



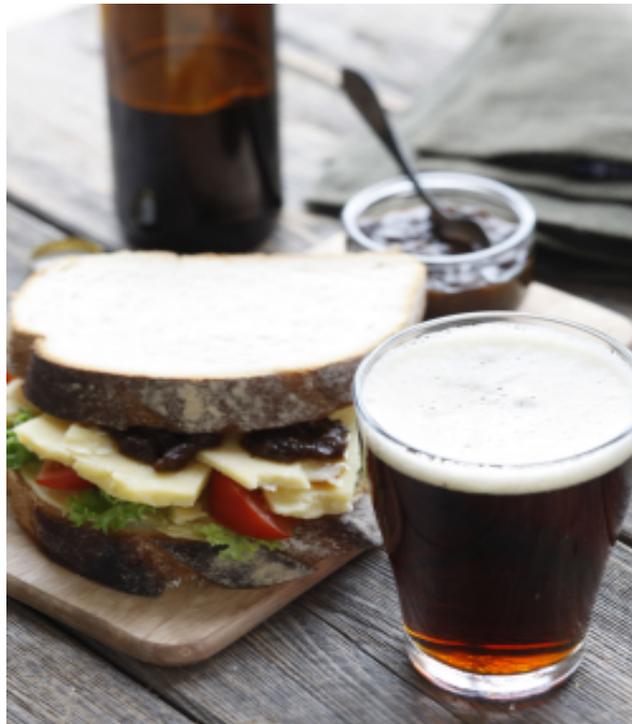
**Green Foundation Ireland**

## **Food Seminar**

**Food: Good to Eat and Good for Ireland?**

European Parliament Offices, 43 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2

**Friday 11 October 2013, 9:00am to 4:00pm**



*Food from Ireland*

## **NOTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS**

*Compiled by Gary Goggins, PhD candidate at NUI Galway*

## **Welcome by**

**Nessa Childers MEP**

**Nuala Ahern** (Chair, Green Foundation Ireland)

## **Official Opening of Food Seminar**

**Tom Hayes TD** (Fine Gael and Minister for Forestry, Horticulture, the Greyhound Industry and Food Safety)

Sustainability is important to Ireland. Agri-business needs to have sustainability targets, hence the launch of 'Origin Green' – a sustainability programme for Ireland's food and drinks industry. Origin Green can provide solutions to food security.

The agri-food sector accounts for 10% of Ireland's exports, 8% of GDP and employs 160,000 people. Expanding the sector will help Ireland's recovery. Real opportunities for expansion exist in the dairy sector. Producing more food without negatively contributing to climate change is one of the most important policy considerations. All actors in the industry recognise the importance of sustainability. In 2011 the agri-sector was responsible for 32% of emissions for Ireland however Ireland's grass-based system is one of the most efficient beef production systems.

The government must continue to invest in advisory services, especially Teagasc. Lower carbon intensity brings greater profit, we must meet Food Harvest 2020 targets and also meet emissions reduction targets. There has been strong growth in a number of food production areas, for example the potato and mushroom industries. In the mushroom industry there are now less growers than before but greater total output. Larger production units are more efficient and with technological advances they have better environmental efficiency, use less pesticides, less fertiliser, etc. New technologies brought about by larger growers in the mushroom industry has also lengthened the production season.

Ireland is uniquely suitable for organic farming thanks to our climate and our green image. There are huge opportunities for growth as demand for Irish products increases at home. Farmers markets and box-schemes provide market opportunities for organic produce. Demand for good, quality food is on the rise. Organic food production is viable and totally sustainable, and offers real opportunities for farmers.

Agriculture, food production and tourism – these are 'the old ways' which will bring Ireland to recovery.

## **Session 1: Trusting the food we eat?**

Chaired by **Ella McSweeney** (Broadcaster)

**Suzanne Campbell** (Food and Farming Writer)

### *Food safety*

Ireland's reputation for food is still good, Ireland secured new markets for beef post the horse meat scandal. The scandal was a case of food fraud – food fraud is not new and is always going to be with us. The report into horse meat did not show DEFRA and the UK FSA in a good light. The UK agencies failed to act.

