two years, that remote working is for many a realistic option, in so doing these remote workers are bringing much-needed life back into our rural communities. However, these workers need services for the families that they hope to bring up in rural Ireland as well as a broadband connection that allows them to work in a rural area and contribute to the local economy and local community. Finally, we have to support our young farmers. The fact that there are more farmers over the age of 80 than under 35 does not appear to alarm anyone. In a time when the need for food security was never as acute, how we allow the threat of extinction on our food producers baffles belief. It is and will be our younger food producers that have always and will always embrace new technology,



new methods of farming and new ideas that will lead the farming sector to reduce its emissions in line with government targets.

Without real support, the disintegration of rural Ireland will continue apace, we will see the best land in the world for the natural production of food go fallow, and we will see the housing crises that some of our cities are currently experiencing get considerably worse. If it is intent of this government to save rural Ireland, then it must act and act fast.



Summary of Proposals

Macra na Feirme pre-budget submission 2023

Rural Broadband

- Increased geographic coverage of the existing 4G network to address black spots – licensing fee decrease for increased bandwidth allowance for mobile phone companies.
- High-Speed broadband available to all homesthroughout Ireland and upgrading of the current mobile network to 5G nationwide.
- Access to rural working hubs in each rural town and village to enable remote workers to access social and technical facilities.

Working from Home

Taxation Measures for Employers

- Tax credit for the investment or upgrading of non-essential work items that contribute to remote working wellbeing – Internet connectivity

Taxation Reliefs for Employees

- Increase on €16 tax-free weekly allowance to €20 with simplification of the application method.
- Internet connectivity investments to enable remote work should be provided for by a micro-capital investment grant.

Education

- Invest €200 million to deliver additional education, training and apprenticeship opportunities and other employment measures
- Increase of funding for an apprenticeship programme to €180 million with the addition of 1000 spaces under NAA.¹ Therefore, widening the scope of apprenticeship.²

Universal Basic Income Pilot

- Commitment needed in Budget 2023 to provide funding for UBI Pilot outlined in the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future.

Youth Work Funding

- Invest an additional €12 million in youth work, of which €10.6 million should be allocated to the youth services grant
- Additional funding resources to improve the vetting process 11
- Increase the VAT Compensation Scheme for Charities cap from €5 million to €20 million.

Transport

Road Transport and Car Use

- Investment in the M20 project
- Increased provision of rural 44KW/50KW charging points
- Through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), a government fund would be created and used by the industry to provide low-cost car insurance for young drivers who meet appropriate and lower-risk criteria for 2 years. This model is similar to the SCBI model of low-cost finance, in which the risk is shared by the taxpayer and industry. Criteria-licence type: full. Age: 20-25, no penalty points. Car size: 1.0l-1.6l, use of car-social, domestic and work commute only.

Bus Network

- Free travel for those 25 years of age and under
- An increase of €5 million to the provision of Local Link Service
- Investment to return and upgrade bus stops along rural routes, including investment in modernisation and bus tracking for user interface (accessibility)

Train Network

- Carry out a feasibility study into completing the M3 Parkway Extension, including Climate Impact Assessment
- Investment in Phase 2 and 3 of the Western Rail Corridor
- Carry out a feasibility study into high-speed rail between Cork and Dublin, in line with the assessment of high-speed rail between Dublin and Belfast
- Identify investment for upgrading of rail carriages to accept greater bicycle storage
- Increase investment in upgrading rail platforms for accessibility

Air and Sea Travel

- Projects which provide alternatives for domestic flights should be prioritised
- The Irish government should support moves at the EU level to introduce a carbon tax on aviation fuel.
- Increase investment in the facilities and

infrastructure in major ports to encourage low carbon travel.

- Advance cross-border efforts with the UK to ensure a more viable alternative using the land bridge for passengers to continental Europe
- Investment in increasing international travel routes for regional airports

Healthcare

General Practice

- Restoration of the distance coding and increasing Rural Practice Allowances to pre-2009 levels³
- The introduction of such a Patient Location Allowance would improve viability, make house calls both during and outside of normal hours possible and lead to a reduction in the number of ambulance calls

Community Healthcare Centres

- Funding for additional services – nutrition, counselling
- Increased pay incentives for high-quality consultants to co-locate or relocate to rural outreach centres
- Progression options are limited for staff. Improvement needed to keep staff – Government
- incentive scheme to ensure there is a service provider/s in rural areas.
- Priority to fill GP vacancies in rural areas

Drug Use and Addiction Service

- Commitment to health-led approach – funding for community mental health services to include addiction counsellors
- Funding of transport for those receiving addiction counselling or other services
- Funding research into “the extent and patterns of substance use in Ireland (including rural areas)”
- Significant increase in opioid substitution treatment in GPs – ties to the above around reduction in GPs in rural areas
- Pilot project for first aid overdose and drug-related –funding through Skillnet for training

Mental Health

- Targeting of funding for intervention mental youth service providers to offer to fund for joint initiatives
- Funding to assist families supporting those with mental health concerns

Sexual Health

- Provision of modern and consistent sexual education to those in education, including consent training.

Energy Generation

- Increases to the Just Transition Fund – allowing for the use of the micro-loan scheme to incentivise investment on-farm for energy generation and conversion of business
- Significant changes to Retrofit Scheme
 - Ringfenced rural investment
 - Reduce barriers to grant-income band reform
 - Community Energy Grant – expanding
 - Linking of property tax to energy rating



Rural Infrastructure

Rural Broadband

Ireland lacks high-speed broadband. Consequently, 29% of Irish business leaders have identified an expectation of lost productivity, primarily due to poor internet connectivity. This draws the National Rollout Broadband plan into a new perspective and priority, particularly to ensure a two-speed economic recovery between urban and rural working opportunities does not occur.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Target of increased geographic coverage of the existing 4G network to address black spots licensing fee decrease for increased bandwidth allowance for mobile phone companies
- High-speed broadband available to all homes throughout Ireland and upgrading of the current mobile network to 5G nationwide
- Access to rural working hubs in each rural town and village to enable remote workers to access social and technical facilities.

Justification

The National Broadband Plan for Ireland contract was awarded in 2019, and committed to supplying a minimum broadband speed of 30Mbps, regardless of how rural or remote a home was. While Macra na Feirme does acknowledge that difficulties may have presented themselves during the rollout of the scheme, broadband delivery to rural communities needs to become a priority of the government. Broadband should be seen as an essential asset to rural Ireland. As farming becomes more technological and the Basic Payment Scheme moves to an online application-only process, there is an urgent need to fast-track a reasonable broadband service to rural communities.

For rural youth in education, be it second or third level, broadband is an indispensable tool for carrying out assignments and researching topics. The phasing out of cheques has brought payment methods for all businesses and people into sharp focus, prompting a new era for business transactions.

As agriculture moves further and further down a path where technology and precision farming play a larger part, a quality broadband infrastructure will be required to allow farmers to utilise this technology to help Ireland reach its climate change targets.

For some organisations, the phasing out of cash will be seen as a significant movement, ultimately changing the way they have operated for years. However, the benefits of incorporating new electronic payment technologies must be embraced and complemented by access to broadband. An acceptable supply of broadband will deliver additional potential to rural Ireland to attract businesses away from cities, therefore benefiting growth in rural communities through the creation of jobs and attraction of investment.

Hubs have the potential to provide remote workers who have been forced to work from home with facilities outside of the main office that is needed to efficiently carry out their roles. An example of this would be providing a backup to those who may need privacy or reduced noise/ interruptions for important conference calls to clients or colleagues, or access to machinery such as photocopiers that again may not be accessible from home.

Macra na Feirme insists that rural Ireland must not be allowed to fall behind any further. With Covid-19 already having had severe impacts on the country's state of employment, along with the rollout of high-speed broadband, making hubs sustainable is a priority to ensuring that other forms of employment are available to keep rural Ireland alive.

Working from Home

The Covid-19 Crisis has demonstrated the increased value of remote work to both employers and employees. The definition of remote work is often confused by many. For clarity, this document defines remote working as in the report 'Remote Work in Ireland; Future Jobs 2019' developed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

This definition defines remote work as a 'form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises regularly ¹.

Taxation Measures for Employers

- Tax credit for the investment or upgrading of non-essential work items that contribute to remote working wellbeing.

Taxation Reliefs for Employees

- Increase on €16 tax-free weekly allowance to €20 with simplification of the application method.
- Internet connectivity investments to enable remote work should be provided for by a micro-capital investment grant.

Remote Working Hubs

- Build on the Connected Hubs Call to fund the renovation of existing buildings into remote working hubs.

Justification

A recent survey conducted by NUIG showed a significant increase in the desire to work remotely, with 83% of respondents wishing for more work from home, with the majority of those opting for remote for all or part of their work week ². Similarly, there are numerous benefits of remote working to both employers and national commitments, such as achieving the targets of reduced emissions from transport and reduced costs of investment in road transport. 61% of Irish business leaders in a survey by PwC are considering ways to make remote working a permanent option ³



However, significant barriers exist, including issues of childcare and, more fundamentally, the lack of connectivity for rural Ireland.

Macra na Feirme would like to see the weekly allowance increased to €20, which equals approximately €960 per annum when accounting for a standard 48-week working year. That would be an extra €164 per person per year, costing the state approximately €16.4 million. But this additional money would not just disappear into thin air. Rather, an increase of the weekly allowance to €20 would result in increased spending in the local economy by those who receive it.

Satellite installation costs households approximately €110 each if they choose to invest in this system. The government has now estimated that 90% of premises in Ireland will have access to high-speed broadband within the next three years, giving plenty of opportunities for flexible and remote work, smart farming opportunities, digital learning, reliable electronic payment and bookings, etc. Even so, the Irish people require these opportunities right now, and not just going into the future.

The government has already committed to the establishment of a national network of over 400 remote working hubs. These hubs have the potential to provide remote workers with facilities outside of the main office, which is necessary to carry out their roles effectively and efficiently, e.g., access to printers and photocopiers and separate space for maintaining work-lifelance. Macra na Feirme believes that the creation of working hubs need not be new buildings, but instead encourages the idea of regenerating existing buildings in rural towns and villages. The proposed fund would allow for the installation of broadband, technical equipment and office furnishings to create fit-for-purpose remote working hubs for communities.



Maternity/Paternal Leave

Macra na Feirme would like to see new parents who are entitled to parental leave be able to divide up their hours rather than take two weeks in one go. These changes will aid in the tackling of gender equality. A shared paid leave system gives parents more choice, flexibility and equality. Parents can make decisions on personal circumstances and what works best for the family.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Implement a shared paid leave system of up to 30 weeks to be used in conjunction by either parent.

Justification

A shared paid leave system gives parents more flexibility to decide how they want to share the care of their child rather than have it decided for them. It is a method of equalising opportunities for both parents that also allows families to balance the needs of their home and workplace together. Studies have shown that fathers who play an active role in their children's lives in the early stages are more likely to share child-rearing duties later, which reduces the imbalance between the sexes when it comes to domestic duties and supports women returning to the workplace.

People's lives cannot be sectioned into neat boxes. Macra na Feirme believes that it would be much more beneficial for parents if these proposals were enacted. An extension of the term of weeks based on flexible working hours allows for greater flexibility in a modern household. This arrangement could alleviate pressures caused by childcare costs commuting, resulting in a happier workforce and better quality of life overall.

Childcare

Macra na Feirme believes that there is value in investing in early learning and school-age children. Investment at these stages will have a long-lasting impact on not only their own lives but also on communities. Early action means that later learning is more likely to be effective and to continue through their lives. It is a good investment in the future for communities and the country as a whole.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Increase the Early Learning and Care and School-age Childcare Capital programme to 10million – taking into account the early suspension of the scheme in 2020.

Justification

Ireland does not have a well-developed system of public provision of early education and is grossly

under-investing in this area compared to other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Ireland has spent just 0.1% of its GDP on pre-primary education compared to the OECD average, which has increased from 0.5% to 0.8%⁴. The Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme was a positive first step in addressing the differences, but it is only one element needed by Ireland's youngest citizens. Much more needs to be done to improve this figure.

Housing

The Help to Buy incentive is a scheme to aid first-time property buyers.⁵ Home buyers have witnessed an increase in the price of homes, with the CSO reporting that residential property prices in the year to June increased by 6.9% nationally.⁶

Macra na Feirme proposal

- Extension of the Help to Buy incentive until the end of 2026.
- Increased provision in the budget in the vacant property refurbishment grant
- Equity loan scheme should be extended to 2026 and increase the budget to allow for private development.

Justification

The Help to Buy incentive is a highly popular scheme by first-time buyers, with more than 22,000 availing of the scheme since its inception. This has cost an estimated €390 million.⁷ The programme for the government commits to retaining and expanding the Help to Buy initiative for new properties and self-build properties.⁸ Many first-time buyers cite the struggle to save for a deposit while also paying other commitments such as rent. The Help to Buy incentive aids those who are struggling to save by giving them a leg up on the property ladder, should that be their wish.

The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant is an extremely useful resource providing funding to refurbish vacant and derelict homes in regional towns and villages. Macra na Feirme would like to see

an increase in the budget for this grant in order to expand the offering to vacant and derelict homes in the rural countryside that are currently not covered under this grant. The current grant applies to towns and villages within a population of over 400 people, as well some smaller ones, which have sufficient services and amenities⁹. The CSO estimates that there were 1,494 remote vacant dwellings 10km or more from their nearest town or village, while some 41,703 empty homes fall between 1km and 5 km radius from their nearest town or village¹⁰.

