



IFA SUBMISSION TO THE CONSULTATION PROCESS ON THE SUCCESSOR TO THE STRATEGY FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The IFA Submission focuses primarily on Pillar 7 of the outgoing strategy for Science Technology and Innovation; that is Government-wide goals on innovation in key sectors for job creation and societal benefit.

IFA believes that a key priority to inform the development of a new strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation is that research priorities must support key Government policy objectives. The development of a new strategy for the agri-food sector to 2025, which follows on from the Government and industry-wide supported *Food Harvest 2020*, will set out targets throughout the entire agri-food sector, from farm level profitability to export growth. The funding priorities for research for the agri-food sector must be coherent with the targets set out in the newly developed agri-strategy 2025.

The dissemination of research findings to end users, whether in agriculture, or other industries, must be a priority of any new Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation.

KEY ISSUES

Translation of investment in Science Technology and Innovation into the achievement of public policy goals

In the five years since the launch of *Food Harvest 2020*, the value of output at farm-gate level has increased significantly, from an average of €4.5b between 2007 and 2009 to €5.9b in 2014¹. This was driven largely by an increase in the value of the output produced, with volume increases recorded in some sectors, most notably the dairy, pigmeat and poultry sectors.

The growth in value of primary food production contributed to the recovery in employment in the primary production and food processing sectors, and underpinned significant growth in the value of Irish agri-food exports, with exports in 2014 reaching €10.5b.

¹ Measured as *Goods Output at Producer Prices less Forage Plants*, sourced from *CSO Output, Input and Income in Agriculture*, www.cso.ie

The extension of the discussion group model across different sectors as an effective means of knowledge transfer has been a positive initiative over the last five years, with the numbers of participating farmers in the dairy, beef and sheep sectors increasing annually. Through the Rural Development Programme in particular, there must be a focus on greater dissemination of research findings to farmers. This must be through increased provision of advisory services, including one-to-one farm advisory, formal agricultural education and through the discussion group format.

Farmers are also participating in programmes to improve herd health and genetics. It is very important that strong government funding is maintained for ICBF to continue the progress already achieved and further develop breeding programmes across the dairy, beef and sheep herds. Increased productivity at farm level results in an increase in earnings in the agri-food sector and increased exports at national level.

In the forest sector, the publication of *Forests, products and people - Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision* sets out an updated national forest policy. The strategic goal is to develop an internationally competitive and sustainable forest sector that provides a full range of economic, environmental and social benefits to society and which accords with the Forest Europe definition of sustainable forest management.

Identifying the synergies between Government's goals in building a better society and the goal of creating jobs and economic growth

The agri-food sector is Ireland's largest indigenous industry, contributing to 300,000 jobs in primary agriculture, food processing, input supplies and related services. These jobs are located across every town and parish in Ireland, and the sector is playing a critically important role in achieving a regionally balanced economic recovery. The targeting of research funding to underpin primary agriculture and the wider agri-food sector will deliver significant economic and societal benefits for Ireland, arising from employment, output and earnings growth across the economy.

Addressing local and national challenges that are also regional and global

With a growing global demand for high quality food, Irish agriculture faces a significant challenge in meeting climate change objectives, while sustainability growing output.

Participation by farmers in the Bord Bia Quality Assurance Schemes (QAS) continues to increase, with schemes operating in the beef, lamb, pigmeat, poultry, eggs and horticulture sectors. In the dairy sector, all milk purchasers and milk producers are participants in the developing Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme. The development of the Origin Green programme to measure and improve the sustainability of Irish food production is building on the work undertaken on farms through the QAS.

IFA has taken a lead role in the delivery of the smart green growth that underpins the original vision of *Food Harvest 2020*, through the establishment of the voluntary resource efficiency initiative *Smart Farming*. This initiative while delivered by IFA, draws on the collaborative expertise of Teagasc, EPA, UCD and others in a focused way to improve farm incomes, while minimising the environmental impact through better resource management.

IFA PROPOSALS

Prioritising research funding in primary agriculture and the agri-food sector

It is critically important that Teagasc, Ireland's research, education and advisory body for agriculture, continue to provide strong, independent research and advisory programmes across all farming sectors, which are not influenced by external, commercial bodies. To do this, Teagasc must be adequately resourced, with the cuts to funding introduced in the downturn restored as a priority as the economy recovers and public finances improve.

To achieve world-class research capacity in certain targeted areas, research funding must support basic as well as applied research, and include the physical and social sciences. This is clear from the research areas currently prioritised by Teagasc. These cover a wide range of areas, including on-farm science-based improvements in animal genetics and grassland management, the development of farm-level indicators to measure GHG emission reductions, behavioural economics research into farm transfer and technology adoption, new product development and development of novel food technologies. There must also be a continued focus on economic and social research and the valuation of non-market public goods provided by the farming sector.

A key area of focus for the new Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation must be that resources are provided to deliver Teagasc's research outcomes in a manner that can be easily accessed and incorporated by farmers into their farm enterprises.

Sustainable growth of the agri-food sector

With a growing global demand for high quality food, Irish agriculture faces a significant challenge in meeting climate change objectives, while sustainably growing output. The new Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation must target research funding in this area.

Significant research is ongoing across all sectors into strategies to reduce GHG emissions. In the dairy sector in particular, the development of the Sustainability Dairy assurance Scheme (Dairy QA) by Bord Bia includes sustainability measurements for the first time, in order that Ireland can prove its claims regarding sustainability. This includes the development of the farm-level Carbon navigator tool developed by Teagasc. Particular emphasis is required on practical solutions for farmers regarding mitigation strategies, with greater buy-in required from the dairy industry.

Development of high-value agri-food products

To differentiate and add value to Irish high quality primary produce, greater public and private sector research collaboration is required. In the cereals sector, for example, research funding and dissemination of findings is required for the development of higher value niche products from home grown cereals, oilseeds, potatoes, beet etc. (such as gluten free oats, premium malts, functional foods)

The work of Food for Health Ireland, the dairy industry and Enterprise Ireland collaborative research body, is an example of progress in this area, where the focus is to conduct research in 'pre-competitive' areas. This must be built upon further and replicated across other agricultural sectors.