Food safety and nutrition are intertwined. The family farm is important in traceability but

farmers are burdened by external factors (e.g. regulation, subject to national reputation). Subsidies have an important role to play in supporting farmers to make farming viable; however targeted subsidies can preference certain crops, thus bringing homogeneity to food products and causing major health issues (e.g. US subsidy of corn production has led to the excessive use of corn derivatives and contributes to poor health, especially the use of High Fructose Corn Syrup in processed foods).

**Éamon Ó Cuív TD** (Fianna Fáil)

*Market impacts of maintaining high food standards*

The food sector is vulnerable to food scares and health issues. Food safety is important at the processing stage and not just at production. The entire food chain needs to be safe. Food scares negatively affect markets; therefore, we must be extremely vigilant in dealing with threats and perceived threats. Image and reputation is what people buy and food based on image and reality must match.

Organic production is important and should be promoted. We also need a certification for non-intensive production – somewhere between industrial and organic production.

We need to retain small and medium size farmers to retain structures and protect rural development. We should redistribute subsidy payments from top to bottom. The government should facilitate small producers to meet the highest standards rather than dropping standards to make them easier to reach. We should facilitate local food sales where some of the risk would pass to the consumer as they know where the produce is coming from.

The motto should not be cheap food, the motto should be food good to eat, at a fair price and a fair return to the primary producer.

**Seamus Sheridan** (The Green Party)

*Food safety and culture*

Is our obsession with food safety detrimental to our food culture? Will we be left with processed, technically safe food? The origins of good food transcends all class, good food is not just for the middle class.

*Science*

Science is very important and has an important role to play in shaping our society. Some elements of GM are good for society (e.g. in mitigating climate change), however other aspects are bad for society. We do not discuss GM publicly in a meaningful way and we are even dismissed from doing so by some people.

Food safety should not be an isolated issue and should be seen in the wider realm of the environment, food security, etc. For example, the antibiotic footprint of food production in water, soils, other animals, etc. is often ignored. Just because food is safe it doesn't mean that it is right.

Does food safety benefit society or benefit big food industry and corporate food? This is played out in our interpretations of safe food and the prominence of food safety issues in the media. For example, Food Safety Officers and Parks and Wildlife Officers have the same degree of power. Those who breach food safety regulations are constantly named in the media, yet polluters and other environmental offenders do not receive the same attention.

Preferential treatment is also given to large corporations, as evident in a recent high profile government sustainability conference held by Bord Bia (where speakers included McDonald's Corporation, PepsiCo, Mars, Nestlé, etc.) and at the recent opening of a Tesco store by a government minister. Large agri-food corporations are given massive governmental supports even though they commodify food and bring more processed food to the market. Minister for Agriculture, Simon Coveney, called the decision of Kerry Group to build a food technology and research centre in Kildare the greatest and most significant day in the history of Irish food and agriculture.

**Professor Alan Reilly** (Chief Executive, Food Safety Authority of Ireland)

The FSAI was set up to protect the health and interests of Irish consumers and consumers of Irish foods. The FSAI is a food law enforcement agency, is science-based, provide advice to ministers, is independent of the agri-food sector, and is concerned with public trust of food.

We need to have regulation right across the food chain. One weak link can destroy the chain. Ultimately food safety is the responsibility of the industry. We have about 50,000 food premises in Ireland. These are monitored through risk-based food inspection. Premises each have a risk profile which contributes to the degree of inspection it is subjected to. Inspection can give you a degree of confidence in the food risk management system depending on what you find.

**Session 2: What will consumers want from food in 2020?**

Chaired by **Trevor Sargent** (Writer and Grower)

**Trevor Sargent**

Would question the sustainability of consolidating production to a few producers and supporting the people that put the other people out of business.

**Senator Kathryn Reilly** (Sinn Féin)

There is great potential for developing the indigenous food sector.

Around 200 farmers in Ireland receive in excess of €100,000 in farm payments and more than 2,000 farmers receive over €50,000. We need to protect small farmers to ensure food security and not just support large farmers. Localised food production can ensure food security.

Food labelling needs to be addressed to ensure we know where food comes from.

**Eddie Downey** (Deputy President, Irish Farmers' Association)

Agriculture is now at the top of the political agenda. Agriculture drives the economy. We can continue to increase food exports. We already produce enough beef to feed 30 million Europeans each year.