Work Activation Measures - Youth Unemployment & Education

When recessions and shocks to the economy hit, young workers are always disproportionately affected, as proven by the last recession when youth unemployment reached over 31% in 2012, even when emigration was a possibility. The evidence points to the potential impact of the measures necessary to protect public health being devastating for young people in the labour force.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Invest €200 million to deliver additional education, training and apprenticeship opportunities and other employment measures
- Increase of funding¹¹ for an apprenticeship programme to 180 million with the addition of
- 1,000 additional spaces under NAA – widen the scope of apprenticeship¹²

Justification

It cannot be denied that young people have suffered serious disruption to their current education, employment and relationships, not to mention their prospects and wellbeing. CSO data in early May 2020 indicated that 122,214 young people under the age of 25 were on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP)¹³. Macra na Feirme welcomes the fact that the figure has since declined by 26.7% (-32,670) to 89,544 in early July as the economy reopened. Young people under 25 comprise 11.7%¹⁴ of the labour force¹⁵. It is concerning that the percentage decrease in young people returning to work and leaving the

⁴ Social Justice Ireland, The Importance of Public Investment in Early Years, 2020.

<https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/importance-public-investment-early-years>

⁵ Revenue, 2021, <https://www.revenue.ie/en/property/help-to-buy-incentive/index.aspx>

⁶ CSO, 2021, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/r-rppi/residentialpropertypriceindexjune2021/>

⁷ RTE, 2021, <https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2021/0508/1217778-what-supports-are-available-for-first-time-buyers/>

⁸ Gov.ie, 2021, pg 55, <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>

⁹ https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/housing_grants_and_schemes/vacant_property_refurbishment_grant.html

¹⁰ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp1hii/cp1hii/vac/>

¹¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2019-press-releases/PR19-06-03.html>

¹² <https://www.ft.com/content/1a82e8e0-04cf-11e7-aa5b-6bb07f5c8e12>

¹³ Detailed COVID-19 Income Supports and Live Register Tables, CSO, June 2020 <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/liveregister/detailedcovid-19incomesupportandliveregistertables/>

¹⁴ CSO, Labour Force Survey, Q1 2020 <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/labourforcesurveyqlfs/>

¹⁵ Detailed COVID-19 Income Supports and Live Register Tables, CSO, June 2020 <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/liveregister/detailedcovid-19incomesupportandliveregistertables/>

¹⁶ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 591, 26th March 2019 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2019-03-26/>

PUP (-26.7%) in the eight weeks between early May 2020 and early July 2020 is lower than the overall rate of decline of -31% and the rate of decline of older worker cohorts (aged 35-44) of -35%. This could indicate that job losses among the young will be higher, resulting in younger workers being unemployed for longer.

The rate of youth unemployment (15-24 years) was also more than three times that of those aged 25-74 years, which stood at 3.7%. Another area of concern is the continued high number of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET). In 2017, Ireland’s NEET rate among 15–29-year-olds was 13.1%¹⁶. Macra na Feirme believes it is vital for the government to support the young workers made unemployed by the pandemic, but it is also important that we do not forget those who were unable before the current crisis. The consistent poverty rate for young people aged 15-24 years in 2015 was 15.6%, which is almost double the overall rate of 8.7% and the highest of all age cohorts.

We welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government to publish an updated Apprenticeship Active Plan¹⁷. Macra na Feirme also welcomes the expansion and growth of apprenticeships in the last number of years. In May 2020, the number of apprentices in training was 18,079¹⁸, up from 10,445 in 2016¹⁹. Funding has also increased by 131% from €52.7m in 2014 to €169m in 2020²⁰. We support the overall commitments in the Programme for Government to increase the number of new entrants, expand apprenticeships into new sectors and increase access to underrepresented groups, such as young women, people with disabilities and

disadvantaged groups. The most recent data indicated that only 2% of apprentices are young women and 2.8% have a disability. As the number and range of apprenticeships expand, these opportunities must remain open to all young people, especially disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. Any policy or measure to increase participation by underrepresented groups will require investment. In 2019, the funding for SOLAS pre-apprentice programmes was €873,000, which is less than 0.5% of the overall apprenticeship budget, with no direct state funding for access to apprenticeship programmes. Macra na Feirme supports the proposal to implement the TU Dublin ATA programme nationwide involving the key stakeholders, such as SOLAS, the local Education and Training Boards, institutes of technology, local employers and the local youth and community sector. The TU Dublin ATA programme supports the participants over a 12-week 12 weeks a range of apprenticeship opportunities, assists with CV and interview preparation and also includes two weeks of work experience anticipated cost of such a national ATA scheme in 2021 is €5 million based on 1,000 places for €5,000 per place. The government’s plan will aim to register 10,000 new apprentices every year by 2025. That is the equivalent of having an apprenticeship space for one in six of our Leaving Certificate classes every year.

The fast-tracking of the creation of a new National Apprenticeship Office to drive the agenda and implement the plan so that people do not feel pressured to follow the traditional routes of college and university should then alleviate the pressure on these institutes.

Universal Basic Income Pilot

The UBI is an automatic payment from the state to every adult legal resident, without any conditions attached. It would be tax-free and designed to replace in-work tax credits and core social welfare payments, with additional top-up payments remaining for those with special needs pensioners. The Programme for Government commits parties to “request the Low Pay Commission to examine Universal Basic Income, informed by a review of previous international pilots, and resulting in a universal basic income pilot in the lifetime of the Government”. Macra na Feirme feels that 2022 would be an ideal time to carry out such a pilot scheme subjected to the outcome of the Low Pay Commission, during a recession, the number of people out of work and receiving social welfare will be higher, meaning the net cost of running such a trial be lower. A pilot which catered for 2,000 young people (under the age of 30) paid at the Living Wage without conditions would cost the state a net of €27,293,980.

	Cost/UBI per participant	Cost of pilot pa
2,000 Participants in UBI	€24,202	€48,405,980
2,000 individuals on Jobseekers	€10,556	€21,112,000
Balance		€27.293.980

Macra na Feirme's proposal

- Commitment needed in Budget 2023 to provide funding for UBI Pilot outlined in the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future

Justification

The Universal Basic Income has been successfully trialed in Finland, Canada and Alaska. The projects aimed to test whether a basic income payment given regularly to low- or no-income participants would reduce poverty more effectively. Results show that encouraging them to work and reducing the stigmatization associated with payments resulted in better health and better chances in life.

Lessons can be learned from those previous pilots to ensure a greater chance of success for the Irish pilot. The rural economy and viability of rural life would be improved by UBI. It has the potential to greatly impact farmers and others in rural Ireland, making businesses viable and supporting those on low incomes, but the benefits are not only for them. Small businesses and entrepreneurs could also benefit, as they might not have to worry about making an income from the business while it is being established. Furthermore, people in the arts may also find UBI beneficial.

Youth Work Funding

The Youth Services Grant Scheme available to Macra na Feirme, along with all National Youth Organisations, has been cut annually from 2008 to 2018 while the demand for services from rural youth has grown significantly. With Ireland's proportion of young citizens ever increasing, additional funding will be required to ensure that Ireland's youth is provided for. Macra na Feirme's services represent significant value for money. Indecon (2012), in their assessment of the economic value of youth work, predicted that a €1 investment in youth services will save the State €2.20 in the future. Further investment is required to develop the already stretched services to rural youth. Funding must also be apportioned to provide resources within the organisation. Macra na Feirme's asks are in line with the asks of NYCI (National Youth Council of Ireland) in respect of youth work and the youth services grant.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Invest an additional €12 million in youth work, of which €10.6 million should be allocated to the youth services grant
- Additional allocation of funds to improve the vetting process
- Increase the VAT Compensation Scheme for Charities cap from €5 million to €20 million

Justification

If significant support and investment in the youth work sector are not provided, there could be justified concerns about the effectiveness and engagement of their organisations in the future as many lose significant income. Without this support, organisations will not have sufficient resources to engage with young people and volunteers in 2022 and beyond. The programme for government has a commitment to "continue to invest in the community an voluntary family support services and youth work, recognising their value in preventing harm and in responding to the needs of vulnerable families"²¹.

The VAT Compensation Scheme for Charities, which came into place in 2019, is capped at €5m worth of funds to repay VAT to charities. Applications from charities of 2020 topped €40m, so Macra na Feirme is seeking an increase from €5 million to €20 million. Charities are, in many cases, providing services to the Irish population which cannot be provided by the government. These charities have been severely hit by the recent pandemic, and the cap increase will allow them to put more back into their services and therefore provide more for those they assist.

We must see evidence of this commitment in Budget 2022. Additional investment in youth work is crucial in supporting the sector to meet the needs of the growing number of young people, particularly the most vulnerable. This is even more important now as we emerge from COVID-19, because of the new way of working that many youth organisations have developed to engage with young people while meeting the social distancing requirements will be more staff and cost-intensives already there prior to COVID before as many young people have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. One of the positive indicators in Ireland is our growing youth population. Census 2016 shows that the number of people aged 10-24 will grow by 4.6% between 2020 and 2025²². Although this a positive development, it will also create challenges. With adequate resources, voluntary youth work organisations are well placed to support young people to reach their potential and make Ireland the best country in the world to be a young person. Voluntary youth organisations are active in almost every community, reaching over 383,000 young people. They are particularly active in supporting those from economically or socially disadvantaged communities, with 53.3% of all participants coming from these areas²³.

¹⁷ Programme for Government, 2020 <https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/2020/06/draft-programme-for-govt.pdf/P21/99>

¹⁸ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 119-123, June 23rd, 2020, <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-05-08a.1001>

¹⁹ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 114, 117-119, 18th January 2018 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2018-01-18a.295>

²⁰ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 114, 117-119, 18th January 2018 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2018-01-18a.295>

²¹ Programme for Government, 2020 <https://www.rte.ie/documents/news/2020/06/draft-programme-for-govt.pdf/P81>

²² E3003, Population 2011-2016 by Single Year of Age, Sex, County and City, CSO, <https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=E3003&PLanguage=0>

²³ Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work by Indecon Economic Consultants, pp 49 November 2012

Voluntary youth organisations work in a broad range of areas, such as promoting active citizenship, social and political education, and supporting youth participation in education and training. They deliver programmes to promote positive mental health, school completion and employability. Additionally, they run projects in youth justice, equality and alcohol and drug awareness. Furthermore, they organise international exchange programmes, allowing them to meet, engage and work with young people from other countries and cultures. The track record, credibility and reach of the youth sector is also demonstrated by the fact that we have the highest level of involvement in youth services in the EU, with 26% of young people active in a youth club/organisation²⁴.

One of the unique features of youth work services in Ireland is the contribution of over 40,000 adult volunteers who work with and for young people. These volunteers bring their life experiences and expertise and provide a critical resource to organisations in the sector and considerable savings to the State. In 2012, Indecon estimated the annual economic value of youth work-related volunteering to be €47.7m²⁵. Too often the State has viewed the work of recruiting, training and maintaining volunteers as being cost neutral, when in fact organisations have to invest staff time and resources in gaining new volunteers and supporting existing ones.

We acknowledge that youth work funding has increased in the last number of years. However, it is important to state that the sector endured very steep cuts in the 2008-2014 period, during which investment in youth work services from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) decreased by 31.8%, from €73.1m in 2008 to €49.8m in 2014. Since then, the investment from DCYA has increased. In 2020, it stood at €61.8m. However, this means that financial support for youth work is still €11.3m, or over 15% below that of over a decade ago, without taking into account inflation or the increased number of young people in our population in need of services. The data also indicates that young people and the youth work sector have not been adequately resourced compared to other sectors, given the increased resources available in the 2014-2020 period. Our analysis shows that while overall government expenditure has increased by 17% between 2011 and 2020, youth work funding has increased by 2.7%²⁶.



Transport

Roads

The M20 project will provide better connectivity between the second and third largest cities in Ireland, Cork and Limerick. Macra na Feirme would like assurances that this project will have sufficient investment in order for it to be implemented and completed in a timely manner. Both of these proposals can improve quality of life for numerous Macra na Feirme members, as well as the general public.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Investment in the M20 project
- Increased provision of rural 44KW/50KW charging points

Justification

In the 1998 National Roads Need Study, there was already an identified need for improvements to the M20, so this is not a new issue for road users²⁷. A scheme made it through the planning and design phases and was submitted to An Bord Pleanála in 2010 for statutory planning approval, but prior to a decision, the project was withdrawn due to the economic downturn. This project, if carried through, can allow for the safe and efficient movement of people, goods and services in the future. Furthermore, it could reduce land transport journey times and improve journey time reliability.

Currently, there are 1,100 public charge points available across Ireland. Macra na Feirme would like to see a 10% increase in the number of public charge points available to users. In a recent AA Insurance survey, Irish buyers are still more likely to buy a diesel-engine car than any other type, with only 7% of the 8,000 surveyed saying they would consider buying an electric car in 2020. Some potential buyers cite range anxiety as a factor for not purchasing an electric vehicle. In order to overcome this problem, the government should consider increasing the number of public charge points available around the country, giving the public the confidence that should they need to recharge, there are plenty of locations to do so.

