



Re: Joint NGO letter in response to the Ukraine crisis and the future of Irish agriculture

Dear Minister McConalogue,

CC: Minister Pippa Hackett, Minister Martin Heydon, Minister Malcolm Noonan, Minister Eamon Ryan

We the Environmental Pillar, Stop Climate Chaos and the Sustainable Water Network (SWAN) are writing to you in response to the global food security crisis that is emerging due to Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine. We are appalled by the terrible acts of aggression perpetrated against Ukraine and the tragic humanitarian crisis that has ensued, and are fully supportive of ongoing actions being taken in solidarity with the Ukrainian people at an Irish and EU level. However, it is deeply concerning to us that the crisis in Ukraine may be misused as an excuse to undermine the environmental and social progress built into the fabric of the European Green Deal, including Farm to Fork, and Biodiversity Strategies. The humanitarian cost alone of delaying our response to the climate and biodiversity crises would be catastrophic¹. As Frans Timmermans cautioned "Please, don't believe in the illusion that [...] you would help food production by making it less sustainable, by not opting for Farm to Fork strategy, by not making it more resilient in terms of the natural environment and the food production."² The dual threat of a food and fodder crisis starkly highlights our economic overdependence on feed and food imports, artificial fertilisers, and fossil fuels. Now is the time for a critical reassessment of Ireland's role in global food security, followed by brave and decisive leadership that supports sustainable food production.

Concerns around a food security crisis internationally, and a winter fodder crisis in Ireland are well founded. If a fodder shortage does happen this winter, action will need to be taken to limit the impacts on farmers and livestock. If a fodder crisis does come to fruition it would be the fourth of the last decade, the previous three having been driven by climate, the severity of which ranged from moderate to extreme, culminating in acute hunger and starvation of livestock, and

¹ IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegria, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press.

²Euractiv (2022) Timmermans cautions against relaxing Green deal goals for sake of food security <https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/timmermans-cautions-against-relaxing-green-deal-goals-for-sake-of-food-security/>

severe hardship for farmers³. Ireland is in an even more vulnerable position now given that our self-sufficiency in feed grain has decreased from 41% (2014) to 21% (2018)⁴. Climate models predict that such events will be more likely in the future with an increased likelihood of more frequent heat events and dry periods³. Ireland's vulnerability to this and future fodder shortages is symptomatic of the failure of successive agricultural policies to take into account the risks posed by climate change and geo-political instability, or the need to achieve greater social and environmental sustainability.

At a global level, food security is being undermined by the serious climate, land-use, water quality and biodiversity impacts associated with intensive livestock farming, fertiliser use, and feed production. In the context of global food security, it is important to clarify that expert analysis shows that Ireland is not helping to 'feed the world'. On this, it is important to emphasize three key points:

- a) Ireland imports more food than it exports in net energy terms⁵,
- b) Ireland's major food exports are beef and dairy products, neither of which feed the poor and hungry of the world⁶, and
- c) Feeding grain to farm animals removes calories from the global food system, especially impacting the poorest countries in the global South⁷.

Ireland's greatest contribution to global food security should be made through improving national food security and tackling the climate and biodiversity crises. The need to reduce the size of Ireland's dairy and beef herds is recognised by the Climate Change Advisory Council⁸ as being necessary to reduce agricultural emissions, and ensure compliance with the Paris Agreement. This would have four positive impacts, as follows:

- It would support our environmental obligations to address water and air pollution, and biodiversity loss associated with the ongoing intensification of those sectors.
- It would reduce the demand for fodder and shield the agricultural sector against future animal welfare crises due to climate impacts and geopolitical challenges and insecurities.
- It provides an opportunity to build resilience through diversification, to reinvigorate the tillage and horticultural sectors, and to support sustainable agriculture practices such as organic farming.

³ Nolan et al (2021) Risk of Drought- Risk of Drought-Related "Fodder Crises" in Irish Related "Fodder Crises" in Irish Agriculture under mid- Agriculture under mid-21st Century Climatic Conditions https://hydrologyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/03-Paul-Leahy-NHC_ClimAg_A0_Poster_Leahy.pdf

⁴ Teagasc (2020) Crops 2030 report - A strategic plan to deliver environmental and economic sustainability for the Irish Crops Sector <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2020/Crops-2030-Strategy.pdf>

⁵ Doyle, C. (2014). Greenhouse gas Policies in Ireland 1990 - 2012 Reliance on the land. Department of Geography School of Geography and Archaeology College of Arts , Social Sciences and Celtic Studies National University of Ireland , Galway, (April).

⁶ Prosekov, A. Y., & Ivanova, S. A. (2018). Food security: The challenge of the present. *Geoforum*, 91, 73-77.

⁷ Di Paola, A., Rulli, M. C., & Santini, M. (2017). Human food vs. animal feed debate. A thorough analysis of environmental footprints. *Land use policy*, 67, 652-659.

⁸ Climate Change Advisory Council (2021) Carbon Budget Technical Report <https://www.climatecouncil.ie/media/climatechangeadvisorycouncil/Technical%20report%20on%20carbon%20budgets%2025.10.2021.pdf>

- It would contribute to increasing global food security directly by reducing Irish imports of feed derived from crops that should be supplying food for people, and indirectly by tackling climate change with its accepted negative implications for global food production and food insecurity.

We urge the Government to take the following actions:

1. Diversify Ireland's agricultural system and support an expeditious and comprehensive implementation of the Green Deal, including Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies. We must shift towards environmentally and socially sustainable farming practices. This is the only path that ensures long-term food security, and food sovereignty, while reducing our exposure to risks and external shocks³.
2. The global food system will continue to suffer from crises and uncertainties as we weather the impacts of climate change over the coming years and decades. By acting now, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within our agricultural sector we can positively contribute to the resilience of global food systems.
3. Ensure a Just Transition for Irish farmers. Farmers must be supported and incentivised to move to more sustainable agricultural practices⁹. The horticultural and tillage sectors have been badly neglected and would benefit from a renewed emphasis on the prosperity of their sectors. There must be greater equity in the opportunities and responsibilities associated with the transition to a more sustainable food system.
4. Now is the time to plan for the reduction in the dairy and beef herds. The reintroduction of dairy quotas at an Irish or EU level would contribute to this goal, as would limits on fertiliser usage that are in line with environmental carrying capacity. In that context, the government should withdraw its application for a new Nitrates Derogation and introduce a permitting system for intensive dairy and beef farming, similar to that for pigs and poultry.
5. A renewed focus must be placed on farming systems which are less dependent on synthetic pesticides and fertilisers. Greater support is needed for regenerative agriculture, organics, nutrient management planning, and multi-species swards.
6. Ensure no reductions / conversion of areas and habitats for biodiversity in current RDP and future CAP (2023-2027).

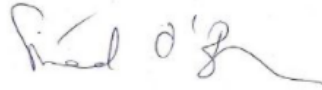
We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our position in more detail.

⁹ Environmental Pillar, the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition and the Sustainable Water Network (2021) Towards a New Agricultural and Food Policy for Ireland Recommendations for Government https://environmentalpillar.ie/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/EnvironmentalPillar_SWAN_SCC_Agricultural_Food_Policy.pdf

Yours sincerely,



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