Farmers keep farms in trust for future generations.

Irish agriculture is the model of agriculture that should be replicated in the rest of the world.

Inspection processes should work alongside farmers.

Agriculture in Ireland has reached its limits in emissions reduction. Emissions have been reduced by 10% over recent years but there is only about 3-4% further reductions possible. Criticism of the Irish model (of high meat and dairy production) could damage the model.

**Michael Kelly** (Grow it Yourself)

GIY has approximately 50,000 members and consists of around 800 individual food projects and groups.

GIY built on the concept of 'Food Empathy' – a deeper understanding of food, where it comes from, how it is produced, and the time and effort required.

'Food empathy' opposed to 'food apathy' – where people don't know or care where food comes from.

GIY is open to everyone, from the person with one pot on the windowsill to the person growing 20 acres. It is about giving food growing a try, and learning and discovering about where food comes from and the cycle of food. GIY educates people about food seasonality. People can also grow a greater diversity and variety of food at home and grow produce that are not available in supermarkets.

GIY recognises a shift towards local (Irish) produce and a move towards greater appreciation of flavour. Large supermarkets sense these trends and are starting to embrace Irish products (e.g. Tesco – home grown in Ireland).

How do we evaluate the overall impacts (social, environmental, economic) of community agriculture projects?

**Gill Westbrook** (General Manager, Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association)

Organic is often referred to as elitist but this is not the case. Sustainability is an overused term and has different interpretations.

To generate 1 tonne of artificial fertiliser uses 108 cubic metres of fresh water, 1 tonne of oil or gas, and emits 7 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Organic production uses 26% less energy.

Land based production is also responsible for rising sea temperatures. We need to look beyond our production methods and consider the entire food chain to include transport for exporting, etc.

Ireland's green image is not permanent.

**Session 3: What people want from food in 2020?**

Chaired by **Nuala Ahern** (Chair, Green Foundation Ireland)

**Nessa Childers** (MEP)

*Food poverty*

People most at risk from food poverty are households with low income, households with more than three children, lone parents, households with disabled parents. People living in food poverty are often obese as they eat a lot of low-nutrition energy-dense food.

We need a multi-sector approach and a multi-level approach to tackle food poverty. We also need a co-ordinated multi-faceted approach to nutrition. Any food that is sponsored by the State should be healthy and nutritious. We should raise taxes on sugary foods.

**Dylan McGrath** (MasterChef Ireland and Fade Street Social)

*Sourcing food*

Use suppliers you can trust. Ireland produces some of the best food in the world. By using Irish suppliers you reinvest back into the country. Customers are looking for nutritious healthy food.

Maintaining high standards of food is important for tourism.

**Grace Binchy** (Bord Bia "Insight and innovation")

*Consumer perspective*

Factors that influence consumer trends –

- *Food and environment (economic):* Simplicity; local emphasis; resourcefulness; convenience.
- *Food and technology:* Connections; transparency; resourcefulness; convenience.

New technologies make decisions for you about what you should eat, what to wear, etc. Food, well-being and health.

**Pat Lalor** (Kilbeggan Organic Foods)

75% of Irish farmers are in the dairy or livestock sector. The average farm subsidy is €19,000. Average drystock farm income at end of year including subsidies is €16,000, thus farmers are losing money. Farmers are working long hours for low pay and often working in isolation. Young people do not want to go into farming thereby contributing to the urbanisation of society. How can we make farming more attractive for younger people?

What will I get for €10?

- 20 cigarettes
- 2 pints of beer
- 20kg potatoes
- 4kg porridge oats (100 servings)
- 12 litres of milk

To increase income large farms can turn to dairy (more profitable than drystock), farmers can plant land for forestry or farmers can seek a second income source outside of farming.

We need to teach students how to think creatively and be innovative. We should have an "ideation camp" to come up with and develop new creative ideas. Farmers need to be prepared to take risks to develop new products.

Food production can generate financial and job satisfaction rewards, however job satisfaction ends at the farm gate if farmers do not get feedback from customers or if they do not know their customers.

Current farm incomes are unsustainable for future generations. Farmers need to become more innovative. The supports and goodwill towards farmers are already there.