Car Insurance

Currently, the cost of car insurance, particularly for young drivers, is high – so high, in fact, that it is forcing young drivers off the roads in some cases. The legal necessity coupled with expensive car insurance makes it difficult for young, first-time drivers to receive a reasonable quote for their car insurance. In a survey conducted by the AA, more than a quarter of parents have helped their children by paying for a proportion of the motor insurance policy²⁸.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), a government fund would be created and used by the industry to provide low-cost car insurance for young drivers that meet an appropriate and lower risk criteria for 2 years. This model is similar to the SCBI model of low-cost finance, in which the risk is shared by the taxpayer and the industry. Criteria-licence type: full. Age: 20-25, no penalty points. Car size: 1.0l-1.6l, use of car-social, domestic and work commute only.

Justification

The current car insurance market is failing young drivers by setting unrealistic quotes. From a young person's perspective, obtaining car insurance is dually problematic. Good driving history and no claims bonus in most cases help to lower car insurance quotes. However, having such a history is practically unachievable for young drivers, who can only begin driving at the age of 17. Additionally, car insurance is a legal requirement and hence an unavoidable expense for all drivers. There are approximately 138,000 drivers in Ireland under the age of 25 with a full driver's licence²⁹. If 20% of these drivers were able to avail of a low-cost finance option of €1,000, the cost would be €27,000,000, but there would also be additional economic activity spread out amongst businesses. The "Double Bottom Line", or dual mandate for the ISIF fund, requires investments made on behalf of the fund to have the potential for investment return and to have an economic impact on Ireland. Macra na Feirme believes a young driver fund for car insurance developed by the ISIF would meet both requirements. Finally, by limiting the length of time a young driver can be insured under the fund to 2 years, young drivers can have the opportunity to develop a no claims history without having long-term impacts on private car insurance companies. While Macra na Feirme recognises the reasoning for young drivers having higher car insurance quotes, it is unreasonable to expect them to be crippled by the high cost of car insurance. Young drivers, particularly those living in rural areas, require

access to their own vehicle to commute to college, their place of work, etc.

Bus Transport

The Macra na Feirme Rural Transport Sub-committee recently undertook a survey of members, seeking their views on access to public transport in rural Ireland.

The results were eye-catching.

- 86% felt it was not viable for them to use public transport as an alternative to a private car
- 64% said that they were very likely or likely to use public transport services if they were available in their area
- 60% agreed or strongly agreed that access to public transport impacted their ability to engage in social activities
- 50% felt dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with access to public transport in their area

In Ireland as a whole, just over 37% of the population lives in rural areas – that is, outside towns with a population of over 1,500. Recent legislative changes, including the outlawing of unaccompanied learner drivers and lowering the drink limit, are having a disproportionately greater impact in rural Ireland. This is due, not to the legislation itself, but to the relative lack of investment in public transport and infrastructure, particularly in public buses. Such underinvestment has had an excessively detrimental effect on younger drivers. The rising costs of motor insurance and the possibility of a criminal conviction for unaccompanied learner drivers is further exacerbated by a lack of public buses in rural areas which would replace the private car. Such increases in punitive measures and lack of public investment have created a feeling of anti-rural bias among many rural communities. This anger and sense of isolation expressed by many members of Macra na Feirme has found expression in the results of the survey above. Macra na Feirme thus proposes key opportunities to invest in public bus transport to create opportunities to tackle rural isolation and to encourage rural youth to use public bus transport. This would result in less private car usage and lower carbon emissions. Macra na Feirme estimates that free travel for u25s under current carbon prices would actually save the government approximately €8.5 million, taking into account the current carbon prices. Increasing the provision of Local Link Service to €25 million would cost the Exchequer €3.9 million, while Macra na Feirme estimates the investment to return and upgrade bus stops along rural routes would cost approximately €1 million.

²⁴ European Commission 2011, "Youth on the Move" - Analytical Report of Flash Eurobarometer Number 319a

²⁵ Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work by Indecon Economic Consultants, November 2012

²⁶ NYCI, 2020. Youth Work Changes Lives – Providing the Pathway

²⁷ M20, 2020. <https://corklimerick.ie/>

²⁸ Hamilton, more than 25% of parents forced to help children pay for car insurance, 2019. <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/transport-and-tourism/more-than-25-of-parents-forced-to-help-children-pay-for-car-insurance-1.3927441>

²⁹ CSO, 2018. <https://statbank.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp>

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Free Travel for those 25 years of age and under
- An increase of €5 million to the provision of Local Link Service
- Investment to return and upgrade bus stops along rural routes, including investment in modernisation and bus tracking for user interface (accessibility)

Justification

Transport remains one of the highest sources of emissions, with the vast majority resulting from private car journeys. In 2018, 11.7 Mt CO₂ eq was produced. Breaking the dependence upon private car usage and ownership is a challenge many governments have faced. Many rural Irish youth are forced into expensive ownership by necessity due to the cost of public transport and poor availability. In order to overcome this cycle of car ownership that many rural young people are locked into early in their careers, Macra na Feirme proposes a period of free travel up to the age of 25 when many young people are under economic pressure from education costs or early low wages. CSO figures show that there were 1.6 million individuals under the age of 25 in 2019. However, those under 14 are unlikely to take longer journeys without parental supervision. Thus, they would not incur significant costs and may actually encourage more paying individuals to take family journeys on public transport. Many in the 14-25 category received the student rate, meaning this would not be a loss of full fares. The existing Free Travel Scheme for those over 66 is provided to 948,000 individuals at a cost of €100 per person. To provide a similar level of cover to those under 25 would result in a cost of €60.5 million by our estimation.

If this were to reduce the amount of private car journeys by as little as 10% and encourage a culture of public transport usage in place of car ownership, the savings in terms of emissions would be 1.7 Mt in CO₂ eq. It is estimated that by 2030, the price of a tonne of carbon may cost Ireland €55/t³⁰ on EU ETS markets. The savings would save the government €93,500,000 annually by 2030. At current prices of €20-30/ton, reducing private travel amounts by 10% would represent a saving of €34,000,000-51,000,000.

Macra na Feirme notes the positive feedback and success of the Local Link bus system. Many young people in rural communities have found this service a lifeline for commuting, accessing services and social involvement. The budget for this program has been raised from €12.2 million in 2016 to approximately €21 million in 2019. The number of passengers has risen by more than 580,000 since 2010, representing a rise of 25% in the 2010-2018 period. Now servicing more than 2 million people, Macra na Feirme believes this service is providing

value for money and proposes a further increase of €5 million yearly to build upon the success of Local Links in rural communities. Challenges remain in tendering and procurement, and this continued investment would help to change perceptions of a rural/urban divide regarding public transport.

Investment is needed to return bus-stops along rural routes, including investment in modernisation and bus tracking for user interface.



Rail Service

There are plans in the Programme for Government to expand the rail network in the next 5 years. We believe the following projects should be given top priority regarding rail expansion: M3 Parkway extension, Western Rail Corridor, High Speed Line Dublin / Cork. Commuter time would lower with increased connectivity between towns and cities.

Ireland remains one of the lowest rated in the EU in terms of train usage, in no small part due to the lack of infrastructure investment and service availability. Out of the more developed European member states, Ireland has annually only 9 passenger journeys per capita in 2018 compared with countries such as Denmark and our closest neighbour the UK, which have 35.5 and 38 journeys, respectively. While we have seen total growth in those using the Iarnród Éireann and other rail services of 24.7% from 2010 to 2018, the number of passengers per capita has grown by only 18%.

This is primarily due to the lack of service provision in key areas of Ireland which have experienced population growth, such as Cavan and Meath. While services currently benefit other growth areas in the Dublin commuter belt, large populations in Monaghan, Cavan and areas of Meath are ignored in terms of service provision. Counties such as Donegal that would benefit greatly from faster and more

³⁰ Carbon Tracker. (2018). Carbon Clampdown – Closing the Gap to a Paris-compliant EU-ETS. Access: https://yoursri.com/media-new/2018-05-03_carbon-clampdown.pdf



direct public transport than currently provided by bus service and less carbon intensive modes than domestic air travel have also been completely ignored.

Macra na Feirme proposals

- Carrying out a feasibility study into completing the M3 Parkway Extension, including Climate Impact Assessment
- Investment in Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the Western Rail Corridor
- Carrying out a feasibility study into high-speed rail between Cork and Dublin, in line with the assessment of high-speed rail between Dublin and Belfast
- Funding for a feasibility study into identifying investment for upgrading of rail carriages to accept greater bicycle storage
- Increase investment for upgrading of rail platforms for accessibility

M3 Parkway extension

Navan is one of the largest commuter towns in Ireland, and its population rose by 5.6% between 2011 and 2016. Out of 19,950 commuters per day, only 46 (0.002%) of them use the train while 13,004 (65%) use either a car or van. 5,521 (27%) reported that they had to leave home before 7.30am each morning.³¹ The vast majority of these commuters are in the younger demographic and earlier in their careers with lower incomes.

Phase 1 of the Dublin to Navan railway line from Dublin to Dunshaughlin was opened in September 2010. Currently, there are over 25 trains per day operating on this route. The proposed Phase 2 of

the project has been deferred ever since. Phase 2 is 34km and would connect Navan town, Kilmessan, Dunshaughlin to Dublin. There is also a proposal for another station north of Navan town, which would open up the line to more potential commuters.

Phase 2 was due to be completed by 2015 under the framework for Transport 21. We believe it is unacceptable that this project has been deferred and is now 5 years behind schedule, which demonstrates a lack of commitment from government to the rail network in Ireland.

Macra na Feirme calls on the government to make the expansion of the M3 parkway railway line to Navan a top priority. Navan has recently been designated as a rent pressure zone and is the fastest growing town in Ireland population-wise. It is well recognised that those under rent pressure are younger citizens who would benefit from lower-cost public transport. Navan is desperately in need of a rail connection to Dublin city, which would benefit not only them but also surrounding towns and the entire counties of Meath, Cavan and Louth by bringing increased connectivity to Dublin city. Macra maintains that the Navan Corridor Study was fundamentally flawed, as it gave no consideration at any point in the document to the carbon saving desperately needed for reducing commuter traffic within the M50. Nor was consideration given to the impact of greater than 3,600 vehicles journeys within the M50.

³¹ Census 2016 http://census.cso.ie/sapmap2016/Results.aspx?Geog_Type=ST2016&Geog_Code=B92C48CA-4722-499A-9F93-29015C461C3F#SAPMAP_T11_1101

Western Rail Corridor

The section of the Western Rail Corridor from Galway to Limerick is the fastest growing railway line on the rail network, with 91,000 passengers using the service in Q1 of 2019, up from 74,000 in the same period in 2018. Now is the time to build upon that success by completing Phase 2 and 3 (to Tuam and Claremorris) of the project.

The benefits of this expansion to the whole Mayo/Galway region, which has suffered greatly from youth emigration due to slower economic growth, would be massive for commuters and tourism. This would directly benefit not only young people here but throughout the western region.

The expansion of the WRC to Claremorris would revolutionise rail connectivity in Mayo in particular. For the first time in half a century, passengers would be able to get a train to Galway from Westport, Castlebar and Ballina without unnecessary travel to Athlone.

Under the government transport programme, Phase 2 of Transport 21: Athenry to Tuam was due to be opened in 2011, and Phase 3: Tuam to Claremorris was due to be opened in 2014. Macra now calls on the government to renew their commitment to the WRC in Transport 21 and to begin work on both phases immediately.

High-Speed Rail Feasibility

A key component to the uptake of rail service is the speed and duration of travel times. Shorter travel times give the rail network a significant advantage over the more flexible but far slower modes of bus transport. To this end, Macra welcomes the decision to carry out a feasibility study on the potential for high-speed rail link connecting Dublin to Belfast.

Macra na Feirme proposes the need to carry out similar feasibility studies on the potential to upgrade the Dublin to Cork line. At only 20 minutes shorter than the Belfast-Dublin line, the potential for a high-speed train servicing our two largest cities would be a worthwhile endeavour.

Macra na Feirme's proposal

- Carry out a feasibility study on the potential upgrade of the Dublin to Cork line

Air and Sea Travel

The desire to travel, especially amongst the younger generation, has never been greater. Travel is seen not only as a luxury but equally as an expected part of the life experience for those in the developed world. However, the green credentials have increasingly become a focus for many of this generation.

It is important to make alternatives more affordable and desirable. The proposals in this section focus on encouraging behaviour change through increasing the attractiveness of the alternatives. After the recent lengthy delays in Dublin and other international airports, Macra na Feirme would like to see flights spread more out of regional airports to reduce the reliance on Dublin airport.

In addition, international tourism is a significant economic driver, and this sector must be protected. The specific requirements posed by Ireland's nature make alternatives to air travel more expensive, requiring significant infrastructure. However, the area of 'green tourism' has significantly increased, with more travellers considering the carbon footprint of their journeys. Investment may be best suited to the some 3.48 million³² of UK visitors that visit Ireland each year. Tourism is accountable for a twelfth of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, but the value of €5.2 million spent in the local economy by 9.5 million overseas tourists in 2018³³ cannot be underestimated.

Macra na Feirme's proposal

- Prioritize projects that provide alternatives for domestic flights
- Irish government supports moves at the EU level to introduce carbon tax on aviation fuel
- Increase investment in the facilities and infrastructure in major ports to encourage low carbon travel
- Advance cross-border efforts with the UK to ensure a more viable alternative using the land bridge for passengers to continental Europe
- Investment in increasing international travel routes for regional airports

Conclusion

Significant investment is needed in the train and bus network, with many infrastructure projects requiring a long repayment timeframe. However, given the need for rapid decarbonisation of the transport sector to meet the ambitious Climate Action Plan and the EU targets, this investment is needed immediately.

Much of the work that must be carried out in terms of investment in the public transport network has been a direct result of prior political decisions to remove or restrict investment from key areas. This failure has led to a deficit that must now be overcome in a fast and politically challenging way. Macra na Feirme believes the challenge is one that the government must face up to immediately, before it is too late. Future generations will thank us for the work carried out now. Macra na Feirme believes Ireland can be a world leader in reducing our carbon footprint, serving as an example to other countries.

Health

SlainteCare commits to an updated Geographic Resource Allocation Model that specifically identifies the need to provide for health care services in rural areas due to the distinct disadvantage to healthcare providers located there.

General Practice

While attracting and retaining GPs is a difficulty, the fact that 60% of surveyed GP graduates stated that they wished to remain in Ireland shows that the situation can be remedied if necessary steps were taken³⁴. Macra na Feirme estimates that restoring the distance coding and increasing Rural Practice Allowances to €30,000 and increasing Modified Allowance of €15,000 would cost approximately €1,900,000.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Restoring the distance coding and increasing Rural Practice Allowances to pre-2009 levels³⁵
- Creation of a Patient Location Allowance

Justification

Distance coding is felt strongly by GPs in rural Ireland³⁶. It provided a fair system to indicate the area a practise covered and compensated those doctors who had a widely spread patient population for the related costs. A patient Location Allowance would improve the viability of making house calls both during and

out of normal hours possible and lead to a reduction in the number of ambulance calls. This allowance would also benefit Out of Hours cooperatives who are under pressure in many rural areas around the country by providing another option for patients and allowing the two parties to work together to share the load.

Primary Health Centres

The core objective for primary care centres is to shift the majority of people's care to the community in order to reduce waiting lists and waiting times. Macra na Feirme would like to see funding be provided for additional services in primary health centres.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Funding for additional services: nutrition, counselling, etc.
- Increased pay incentives for high-quality consultants to co-locate or relocate in rural outreach centres

Justification

In order to ensure that these centres are the first point of contact that people have with the health service, Macra na Feirme would like additional services introduced to these care centres to provide a more well-rounded service. Since these should be the first point of call, Macra na Feirme wants the government to ensure that the people using these services get the highest quality of care by increasing pay incentives for high-quality consultants to attract them to rural Ireland.

³² <https://www.tourismireland.com/Marketing/Great-Britain>

³³ <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/transport-and-tourism/ireland-s-denial-as-flight-shaming-clouds-gather-over-tourism-1.4083244>

³⁴ <https://www.imo.ie/policy-international-affair/documents/IMO-Position-Paper-on-Supporting-and-Developing-Rural-General-Practice.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2018-07-24/1677/#pq-answers-1677>

³⁶ <https://www.imo.ie/news-media/news-press-releases/2015/rural-general-practice-do/Final-Position-Paper-on-Rural-Practice.pdf>





Drugs Use and Addiction Service

Those in need of addiction treatment currently have a number of different treatment options available to them, depending on their needs, both in the public and private health service. Macra na Feirme would like to see more done with these services to make them more accessible. In 2019, the previous government committed to a health-led approach to the possession of drugs for personal use, and Macra na Feirme asks that this commitment be continued by the current government. We estimate that funding of transport for the family of those receiving addiction counselling or other services should cost approximately €5 million. The research into the extent and patterns of substance use in Ireland (including rural areas) should be allocated approximately €200,000. This research can shed light on the issue in Ireland and support future policy. Macra na Feirme also estimates that a pilot project for First Aid Overdose and Drugs related training would cost approximately €250,000, and that it should be funded through Skillnet Ireland to encourage people to partake.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Commitment for health-led approach – funding for Community Mental Health services to include addiction counsellors
- Funding of transport for the family of those receiving addiction counselling or other services
- Funding research into the extent and patterns of substance use in Ireland (including rural areas)
- Significant increase in Opioid Substitution Treatment in GPs – ties to the above around reduction in GPs in rural areas
- Pilot project for First Aid Overdose and Drug related – funded through Skillnet for training
- Targeting of funding for intervention material youth service providers to offer funding for joint initiatives
- The appointment of a gambling regulator as soon as possible
- Funding of services for those who suffer from a gambling addiction

Justification

Drug addiction is an illness that affects many families and communities. We need to break the stigma associated with drug use and show these people compassion in difficult circumstances. This is why a health-led approach is so important and must be continued, as the previous approach was not successful.

Previously, drug use was confined to cities or large towns. Currently, drugs such as cocaine are being used in even the smallest villages in rural Ireland. In a poll conducted by the Irish Examiner and the ICMSA, “three quarters of farmers and farm families believe drug use is now widespread in rural communities”. The Department of Health’s National Strategy on drug and alcohol use in Ireland states that people are “coping with rural isolation through the use and misuse of legal drugs such as alcohol and prescription drugs”, and that “a lack of transport and significant travel times for those in rural communities was cited as a significant barrier to accessing services”.

A pilot programme giving people first aid training in how to deal with these cases could be a life-saver for someone who needs it. There are two sides to this type of programme. It educates the trainee on how to treat overdoses and on drug related topics so that they themselves can make better informed decisions, but it can also help those around them.

Transport for those receiving addiction counselling or other services could be the difference between someone getting the help they need and going without. The difference it could make to those who require it is incalculable. This could confirm the commitment of the government to rural Ireland, as these people may otherwise struggle to find transportation. We need to eliminate barriers to these services rather than maintain them.

As outlined in the programme for government, there is a commitment to establishing a gambling regulator, which will focus on public safety and wellbeing. It should cover in-person gambling and especially online gambling. This regulator is set to have the powers to regulate advertising, gambling websites and apps.³⁷ This appointment needs to be made sooner rather than later, as we are currently still restricted at home.

Irish gamblers are considered the fourth-biggest gamblers in the European Union. In 2020, Irish gamblers lost approximately €1.36 billion, which averages at €300 per adult.³⁸ The Irish public cannot escape gambling advertisements, from sponsored ads on our phones to the radio and TV. Covid-19 resulted in increased boredom and isolation, so it is understandable that people turned to online gambling, but that habit can turn into a dangerous addiction regardless of the opening up of society.

³⁷ Gov.ie, 2021, pg 86, <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>

Sexual Health

The ability to choose contraception is imperative for everyone who is sexually active. Cost should not be an obstacle when making this decision.

Macra na Feirme's proposal

- Provision of modern and consistent sexual education to those in education, including consent training.

Justification

Sexual education is necessary to empower people to understand their health, wellbeing and dignity and well as aiding the development of relationships and impressing the importance of protection and consideration for other people's feelings. As they say, knowledge is power, and sexual education does not increase sexual activity, sexual risk-taking behaviour nor STI/HIV infection rates.³⁹ Unsurprisingly, education may also reduce the number of accidental or crisis pregnancies.



Energy Generation

In order for modern societies such as Ireland's to survive and thrive, they depend on reliable and secure supplies of energy. Macra na Feirme would like to see the following proposals considered because by investing in sustainable energy generation, Ireland will have the potential to be considered a low-carbon economy.

Macra na Feirme's proposals

- Increases to the Just Transition Fund – allowing for the use of the micro-loan scheme to incentivise investment on farm for energy generation and conversion of business
- Significant changes to Retrofit Scheme – Ringfenced rural investment
 - Reduce barriers to grant – income band reform
 - Community Energy Grant – expanding
 - Linking of property tax to energy rating

Justification

The EPA has projected that Ireland will miss its EU targets for 2030. This will result in Ireland incurring significant fines from the European Commission. The fines are not the only problem, as there could be long-term economic and opportunity costs to Ireland not keeping up with clean energy technologies. The demand for energy is not likely to decrease on its own, so significant efforts must be made to cater to this demand in a clean and sustainable manner.

Budget 2020 allocated €6 million for a Just Transition Fund, but Macra na Feirme would like to see a 20% increase, bringing it to €7.2 million. This addition will allow for the use of the micro-loan scheme to incentivise on farm investment.

The pilot grant scheme for deep retrofitting was oversubscribing, which proves that people have the appetite to engage in schemes like this. Macra na Feirme would like to see the changes outlined above to ensure that those who require it can avail of it. By linking property tax to energy ratings, home owners have an incentive to save money on property tax the sooner they make the changes. The SEAI has estimated that €35 million would be needed over the next 35 years to make Ireland's existing houses low carbon by 2050.

³⁸ Hutton, 2021, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/irish-fourth-worst-gamblers-in-eu-as-move-online-accelerates-1.4617386>

³⁹ UNESCO, 2018, <https://en.unesco.org/news/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-important>

Agriculture

Agricultural Summary of Proposals

Farm Income and Tax

EU State Aid Restrictions on Young Farmer Reliefs

- The government to engage with the EU to increase the threshold from €70,000 under State
- Aid rules to €140,000

Income Volatility

- A voluntary individual income volatility initiative to be introduced to allow farmers to deposit a defined percentage of profits to a fund in a good year and withdraw funds during poor years, with drawings being subject to income tax
- Management of the deposit fund to be carried out by regulated co-ops and Agri merchants who trade with the farmer
- Depositing of profits will be limited to doing so over a rolling five-year period, with withdrawal of funds having to take place within five years before any additional depositing occurs

Dedicated Debt Mediation Service for farmers

- Funds ringfenced for a dedicated debt mediation service for farmers

Capital Taxes

Stamp Duty Relief

- To extend Stamp Duty Relief to young trained farmers until the end of 2026
- Extend the maximum age to avail of Stamp Duty relief on the purchase of land to all young trained farmers up to the age of 40
- To expand Stamp Duty Relief to include all land transfers in registered Succession Farm Partnerships up to the age of 40

Tax Relief on the Leasing of Farmland to Family Members

- Extend the tax relief on the leasing of farmland to include agreements between parents and children who are young trained farmers.
 - Available once-off tax relief
 - No longer than five years with €9,000 per annum relief
 - Available to young trained farmers up to the age of 30

Addressing the 'Older Young Farmer'/New Entrant Parent Partnership Issue

- All young trained farmers under the age of 40, who commenced farming before January 2008, who have no or low-valued Basic Payment entitlements or are below the national average, be facilitated through the taxation code in the form of a tax credit on the cost of purchase of entitlements valued at the national average.

Stock Relief

- Extend Stock Relief until the end of 2026

Farmer Health, Safety and Wellbeing

- To develop and run a National Rural Network for The Republic Ireland would require funding of €200,000 initially
- The development and funding of a safe tractor driving skills initiative for young people

VAT Review

Safety Equipment

- Seek VAT exemption within EU VAT Directive on safety equipment across all sectors

Sexed Semen

- VAT exemption on sexed semen for all farmers

Forage/Lab Analysis

- VAT exemption on all Forage/Lab Analysis

Faecal Egg Analysis

- VAT exemption on faecal egg lab testing

Non-oral Medicines and Disinfectants

- The timeframe suggested of 2024 to apply the 0% Value-Added Tax (VAT) rate on non-oral animal medicines and vaccines must be fast-tracked to 2023.



Sustainability Measures

Environmental Scheme

- New environmental scheme open to all farmers who complete the basic requirements
 - Up-to-date Nutrient Management Plan
 - Create a Continual Professional Development Plan of training in key environmental practices and standards
 - Carbon Assessment through the Bord Bia Origin Green Programme
 - 25% greater ceiling for farmers under the age of 40 who are either farming alone or in a partnership

Targeted Capital Allowance

- Put in place a targeted Annual Investment Allowance (AIA) similar to the UK focusing on smart agriculture, renewable energy equipment and climate change mitigation infrastructure

Environmental Infrastructure

- Support in the form of capital grants for small-scale on-farm AD units and solar projects. A Biogas support scheme in the form of a feed-in tariff should be put in place for biomethane injection for larger, centralised AD facilities close to the gas grid.
- Increase in the annual budget for the recently opened Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH), which encourages farmers to change from fossil-based fuel sources to renewable heat sources.
- 100% of feed sources for biomass production should be indigenous to encourage the development of the supply chain.

- Reopening of the energy crop support scheme now that a market has been created from indigenous biomass through the SSRH. This will offer farmers an alternative land-use option.

On-farm Nutrient Management Infrastructure

- The fast track system of applying for the TAMS scheme for young farmers and farmers participating in the voluntary ASSAP program
- A streamlined and consistent approach to planning permission applications and development charges across local authorities for farm infrastructure
- Fund to support young farmers who are not eligible under TAMS to upgrade their nutrient storage and infrastructure

Carbon emission farm advisory service

- Fund a programme offering free advice and guidance to farmers

Pathways to Farm Generational Renewal

1

Taxation Relief to include family members

- Up to the age of 30
- Limited to 5 years

2

Stamp Duty Relief

- Extension to include during Succession Partnership
- Extension to up to age of 40

3

Land Mobility Service

- Established Young Farmers Option for Expansion
- Establishment option for non-successors

Introduction

Young farmers and rural young people are the lifeblood and future of our rural communities, agriculture and associated industries. Rural young people are important stakeholders in all industry ambitions. They are the cohort that national initiatives and political outcomes most influence in the future. Therefore, prioritising and backing rural youth to navigate upcoming challenges and capitalising opportunities will help sustain vibrant rural communities and allow our largest indigenous industry to prosper.

In a time filled with opportunities and threats, there is one certainty: without an injection of youth into the sector, agricultural expansion and increasing the value-added, along with our position as a key player in global markets, will not be sustained. Young farmers need to be involved in management decisions on agricultural holdings at an appropriate age when they have the time and energy to reach their full farming potential. Every effort needs to be undertaken to favour the early establishment of young farmers.

Pioneering initiatives such as the Macra na Feirme Land Mobility Service have significant potential to enable young and older farmers to work collaboratively in establishing young farmers in the industry. Greater support at both the national and European levels for generational renewal has been a long-term policy agenda of Macra na Feirme.

Regardless of the challenges, young farmers will face, e.g. climate change or the availability of land, both a suitable taxation policy aimed at positively positioning them to overcome sectoral challenges and the promotion of access to capital for investment will help to increase the appeal and viability of farming as a career. Investing in the social, economic and environmental infrastructure of rural areas will ensure they are vibrant and attractive places for the next generation of young people to work and live in.

Farm Income and Tax

EU State Aid restrictions on Young Farmer Reliefs

Young farmer stamp duty relief, along with two young farmer income tax reliefs (100% stock relief and Succession Partnerships tax credit), are subject to the Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation (ABER) as part of the EU State Aids. As a result, the three reliefs must be aggregated for the €70,000 ceiling on the amount of relief available under the EU Regulations.

The EU will shortly undertake a review and consultative process on the Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation. The timing of this review is concerning as it coincides with the expiry date of the current reliefs and could impact on the orderly extension of both young farmer Stamp and Stock reliefs which are due to expire on the 31st December 2022. The consistency and continuity of these reliefs is essential.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- The Government to engage with the EU on the Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation to allow the orderly extension of young farmer tax reliefs post 31st December 2022.
- As part of the Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation review increase the threshold from €70,000 under State Aid rules to €140,000.
- Tax reliefs currently outside the scope of the Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation should remain so.

Justification

The tax reliefs under the ABER are essential to orderly land transfer and generational renewal. Raising the state aid ceilings for young farmers will allow for greater flexibility and for the government to react faster and more effectively to support vulnerable farmers. Macra na Feirme believes that the ceiling acts as a barrier to young people entering the sector. This materializes in the form of financial barriers preventing young farmers from being able to afford to invest in a farm enterprises up to the level that is required to meet the viability needs of the young farmer.

Income volatility

Macra na Feirme, along with other farm bodies, strongly believes there is an urgent need to introduce a new initiative to alleviate farm income volatility for farmers operating as sole traders. Volatility instigators such as geopolitical circumstances, weather and disease outbreaks are out of the control of any farmer and hamper the livelihoods of even those who are excellent managers in their enterprises. Income averaging, or more specifically tax averaging, is a useful tax management strategy tool for limited companies but is less effective for family farms

and sole traders. The success of income volatility measures has already been seen in international models such as the Farm Management Deposit Scheme in Australia.

Macra na Feirme proposals

- A voluntary individual income volatility initiative to be introduced to allow farmers to deposit a defined percentage of profits to a fund in a good year and withdraw funds during poor years, with drawings being subject to income tax.³⁹
- Management of the deposit fund to be carried out by regulated co-ops and agri merchants who trade with the farmer.
- Depositing of profits will be limited to doing so over a rolling five-year period with withdrawal of funds having to take place within five years before any additional depositing occurs.

Justification

An initiative to help address volatility in farm incomes is critically needed to provide more financial stability to farmers in a price volatile environment. The principles for any income volatility tool should revolve around farmers being able to deposit surplus profits in a fund during years of good return with the ability to draw funds in years of poor farm return. Drawings would be subject to income tax when exiting the fund. The proposed ICOS Income Stabilisation Measure acts to increase the liveable range and decrease financial pressures on family farm incomes while having minimal impact on the total tax paid. The principles of this income volatility scheme could apply to the vast majority of sectors, with co-operatives also operating in the tillage and beef sectors. 2017 and 2018 are prime examples of the circumstances in which a scheme like this would offer some protection to family farms facing financial pressures.

Dedicated Debt Mediation Service for farmers

In New Zealand, the government provides a Farm Debt Mediation Scheme which bridges the gap between farmers and creditors. This provides fair and reasonable access to mediation for financially struggling farmers. At any stage, either the farmer or the creditor can request mediation. If the request is accepted, the farmer chooses three mediators from an authorised list. The creditor then contacts one of them, and they will start to organise the mediation process. The average cost of farm debt in New Zealand is approximately \$6,000. Under this scheme, farmers and creditors share the cost equally up to the maximum farmer contribution of \$2,000. After this threshold, the creditor will have to meet the balance. Farmers facing extreme hardship can also apply for help from the Mediation Hardship Fund, which is where farmers can apply to have mediation and associated costs paid for by the government.⁴⁰

Macra na Feirme’s proposal

- Funds ringfenced for a dedicated debt mediation service for farmers

Justification

Growth in agriculture is generally fuelled by investment. For Irish farmers to meet the ambitious targets set for them, significant investment and credit will be required. In 2019, the average loan amount across all agricultural sectors was €59,598, while the average farm income of farms with debt was €35,737. Additionally, 38% of farms had farm-related debt.⁴¹ Young farmers typically would not have built up the reserves that more established farmers would have, making them more vulnerable in the challenging times we are in right now. These young farms may also not have the growth levels that more established farms have, potentially making them less profitable with a higher demand for finances. According to Teagasc, Irish farmers on average have a sound financial structure, and debt to asset levels are considered to be quite low by European standards⁴².



Capital Taxes

Stamp Duty Relief

Stamp duty relief is an invaluable tax resource available to young trained farmers up to the age of 35. However, a revision of the age limit is warranted to better align Irish taxation measures with EU regulations and allow young farmers the full advantage of the measure.

Macra na Feirme proposals

- To extend Stamp Duty Relief to young trained farmers until the end of 2026.
- To expand Stamp Duty Relief to include all land transfers in registered Succession Farm
- Partnerships up to the age of 40
- Extend the maximum age to avail of Stamp Duty relief on the purchase of land to all young trained farmers up to the age of 40

Justification

In 2018, a total of 1,056 young trained farmers availed of the Young Farmers Stamp Duty Relief valued at €16.8 million. This was a significant increase from 2017 levels, with 845 claimants worth €7.8 million. The current young farmer stamp duty relief is due to expire on 31st December 2022. The age limit as part of the EU’s definition of a young trained farmer is 40. Hence, better aligning Irish taxation measures with EU definitions is very much justified to allow all Irish young farmers to receive the same support. Additionally, due to the substantial cost and lack of available finance associated with purchasing agricultural property, a young farmer will struggle to avail of many benefits of stamp duty relief before the age of 35. Such relief is most likely only beneficial in cases of land transfer from a parent, as many young trained farmers would not be in a position to purchase land at the age of 34 or younger. To the betterment of the Succession Farm Partnership model, provisions should be made to allow such partnerships to benefit from Stamp Duty Relief. The Succession Farm Partnership measure was introduced to encourage farm succession within families. The first measurable update of the scheme in 2017, the Succession Farm Partnership credit was valued at a cost of €0.4 million, and involved 174 partnerships. The uptake of this measure will increase in subsequent years. Macra na Feirme estimates that there are over 400 Succession Farm Partnerships at present with a credit of over €1 million.

In Budget 2022 a limited extension was given to this relief, which is a form of state aid. This was done to ensure it remained compatible with the EU’s Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation (ABER). The ABER permits Member States to provide state aid to the agriculture sector if it meets certain criteria, such as facilitating and encouraging the intergenerational transfer of farms. Once the current CAP negotiations are complete, the ABER is expected to be reviewed. The current ABER, which itself has been extended, currently expires at the end of 2022. In this regard it is paramount that the Irish Government secure the inclusion of all state aid support for young-trained farmers under the ABER.

⁴⁰Ministry for Primary Industries, The Farm Debt Mediation Scheme, 2020. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/funding-and-programmes/farming/the-farm-debt-mediation-scheme-2/>.

⁴¹Teagasc, Teagasc National Farm Survey 2019 Preliminary Results, 2020. <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2020/TeagascNFS2019-Preliminary-Results.pdf>.

⁴²Teagasc, Financial Status of Irish Farms: Financing Investment for Food Harvest 2020, 2015. <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2016/6358-Financial-Status-of-Irish-Farms.pdf>.

Consolidation Tax Relief

The purpose of farm consolidation relief is to encourage the consolidation of farm holdings, to reduce fragmentation and to improve the operation and viability of farms. Teagasc, as the competent body, is required to certify that purchases, sales and transfers of land are being carried out for genuine consolidation purposes.

In the Finance Act 2020 section 81C Farm Consolidation Tax Relief was extended for two years to the 31st of December 2022.

Macra na Feirme Proposals

- Extension of Farm Consolidation Tax Relief to the end of 2026
- Revision of the criteria in relation to dwelling houses

Justification

The Farm Consolidation Tax Relief is due to expire on the 31st of December 2022. Macra na Feirme highlights the importance of this relief for farm fragmentation and in order to facilitate land transfer to ensure holdings are of a reasonable scale to support the family farm model. In revising the rules in relation to dwelling houses that are unfit for purpose it could also increase the availability of houses/properties for refurbishment.

Capital Acquisition's Tax

Capital Acquisition's Tax is very significant in its importance to supporting and facilitating intergenerational farm transfer. It ensures that land is farmed in a productive capacity and that the opportunity for young people to access farming is maintained. Due to the nature of historical farm structures issues arise given the criteria applied to the thresholds under this relief.

Macra na Feirme Proposals

- Group A Threshold increase from €335,000 to €542,544 in line with 2009 levels
- Group B Threshold Increase from €32,500 to €54,254 in line with 2009 levels
- Group C Threshold Increase from €16,250 to €27,127 in line with 2009 levels
- Revision of Group B Qualifying Criteria for Group A relief, for registered farm partnerships with two or more partners one of whom is a young-trained farmer
- Revision of Group C Qualifying Criteria to allow a young trained farmer whom is not related to the asset owner but qualifies under the criteria as a favourite niece/nephew to access
- Group A Thresholds

Indexation Relief

Indexation Relief means that any costs you paid before 2003, related to the asset, are increased. This increase is based on inflation calculated by the CSO.

The relief applies to the:

- purchase price or market value of the asset at the time you became the owner
- cost of acquiring the asset (such as solicitor's and auctioneer's fees)
- cost of enhancing the value of the asset
- cost of disposing the asset.

Macra na Feirme Proposal

- Indexation relief should be reviewed, and the reference year be increased from 2003 to 2017 and a rolling one year increase in the reference year every year thereafter.

Tax Relief on the Leasing of Farmland to Family Members

Currently, tax relief on the leasing of farmland only applies to non-related parties. The present structure puts a parent who leases the family farm to a son or daughter at a financial disadvantage compared to someone who leases their land to a third party. Macra na Feirme would like to see that this relief be brought in alongside the proposals above to further improve Ireland's and also Europe's land mobility and generational renewal goals.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- Extend the tax relief on the leasing of farmland to include agreements between parents and children who are young trained farmers.
 - Available once-off tax relief
 - No longer than five years with €9,000 per annum relief
 - Available to young trained farmers up to the age of 30

Justification

Every possible effort should be made in facilitating young farmers' access to land. Those who provide them with land should be rewarded to encourage the further freeing up of land for young farmers. With no Early Retirement or Installation Aid in place, this is one item that could make the transfer of a farm to a son or daughter easier. It goes against natural justice that someone should be discriminated against under the tax code for leasing land to a family member rather than to a third party. In a bid to facilitate the freeing up of land for young farmers and ensuring that all family members have a form of income, promoting the leasing of land between family members is of great importance.

To aid the long-term transfer of land, ensuring such relief only applies for one lease is critical to prevent continual leasing and promote transfer. In the 2014 Indecon review on Agri-Taxation, the total

cost of leasing reliefs was estimated to cost the Irish exchequer €5.20 million, making it the sixth least expensive Agri-tax cost to the exchequer.⁴³ Macra na Feirme feels that allowing the inclusion of agreements between parents and their children and between siblings is one measure that should be undertaken to decrease the range of factors that have caused the low uptake of leasing relief as identified by Indecon in 2014's Agri-taxation review. In 2017, the exempt rental income from leasing of farmland cost €23.7 million, involving 9,790 transactions. When one compares these figures to those from 2013, there were 4,370 transactions at a cost to the exchequer of €7.3 million. This points to the success of the relief to encourage greater access to land on a long-term basis. Long-term leases are far more economically sustainable for the active farmers, who can invest in soil health, environmental measures, etc. Leasing can be a mechanism to give young farmers full control of a piece of land and show off their capabilities before the land is transferred over permanently. It can also give both parties involved peace of mind.

⁴³Agri-taxation Working Group, Agri Taxation Review. Report of the Agri-Taxation Working Group to the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2014. https://ligees.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Agritaxation-Review-Final_web-pub.pdf

Addressing the 'Older Young Farmer/ Forgotten' Farmer Issue

Macra na Feirme continues to advocate for the recognition of the 'forgotten' farmers. We believe that their situations should be assessed on a case-by-case basis due to the range of "specific disadvantages" that they have. Macra na Feirme also believes all innovative solutions should be looked at through the Irish taxation code.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- The definition of the forgotten farmer needs to be addressed, there has been no clarity offered on the issue and many of these forgotten farmers are concerned that definitions will exclude them from future CAP payments.
- All young trained farmers under the age of 40, who commenced farming before January 2008, who have no or low-valued Basic Payment entitlements or below the national average, be facilitated through a once off payment that reflects the average draw down of support availed of by these farmers prior to the closing of the young farmer schemes.

Justification

All young farmers deserve equal treatment, and the current five-year rule creates two tiers of young farmers. Changes to CAP legislation in the last Omnibus offered a mechanism to deal with this group. However, this has not been taken up, and the young farmers in question have no mechanism except through purchase of entitlements to get a foot on the CAP ladder. A tax mechanism such as the above could both accommodate young farmers with low or no entitlements and provide a degree of financial support, associated with farming entitlements, to those who were unable to qualify for the National Reserve due to the date they commenced farming. Continuity is needed with current and future schemes so that young farmers do not end up in the same situation as what happened previously with this cohort. The Minister needs to clarify if the cohort of farmers are being supported under the next CAP and where the funds are coming from to achieve this.

Stock Relief for Young Trained Farmers and Registered Farm Partnership

Stock relief is given as a deduction from trading income. It is calculated by reference to the increase in value of farm trading stock over an accounting period.

The deduction is a defined percentage of the increase in value of trading stock as follows:

- 25% standard relief for farmers
- 50% if you are a partner in a Registered Farm Partnership, subject to certain limits
- 100% for young trained farmers, subject to certain limits.

Macra na Feirme Proposal

- Extend Stock Relief for young trained farmers until December 2025.
- Extend Stock Relief for Registered Farm Partnership until December 2025.
- Increase the length of time that Registered Farm Partnerships can avail of stock relief from 3 to 5 years with an equitable increase in ceiling support from €15,000 to €25,000

Justification

Stock relief is due to expire at the end of the year, and for farmers and those in partnership, it is vital that these reliefs stay. The extension of these measures in the budget must occur, as there is the necessity to continually encourage young farmers to get established in farming and address imbalances in the age profile.



100% stock relief extends the economic contribution from young farmers by allowing them to quickly boost their trading stock numbers in a tax-efficient manner.

In Budget 2022 a limited extension was given to this relief, which is a form of state aid. This was done to ensure it remained compatible with the EU's Agricultural Block Exemption Regulation (ABER). The ABER permits Member States to provide state aid to the agriculture sector if it meets certain criteria, such as facilitating and encouraging the intergenerational transfer of farms. Once the current CAP negotiations are complete, the ABER is expected to be reviewed. The current ABER, which itself has been extended, currently expires at the end of 2022. In this regard it is paramount that the Irish Government secure the inclusion of all state aid support for young-trained farmers under the ABER.



Farmer Health, Safety and Wellbeing

There is an extraordinary need to address the health, safety and wellbeing of our farmers through training, education and innovation. There are many aspects outside their control that can add additional strain on their wellbeing.

The 'Farmers Matter – Making the Moove' pilot project was established to promote positive mental health and quality of life for farmers in North Tipperary's rural communities. In 2019, a consultation process was rolled out in partnership with the HSE Health and Wellbeing in the Mid-West and Macra na Feirme's North Tipperary Region. In 2021 the exercise was repeated in Roscommon and the 5 main drives of stress among rural people was identical to those identified two years previously in North Tipperary.

These issues were,

- 1. Isolation/Loneliness
- 2. Financial Pressures
- 3. Succession and Planning
- 4. Relationship Management
- 5. Uncertainty/Changing policies

Make The Moove have now actively consulted with over 500 rural people and farmers. Not by phone or by survey but by being in local halls listening to what people have to say. This is their voice and their issues. The people who attended these meetings also identified the solutions they felt would help all based in the need for any solution to have rural empathy, they are

- 1. Education and training/awareness
- 2. Social outlets for rural people
- 3. National Rural Support network for Mental Health and Wellbeing
- 4. Mental Health Toolkits
- 5. Financial and Relationship support

Macra na Feirme Proposal

- To develop and run a National Rural Network for The Republic Ireland would require funding of €200,000 initially
- The development and funding of a safe tractor driving skills initiative for young people

Justification

The development of a National Rural Support Network was identified by people across the consultation as one of the main solutions. Make The Moove have delivered training to countless groups in relation to awareness workshops. A programme for rural ambassadors was also developed.

In the Autumn of this year Make The Moove will be delivering a pilot education programme in six Teagasc Agricultural colleges across the country which is specifically designed for students needs. This is being run with the support of Teagasc and the funding needed provided by Mental Health Ireland. In 2020 and 2021 Make The Moove delivered 5,000 Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkits to farmers across Tipperary. The programme has delivered on the solutions identified by the people who attended the consultations. The next step is to deliver the National Support Network for Rural People.

This is not reinventing the wheel such networks exist in Northern Ireland and in New Zealand. The people who came to the consultations identified the need for the network, other countries have demonstrated that it works. In recent weeks Make The Moove has received seed funding from FBD Trust to establish the basis of a service here in Ireland. What is required now is additional funding from within the Department of Agriculture to support the development and running of a National Support Network. Safe tractor driving skills has been consistently been identified by contractors and farmers alike. Safe tractor driving skills are imperative to safety on farms.

VAT Review

In 2017, there were 16,478 farmers who claimed VAT refunds, submitting a total of 20,369 claims amounting to just over €59 million. Reducing or eliminating the VAT on some key areas will increase the uptake of farming practices that will benefit the sector. Macra na Feirme feels that the following items should have their VAT rate reduced or eliminated:

Safety Equipment

The fatality rate for the agriculture sector is the highest compared to any other Irish sector and disproportionate to the percentage of total employment.⁴⁴ Particularly in the dairy industry, expansion coupled with a projected labour demand increase of 6,000 persons over the next decade will increase the workload on the average farmer. With increased workload comes increased risk on farms, creating a safety concern⁴⁵. The 2017 ESRI report "Risk-taking and Accidents on Irish Farms" highlights the risk faced by all farmers.⁴⁶ Additionally, agriculture is not the only industry that would benefit from a recalculation of current VAT status. In the current Covid-19 situation, a zero rate of VAT is applied to personal protective equipment supplied by domestic suppliers to frontline health staff, and Macra na Feirme asks that this accommodation be considered for safety equipment too.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- Seek VAT exemption within EU VAT Directive on safety equipment across all sectors

Justification

Every avenue needs to be explored to improve farm safety. The average family farm income differentiates across all enterprises. As a result, while industry and farm media have extensively highlighted risks on farms and the need to increase safety awareness, certain farms lack the finances to invest in farm safety equipment. Making safety equipment readily available to all farms should be made a priority, with the removal of VAT on safety equipment acting as a vector to improve uptake by farmers. Macra na Feirme recognises that changes to VAT on safety equipment must be undertaken in the context of the EU VAT Directive. The Irish government must seek the necessary changes to the EU directive to support this VAT exemption, which will have far-reaching consequences for farm, construction, fire and road safety. A report by the National Office of Clinical Audit carried out in Major Trauma admissions from agriculture identified 430 individuals injured between 2014 and 2016.⁴⁷

The average stay required for treatment of illness was estimated at six days. The HSE estimates a single day of inpatient stay per bed to be €893.⁴⁸

This means the substantial cost and loss of earnings as a result of farm deaths would result in a cost to the state of €2,303,940. In addition, 77 of those admitted required intensive care unit admission as a result of their injuries, which is estimated to cost €10,916, adding an additional €840,532⁴⁹.

Since this study, the rate of both farm accidents and deaths have risen, including a 13% increase between 2012 and 2017 and a 20% rise in deaths from 2018. Teagasc figures also demonstrate that 562 accidents occurred annually. Which excluding those listed above requiring hospitalisation, carry their own economic losses to the Exchequer through losses of productivity⁵⁰.

Based on these figures, Macra estimates that approximately €1.5 million is lost to the Exchequer each year as a result of farm accidents, not including deaths. When farm deaths and loss of earnings and therefore income tax loss is included, Macra estimates the cost to be between €2.5 million and €3 million.

By applying VAT Relief, which would be reclaimable on all safety equipment, the purchase of valuable equipment would reduce the cost to the Exchequer. If the VAT reclaimed was on the purchase of a PTO guard for every farm in the state, the cost would only amount to less than €2 million.

⁴⁴ HSA, Fatal Injuries – Health and Safety Authority, 2017. http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Your_Industry/Agriculture_Forestry/Further_Information/Fatal_Accidents/.

⁴⁵ Kelly et al., The People in Dairy Project – A report on the future people requirements of Irish dairy farming to support sustainable and profitable dairy expansion, Teagasc.

⁴⁶ ESRI, Risk-taking and Accidents on Irish Farm, 2017. https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Agriculture_and_Forestry/Risk_Taking_and_Accidents_on_Irish_Farms.pdf

⁴⁷ Sheehan, M et al. (2020) Trauma on Farms in the Republic of Ireland. Injury. Access: [https://www.injuryjournal.com/article/S0020-1383\(20\)30403-4/fulltext](https://www.injuryjournal.com/article/S0020-1383(20)30403-4/fulltext)

⁴⁸ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/extra-2-500-hospital-beds-could-cost-1m-each-hse-warns-1.3351253>

⁴⁹ McLaughlin, AM et al. (2012). Determining the economic cost of ICU Treatment: a prospective "micro-costing" study. Lenus. Access: <https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/207929>

⁵⁰ Teagasc. (2018). Alarming Rise in Farm Accidents – Teagasc Survey. Access: <https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/news/2018/rise-in-farm-accidents.php>

In 2017, there were 16,478 farmers who claimed VAT refunds, submitting a total of 20,369 claims amounting to just over €59 million.



Sexed Semen

Currently, the uptake of sexed semen on farms is low, most likely due to the increase in the price when compared to conventional semen. To improve uptake, boost farm returns and further strengthen animal welfare, Macra na Feirme proposes the removal of VAT on sexed semen.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- VAT exemption on sexed semen for all farmers

Justification

Regardless of whether conventional artificial insemination or natural breeding is implemented on dairy farms, there is only a 50:50 chance that the calf will be female and capable of being used for milk production. Incentivising the use of sexed semen on farms will increase the percentage of female calves born and help strengthen our animal welfare standards for particular crossbred animals. Finally, sexed semen gives farmers more options when selecting replacement animals and allows them to match the sex of the animals with market conditions and requirements.

In 2019, a total of 850,312 AI serves were recorded. Although the number of sexed services is commercially sensitive data, we know that the use of sexed semen is increasing. If Ireland were to reach the figure of greater than 25%, like in UK herds, this would represent more than 212,500 serves. As the average price of a sexed straw is more expensive than a non-sexed straw (approx. €38 vs €18) due to lower sperm yield, a VAT cut to sexed semen would cost the Exchequer €454,956. The sale of livestock is given the rate of 4.8%. However, if use of sexed semen were to rise, the VAT rate applied to all sales would increase as a result of greater livestock values. Using Teagasc research on conception, the use of 212,500 straws should result in 127,500 calves, of which 50% would be male dairy calves and thus lower value. The remaining 85,000 dairy cows would be served with beef AI in the normal course of events.

However, in the scenario in which sexed semen increases to 25% of serves, this would result in approximately 95625 calves, of which 90% would be born with a higher value due to their gender (dairy heifers valued at €350 approximately) compared to dairy bull value (valued at €30 approximately). Alongside this, in order to achieve the same conception rate for milk production, the remaining 116,875 would be served with a higher beef value AI, producing a higher value dairy-beef calf (dairy-beef average value of €200). With 63,750 sales in dairy bull calves, the conventional approach, along with 85,000 dairy-beef calves, would generate €866,221 in VAT from calf sales and €636,938 VAT from AI sales (beef and dairy).

However, if 25% of serves were to be sexed, there would be 31,875 excess female calves available for sale, resulting in €357,689 VAT on sales. The sale of 9,562 male dairy calves would yield €13,139 in VAT, and an additional sale of 116,875 dairy-beef calves would result in €1,441,438. Additional beef sales would yield VAT returns of €250,255. Without accounting for the costs of establishing routes of sales for these lower-value dairy bull calves through exports by state agencies and the reputational risk, the return on reducing VAT on sexed semen would yield a €188,474 VAT increase through livestock sales.

	VAT Rate: 13.5%	VAT Rate: 4.8%	Total
Scenario 1: BAU			
212,500 Dairy AI Serves	€454,956		
85,000 Beef AI Serves	€181,982		
Calf Sales – 63,750 (Dairy Bulls @€30/calf)		€87,596	
Calf Sales - 85,000 Beef (Ave €200/calf)		€778,625	
Total			€1,503,159
Scenario 2: Removed VAT on Sexed AI			
212,500 Sexed AI Serves			
116,875 Beef AI Serves	€250,225		
Calf Sales – 22,313 (Excess Dairy Heifers @€350/calf)		€357,689	
Calf Sales – 9,562 (Dairy Bulls @€30/calf)		€13,139	
Calf Sales – 116,875 Beef (Ave €200/calf)		€1,070,610	
Total			€1,691,633
Benefit to the Exchequer			€188,474

Animal Health Measures

Non-Oral Medicines and Disinfectants

Livestock numbers and production increase, there is the potential for more diseases on farms. We are also entering an era where antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is not only threatening livestock health but also beginning to have consequences on One Health Approaches, hence threatening human health. To increase the health status of the national herd, prevention is always better than cure. Sick animals tend to either take longer to reach slaughter weight or produce less milk. Longer time to reach slaughter weight and reduction in the milk output of an animal over its lifetime increase the GHG output per product produced by the animal, curtailing efforts to mitigate climate change. To advance the health status of livestock on farms, combat AMR and reduce agriculture's contribution to national GHG emissions, Macra na Feirme proposes alterations to current VAT rates on hygiene products and disinfectants

Macra na Feirme proposal

- VAT Exemption on farm disinfectants and hygiene products
- The timeframe suggested of 2024 to apply the 0% Value-Added Tax (VAT) rate on non-oral animal medicines and vaccines must be fast-tracked to 2023.

Justification

Currently, hygiene products for livestock and disinfectants used on farms has a VAT rate of 23%. Typical disinfectants and other hygiene products include teat seal and disinfectants used to clean dairy facilities and equipment. Reducing the price of livestock hygiene products all comply with national strategies tailored toward preventing disease on farms rather than treating animals. Livestock hygiene products such as disinfectants and teat seal act to decrease the prevalence of pathogens on-farm, reducing the likelihood animals will become infected and therefore decreasing the requirements for antibiotics.

The rise in AMR as a direct result of the use of antibiotics to treat preventable diseases on farms is a significant risk to public health. It is estimated that the extra healthcare costs and productivity losses due to drug-resistant bacteria cost the EU €1.5 billion per year.⁵¹ In the Irish context, a single outbreak of a resistant bug is estimated to have cost one HSE hospital more than €2 million.⁵² In the case of calf diarrhoea, the use of antibiotics is widespread to treat secondary infections and prevent bacterial infection.⁵³ However, this practice could be prevented by better application of scour virus vaccination. Disinfection of sheds could also aid prevention.

Forage/Lab Analysis

Farmers face increasing scrutiny for the usage of both phosphorus and nitrogen fertilisers. Correct phosphorus and potassium index as well as pH can significantly reduce both the potential for pollution and demand for similar production levels. In addition, due to Ireland's changing climate, farmers are increasingly experiencing forage shortage. Forage budgeting is an essential component of the winter feed programme on farms. Forage should undergo analysis to determine its exact nutritional value.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- VAT exemption on all Soil and Forage Lab Analysis

Justification

The use of Nutrient Management Plans based on soil testing are vital tools for reducing the risk of pollution and over-fertilisation. Appropriate forage budgeting each year and ensuring high quality feed sources can reduce the demand for expensive feed sources, such as imported grains and proteins. The removal of VAT from this analysis will encourage and increase the number of farmers who are carrying out this vital testing each year. Determining and understanding the nutritional value of the fodder being used along with the soil conditions and fertility allows the farmer to make informed decisions on diet formulation and nutrient management on the farm. The removal of VAT from samples being tested in labs will increase the use of action plans on farms.



Faecal Egg Analysis

Faeces sampling can be a useful tool for farmers against disease on all cattle farms. Testing indicates the various parasites that may be present in the faeces and can also show the effectiveness of the farmer's dosing programme. Farmers need to know what they are dealing with to best tackle it. Resistance to fluke and worm doses on Irish farms is becoming increasingly common, so effective dosing is becoming more difficult.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- VAT exemption on faecal egg lab testing

Justification

Parasite infection on sheep, dairy and beef farms is a major cause of losses to both farmers and the economy. There is also a significant wastage of natural resources and resultant GHG losses due to poor feed conversion. Estimates of liver fluke (*F. hepatica*) alone in the national sheep flock range from 41% to 52% by region, with a national average of 50.4%⁵⁴. This results in yearly losses of 0.6% on sheep carcass weight⁵⁵. This loss of 360t approximately of sheep carcass meat per year to the national flock is based on 2018 figures. Using the average prices for 2018, this costs the industry €1.8 million per year. The rate of infection in beef steers and heifers is 7.7% and 8.3%, respectively, resulting in an estimated loss of 1991.2t approximately in 2018 results and a loss of €7.2 million to the national economy.⁵⁶ It is estimated that Liver Fluke costs Irish farmers €90 million each year, including costs on farm.⁵⁷

TB Eradication

In 2018, the Government approved a proposal from the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed TD to commit to the eradication of Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) by 2030. Since 1954, Ireland has culled around 2.5 million bTB reactor animals in our efforts to eradicate bTB. In that time, significant costs have been incurred by farmers, the State and the EU.

The TB Stakeholder Forum was established in line with the four main principles outlined in the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy launched by Minister Creed in 2017. The four principles are:

- 1. We must work together to improve animal health standards.
- 2. The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders must be clear.
- 3. The principle of 'prevention is better than cure' must be consistently applied
- 4. Finally, animal health programmes will have clear objectives, and will be sustainably and appropriately funded.

The level of bovine TB has been rising since 2016. At the end of 2021 herd incidence was 4.33%, and at the end of Q2 2022 herd incidence has fallen slightly to 4.25%. Over the last 6 months herd incidence has been holding between 4.2% and 4.4%. The herd incidence figure includes 342 breakdowns due to inconclusive animals failing the gamma interferon test. The overall steady increase in herd incidence since 2016 highlights the need for urgent action by all stakeholders.

Macra na Feirme Proposal

- Recognition of the labour contribution of farmers annually required in the annual testing programme which it is estimated equates to €20m.
- Fast-tracking of investment in research and investigation into Genetics around TB, whole genome sequencing and also to the efficacy of the vaccine for wildlife.
- Delivery of double funding for the TB wildlife programme as agreed by the TB Forum.
- Fully funded Deer Management group with the necessary resources to implement policy decisions in practice to curtail deer numbers and implement management decisions in relation to the role of deer in the transmission of TB.

Justification

The ability of Irish Livestock agriculture to access international markets is increasingly becoming dependent of animal health and sustainability credentials. Increasingly, animal health issues are forming part of Ireland's bilateral trade agreements, including requirements specific to bTB which are additional to the controls in place under EU law. An enhanced funding model is required to meet the demands of farmers in eradicating TB but also to meet the demands of the market. Other countries that have eradicated the disease have demonstrated that significant increased investment is needed towards the end of the eradication programme.

⁵¹ Burke, M. (2019). Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) – the way forward. Access: <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2019/AMR-Conference-2019.pdf>

⁵² Cormican, M. (2019). Why reducing antibiotic use is now an imperative. Access: <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2019/AMR-Conference-2019.pdf>

⁵³ Constable, P. (2004). Antimicrobial Use in the Treatment of Calf Diarrhea. Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine. Access: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/8883420_Antimicrobial_Use_in_the_Treatment_of_Calf_Diarrhea

⁵⁴ Munita, M et al. (2019). Liver fluke in Irish sheep: prevalence and associations with management practices and co-infection with rumen fluke. Bio Medical Central. Access: <https://parasitesandvectors.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13071-019-3779-y>

⁵⁵ Hayward, A et al. (2020). The influence of liver fluke infection on production in sheep and cattle: a meta-analysis. BioRxiv. Access: <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.07.29.227074v1.full>

⁵⁶ Animal Health Ireland. (2019). The Cost of Liver Fluke. Access: <http://animalhealthireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AHI-Bulletin-November-2019-FINAL.pdf>

⁵⁷ Cooper, Kevin M., et al. (2015). Potential impacts of climate change on veterinary medicinal residues in livestock produce: An island of Ireland perspective. This paper is one of a series of reviews on "Climate Change and Food Safety – an Island of Ireland perspective. Trends in Food Science & Technology

Sustainability Measures

Environmental Scheme

Given the recent focus on emissions and the committed reduction by 2030 of 25% from Agriculture it is critical that significant support is provided to farmers to adopt farm practices on the journey to 2030. Front loading of investment early in the next seven years is critical to set up the sector for delivery of its ambitions target. Throughout the next number of years it is crucial that investment is provided particularly for young farmers. These young people will be the future environmentalists and the future food providers.

Comparisons can be drawn with investing in youth education to better opportunities with investing in young farmers. Macra na Feirme are steadfast in its support of young farmers and the need for significant increases in investment in the future of farming. Young farmers are at a financial disadvantage when compared to older farmers who have greater capacity to invest. Therefore higher rates of payment are required when compared to older farmers and also priority access to all schemes and measures.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- New environmental scheme open to all farmers who complete the basic requirements
 - Up-to-date Nutrient Management Plan
 - Create a Continual Professional Development Plan of training in key environmental practices and standards
 - Carbon Assessment through the Bord Bia Origin Green Programme
 - 25% greater ceiling for farmers under the age of 40 that are either farming alone or in a partnership

The Scheme must facilitate farmers in selecting from a menu a number of actions that enhance the emissions reduction targets. Payment rates are based on the number of actions a farmer commits to carrying out. Below is a list of potential measures that a farmer may select from. These measures are based from discussions which are ongoing in The Food-Vision Groups and also in relation to measures identified in the Teagasc MACC Curve,

- 1. Reseeding with Clover inclusion rates
- 2. Over-sowing of Clover into pasture
- 3. Sowing of Multi-Species swards
- 4. Liming Programme on Farm
- 5. Implementation of Nutrient Management plan
- 6. Feeding of methane reducing feed additives
- 7. Selection of bulls based on methane output
- 8. Use of protected Urea
- 9. Application of Slurry through LESS
- 10. Use of Slurry Additives
- 11. Milk Recording
- 12. Grass measuring

Justification

A greater ceiling for young farmers is justified not only due to the higher activity and investment on farms but also the greater challenges that young farmers face while getting established. They generally lack the reserves that more established farmers would have already built up, making them more vulnerable. Young farmers in Europe most frequently take loans to invest in mechanisation (63%), followed by working capital loans (43%).⁵⁸ The ESRI identified that young farmers were more at risk of breaching the nitrate limit due to constraints around investment before succession.⁵⁹ In addition, the returns from the education of young farmers and investment in environmental practices are greater due to the greater impact of change in practice early on in farm ownerships.

⁵⁸ European Investment Bank, Survey on Financial Needs and Access to Finance of EU Agricultural Enterprises, 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/events/survey-financial-needs-and-access-to-finance-eu-agri-enterprises_en.pdf.

⁵⁹ ESRI, predicting which farms are most likely to breach nitrate pollution regulations, 2020. https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RB202009_3.pdf.



Targeted Capital Allowance

The Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine recommends measures to incentivise all Irish farmers to adopt practices that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Reducing GHG emissions in a bid to curtail climate change is influencing every industry. Recent European Parliament climate change targets intend to decrease the percentage of GHG emissions that can be offset against carbon storage and tree planting. As a result of such changes, there will be a need to reduce emissions resulting directly from agricultural practices and increase on-farm efficiency. Additionally, recent Teagasc reports project that agricultural labour shortages are on the horizon. Technology and smart agriculture have the capability, to an extent, to help reduce the labour requirement on farms. In a bid to make agriculture more sustainable and to tackle climate change and labour shortages, a restructured framework for the writing off of assets should be applied.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- Put in place a targeted Annual Investment Allowance (AIA) similar to the UK focusing on smart agriculture, renewable energy equipment and climate change mitigation infrastructure

Justification

Currently in the UK, £25,000 (equivalent to €30,000 approx.) is the maximum that can be written off on capital expenditure in the first year, with the remaining balance written off over the normal period⁶⁰. This proposal would differ from the UK model and be directed only toward climate change and smart agriculture capital expenditure, thus incentivising their uptake. The Agri-taxation Review of 2014 stated that taxation measures such as capital allowance increase investment, which benefits the national economy through employment and increased output. The present time frame for writing off capital assets hinders people who are paying both high loan repayments and high tax bills. In an Irish context, increasing capital inputs by 10% is likely to increase annual agricultural output

by 1.6-4.2%.⁶¹ Increased investment in sustainable and smart agriculture will increase farm efficiency and reduce GHG emissions.

Environmental Infrastructure

Anaerobic digestion (AD) units on Irish farms are much-undervalued potential sources of income and renewable energy. If the uptake of these units increased in Ireland, agricultural by-products, residues and energy crops could be used as renewable energy sources, thus displacing the need for fossil fuels to produce energy.⁶² AD units not only produce biogas but also fertiliser in the form of digestate, with Teagasc research showing GHG emissions from digestate processing to be less than the amount produced from manufacturing of nitrogenous fertilisers in most scenarios. AD has the potential to assist in meeting our targets of Renewable Heat, Transport and Electricity, which have been significantly missed in 2020 targets. Biogas/biomethane can be used to replace natural gas in home heating, as a transport fuel and in the industry via injection into the national gas grid.

Increased uptake of AD units amongst farmers has the dual benefit of producing renewable energy and less GHG intensive fertiliser while providing an opportunity to diversify as targeted by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA) recommendation. For many farmers, developing AD units on their farms will not be an option due to the large capital cost of constructing and operating such facilities and the lack of significant energy demand for the gas produced. However, there is significant potential for many farmers to provide feedstock (grass and slurry) to centralised medium- to large-scale AD facilities located close to the gas grid to facilitate biomethane injection.

Macra na Feirme proposals

- Support in the form of capital grants for small-scale on-farm AD units and solar projects. A
- Biogas support scheme in the form of a Feed-in Tariff should be put in place for biomethane injection for larger, centralised AD facilities close to the gas grid.
- Increase in the annual budget for the recently opened Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH), which encourages farmers to change from fossil-based fuel sources to renewable heat sources.
- 100% of feed sources for biomass production should be indigenous to encourage the development of the supply chain.
- Reopening of the Energy Crop support scheme now that a market has been created from indigenous biomass through the SSRH. This will offer farmers an alternative land-use option.
- A solar micro-generation scheme which specifically includes shed roof spaces and other BER exempt buildings.

Justification

Some 90% of Ireland's energy is imported.⁶³ The Institute of International and European Affairs estimates some 85% of Irish gas supply comes from the UK.⁶⁴ Collaborative agreements should also be considered for regional AD units. The Irish government should view AD as an investment in Ireland's ongoing carbon mitigation strategy, one which will create jobs, grow the Irish economy and have the ability to reduce our dependence on foreign fuel sources for energy production. This investment in regional AD units would also assist farmers with an additional income by supplying the units with feedstock in the form of harvested forage. This has the potential to increase diversification and reduce dependence on livestock. As recommended by the JOCCA, harnessing the actual potential of AD in Ireland could result in a capital investment of €1.4billion to the Irish economy and the creation of thousands of jobs in rural Ireland in engineering, construction, and manufacturing and management positions.⁶⁵

With additional EU climate change targets having been set and the need to reduce dependence on UK-derived energy, Ireland's ability to decarbonise will be costly. However, AD provides a renewable answer. Biomass boilers should be run off indigenous biomass, which is available here instead of being imported. Otherwise, it could have a detrimental impact on indigenous biomass suppliers, hampering the development of the energy crop sector and raising the carbon footprint of the imported biomass. All of this would curtail the positive environmental effects of the scheme.



On-Farm Nutrient Management Infrastructure

As part of Ireland's River Basin Management Plan, Macra na Feirme welcomes the development of the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP), which is a government/ industry collaborative initiative that is funded to run until the end of 2021. ASSAP aims to achieve improvements in water quality and wider sustainability by providing

free advice from dedicated sustainability advisors to farmers operating in the 190 'Areas for Action' across the country. The Nitrates Directive is supported by the Rural Development Programme (RDP) measures, which include the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) and the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS), which support water quality. The TAMS helps farmers to invest in infrastructure such as nutrient storage. However, the approach for applying to TAMS and farmers' experience of planning permission and development changes vary across the 31 local authority regions.

Macra na Feirme proposals

- Fast track system of applying for TAMS for young farmers and farmers participating in the voluntary ASSAP program
- A streamlined and consistent approach to planning permission applications and development charges across local authorities for farm infrastructure
- Fund to support young farmers who are not eligible under TAMS to upgrade their nutrient storage and infrastructure

Justification

The ASSAP program is an innovative approach to helping farmers ensure their farms are contributing to good water quality. Innovation and a streamlining of the planning and development charge system are also required to allow farmers to put in place the necessary nutrient infrastructure in an efficient and timely manner. Young farmers who inherit farms that do not have the necessary nutrient infrastructure for the livestock cannot receive TAMS support. This puts young farmers taking over farms at a severe disadvantage, as they are locked out of grant aid supports. Macra na Feirme is calling for support for these young farmers to allow them to develop or upgrade nutrient facilities on their farms.

⁶⁰ Agri-taxation Working Group, Agri-Taxation Review, Report of the Agri-Taxation Working Group to the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. https://igees.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Agritaxation-Review-Final_web-pub.pdf

⁶¹ Agri-taxation Working Group, Agri-Taxation Review. Report of the Agri-Taxation Working Group to the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2014. https://igees.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Agritaxation-Review-Final_web-pub.pdf

⁶² Schulte et al., Irish Agriculture, Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change: opportunities, obstacles and proposed solutions, 2011. http://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2011/61/61_ClimateBillSubmission.pdf

⁶³ Finan et al., Grass to energy and back again, Teagasc Research, 2011 https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/crops/crops/Grass_to_EnergyFinnan_Spring-2011_TRResearch.pdf

⁶⁴ Institute of International and European Affairs, What does Brexit Mean for the Energy Sector in Ireland?, 2016. https://www.iiea.com/ftp/Publications/2016/IIEA_PolicyBrief_Energy.pdf

⁶⁵ Fitzduff and Burke, Opportunities and challenges of developing anaerobic digestion, Engineers Journal, 2014. <http://www.engineersjournal.ie/2014/09/01/opportunities-challenges-developing-anaerobic-digestion/>

Carbon emissions farm advisory service

Macra na Feirme recognises the success of the ASSAP programme and wants to see a similar programme set up, applying the same methodology to carbon emissions farm advisory service. Carbon sequestration is the process of capturing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere and storing it in plant material or soil. Ireland must reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 30% by 2030. It is allowed to offset 5.6% of national emissions by carbon sequestration, so carbon sequestration is necessary to hit this target.

Macra na Feirme's proposal

- Fund a programme offering free advice and guidance to farmers

Justification

In the programme for government, the government committed to undertaking a national land use review that will include farmland, forests and peatlands. It will also consider emissions to air and water, carbon sequestration and climate adaptation challenges. Macra na Feirme would recommend a service model based on the success of ASSAP, which clarified the impact of agricultural activities on soil carbon, potential losses and sequestration. This is of particular importance given the conflicting messages in circulation to farmers and the increased focus on the potential of reduced drainage and rewetting to reduce agricultural emissions.

TAMS

Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) provide grants to farmers to build and/or improve a specific range of farm building and equipment on their farm.

Macra na Feirme's proposal

- Expansion of the specified range of equipment eligible under TAMS to include upgrading of electrics, solar water pumps and solar-powered fencing.
- Inclusion of under passes in TAMS especially from a road safety perspective.
- Drafting and health monitoring systems should be included as part of TAMS whereby young farmers should receive a 60% grant on the installation.
- Farm safety implements.
- Reduce the minimum spend to less than €2,000 to facilitate smaller investments.
- Inclusion of measures to ensure biosecurity on farm for prevention of disease.
- Extension of funding to support on farm grazing infrastructure improvement measures.

Justification

From a farm safety perspective, there can be no doubt that electricity can be a danger if the connections are old and not maintained. There are no second chances when it comes to electricity. Farms are often major consumers of energy, and with that comes an opportunity to become safer and more energy and financially efficient. Farmers can forget to factor in the costs associated with building and expansion. When making a large investment, the additional costs involved in upgrading electricity supply may not seem to be the most important factor to budget for. Farmers should plan to transition away from the use of dairy stock bulls over the next 5 years.

This will further accelerate the progress in the EBI. However, for farmers to move away from the use of stock bulls, the task of heat detection must be made as straightforward and accurate as possible for the farmer. From a herd health point of view, the health monitoring system will improve efficiency on farms and greatly reduce emissions by identifying illnesses earlier, increasing the longevity of cows in the herd thus reducing the replacement rate. Concerning breeding, the farmer will be able to carry out 100% AI on the herd, thus eliminating use of stock bulls and allowing greater beef progeny to be developed from the dairy herd by selecting beef sires based on the Dairy Beef Index.

Reducing the number of male dairy calves going forward needs to be a priority to protect Irish Dairy farmers social license while also increasing the supply of more valuable calves to the beef farmer which would reduce the export requirement. Sexed semen is the solution that will allow dairy farmers to selectively choose which cows to breed their replacements from and use beef sires on a larger proportion of the herd. However, timing of sexed semen insemination is critical so heat detection systems can vastly increase the potential uptake of sexed semen by increasing farmer confidence in the time of AI.

Accurately detecting timing of heats in cows would have a hugely positive knock on effect on fertility in herds. Combined with cows health indicators being monitored on a continual basis then it would be expected that 6 week in calf rate would drastically improve on farms through better decision making as a result of all the data derived from the system.

⁶⁶ CSO 2020, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eii/environmentalindicatorsireland2020/landuse/>

⁶⁷ Gov.ie, 2021, <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>

⁶⁸ Gov.ie, 2021, <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b9058-beef-finisher-payment/>

⁶⁹ Agriland.ie, 2021, <https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/reducing-age-of-slaughter-may-be-the-solution-to-avoid-culling-national-herd/>

Organic Market

Land use for organic farming in Ireland accounted for 1.4% of the total agricultural land in 2018, which was the third lowest percentage among the EU member states.⁶⁶ Organic agriculture features throughout the programme government with commitments to focus on maximising the potential opportunities in the organic sector.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- Creation of a specific Market Development Fund for organic agriculture

Justification

There is a need for a market development fund specifically for organic agriculture so we can increase the number of organic farmers who can get a viable price for their product. The programme for government also commits to aligning Ireland's organic land area with that of the current EU average over the lifetime of the current government, focusing on developing domestic and international organic markets.⁶⁷ In order to achieve these goals, work must be put into developing these markets so that the sector is attractive to enter into.

Beef Finisher/Rearer Payment

There is precedence for a Beef Finisher/Rearer Payment, with the introduction of Beef Finisher Payment in 2020 to provide income support to farmers with beef finishing enterprises who were impacted by the economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁶⁸

Macra na Feirme proposal

- The introduction of a Beef Finisher Payment based on age of slaughter – a stepped payment
 - €150 at under 26 months
 - €100 at 26-28 months
 - €75 at 28-30 months
- The introduction of a Beef Rearer Payment based on growth rates of animals destined for slaughter to promote earlier age at slaughter and thus reduce the emissions from the Agriculture sector.
 - Payment based on animals reaching target weights at three month intervals.
 - Target weight will vary depending on breed and potential slaughter weights.
 - Figures from average slaughter weights should be used within breed to determine target weights at varying intervals.

Justification

According to Andrew Crombie of ICBF, each month (thirty days) reduced in the lead-up to slaughter is the equivalent of almost 250kt of GHG reduced.⁶⁹

Macra na Feirme would like to see the introduction of this payment to be considered a GHG reduction measure, which can then go on to further strengthen the green credentials of the industry.



Liming

Liming plays a very important role in improving soil fertility for better grass growth and is considered to be a crucial enabling measure to support the reduction of chemical N. Lime use is assumed to reach 2m tonnes usage by 2030 in the MACC with progress from current use of less than 900k tonnes occurring in a linear fashion between 2022 and 2030. Liming does create a small increase in direct CO2 emissions, but in the context of overall GHG balance, this is not considered important.

Macra na Feirme’s proposal

- Roll out of the lime promotion programme as promised within the Programme for Government



Land Mobility and Generational Renewal Facilitation Service

The current Land Mobility Service is an initiative established by Macra na Feirme with funding from industry, farmer participants and the Department of Agriculture. The Service provides options for land owners and opportunities for young trained farmers. There are three key elements to the service:

- 1. Create awareness and provide information
- 2. Facilitate and deliver arrangements including matching
- 3. Support operating arrangements

The Land Mobility Service currently engages with circa 350 to 400 farmers per annum and helps facilitate 100 to 150 arrangements annually. The Land mobility initiative has received positive feedback from the EU Commission and stakeholders and the need has been identified to expand and grow this very important service in order to deliver on the ambition for generational renewal. Further growth, success and engagement is curtailed by a restricted budget and despite the CAP strategic plan identifying the need

for Land mobility the measure is not included for in Irelands CAP strategic plan.

Macra na Feirme proposal

- A nationwide Land Mobility and Generational Renewal Facilitation Service requires annual exchequer funding of €250,000. The need for Land Mobility and Generational Renewal was identified in the CAP Strategic plan but its absence from the plan will require exchequer funding to deliver on the EU ambition for Generational Renewal.

Justification

The benefits of positive farmer Generational Renewal and young people living to rural communities is well established. This generational renewal does not have to be confined to within the family or land ownership, many successful and sustainable farming enterprises are operated by excellent young farmers, who own no or little land. Apart from the social benefits delivered by young farmers there is evidence to show that they better adopt new technologies and environmental considerations, both their carbon footprint and income return per unit of output tends to be more positive than that of older farmers. The risk and past experience with relying on traditional young farmer support and land owner exit measures alone to deliver change is that the result is

- A lack of awareness of the support measures, and how they can be availed of in conjunction with all the other elements and schemes within a CAP, eg a positive environmental scheme could have a negative generational renewal impact due to land owner misinformation or misunderstanding.
- Delivery, but not enough to reverse a trend due to insufficient support at farm level and/or facilitation with obstacles and identifying collaborators.
- A focus on one party rather than a sustainable and win win outcome
- Land abandonment.
- Conglomeration with young farmers disadvantaged and large operators accessing available land.

The challenge for this type of support service is that what you are dealing with is time consuming, often sensitive, requires expertise discretion and patience and is often protracted.

i <https://assets.gov.ie/67604/a6d56047985748f4a63faeb740d69847.pdf>

ii <https://www.nuigalway.ie/about-us/news-and-events/news-archive/2020/may/survey-shows-83-want-to-continue-to-work-remotely-after-covid-19-crisis.html>

iii <https://www.pwc.ie/media-centre/press-release/2020/cfo-pulse-survey-reveals-irish-businesses-looking-to-increase-remote-working.html>



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