

2022



Macra na Feirme

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON CARBON BUDGETS
MACRA NA FEIRME**

Macra na Feirme would welcome the opportunity to engage with the minister in a face to face meeting, on the following topics. Young farmers, young business people are having their businesses curtailed. Young farmers must be supported in their careers. Young farmers must be front and centre in all agriculture carbon budget conversations.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 has a proposed a target for agriculture to reduce emission by 22% to 30% by 2030.

The most important aspect in the reduction of emissions is farmer uptake. Farm uptake will largely be influenced by education to create awareness and change farming practices. Farmers are the agents of change, but need vast amounts of support and guidance during any transition. Government policy has a huge role to play in farmer education and facilitation of farm change through the provision of financial support mechanisms and knowledge transfer.

Impact of 30% reduction

Agriculture is one of the main land uses in Ireland. As a result, it has a major role to play within our habitat, water quality and our greenhouse gas emissions profile. Our landscape is like no other in any of the member states across the EU, with 72% of the land under agricultural usage. Agriculture is Ireland's leading indigenous industry, with approximately 164,000 people employed in it. The fabric of rural Ireland and the countryside, is made up of family farms. They go about their business on a daily basis, doing their best to produce sustainably produced, premium-brand leading products that command a global premium right across the global market.

As outlined in the Irish Farmer Journal/KPMG report a 30% reduction compared to 2018 levels, will likely require a livestock reduction of 18% for dairy, 22% for beef and 5% for pigs, poultry and sheep. This would accompany the application of mitigation measures outlined in the Teagasc MACC along with any additional measures coming from Teagasc research resulting in an 18% reduction compared to 2018 levels. Together these measures and livestock reductions result in profit falling on average farms by €17,500 on the average dairy farm and by €2,800 on an average beef farm (Irish Farmers Journal/KPMG, 2021). When you compare this to the average dairy farm income of €74,236 in 2020 according to the Teagasc National Farm survey, the average cattle rearing income was €9,037 and the average cattle other system income was €14,813 (Teagasc, 2021).

Macra na Feirme feels that the carbon budgets will affect every aspect of young farmers lives, both personal and professional, for decades to come.

The CCAC admits in their report that there will be lower agriculture outputs, incomes and a reduction in employment as a result of a reduction in bovine agricultural activity.

Naturally if there are decreased in average incomes of farmers there will also be decreases in economic output for the sector. The livestock reductions will likely result in a €2.04bn decrease in economic output for the agriculture sector, with the beef sector contributing the biggest share of the decrease. The overall decrease in economic output for 30% emission reduction is estimated to be €2.09bn (Irish Farmers Journal/KPMG, 2021).

Full time equivalent employment with a 30% emissions reduction, has been estimated to reduce 7,400 (6%) to 15,000 (12%). These numbers are just those in direct farm employment. It also worth noting that job losses would be greater if subsidies decreased along with livestock reductions.

It is estimated that there would be a 20% (41,000) reduction in full time equivalent employment for those employed outside of the farm gate (Irish Farmers Journal/KPMG, 2021). This could be the downfall of rural Ireland and that should not be forgotten about.

The Signpost Programme

Teagasc and the participating farmers in the Signpost Programme will assess the carbon sequestration capacity of grassland and croplands which the programme; assess the impact of management on C sequestration, and, quantify the impact of drainage and re-wetting on agricultural peat soils. The research will also combine CO₂ flux tower data with drone and satellite remote sensing and state-of-art carbon cycle models. This will allow Teagasc to model the impact of future climate change, farm management practice and practice changes on carbon sequestration as well as crop, grass and forest yields.

Teagasc and the signpost farmers are putting in excellent work and commitment to this programme in the pursuit of reducing GHG emissions from Irish agriculture, reducing overall environmental footprint of agriculture and of course leading and support the transition of Irish farming towards more sustainable farming systems.

The Teagasc MACC has identified further emission cuts through the uptake of various technologies and change practice. The research developed by Teagasc in relation to the MACC charts a pathway forward over the coming years to address the climate challenge. What is required now is an

intensification of investment in research and innovation to develop further technologies and practices that will deliver on additional carbon commitments.

It is also important to note that Biogenic methane figures appear to have been overestimated based on the trial in Teagasc Solohead farm.

Generational Renewal

The important point in terms of climate and our embracing of technologies and of the environmental challenge that lies ahead is consideration for the impact of generation renewal, the encouragement of young farmers and young people and how they can drive practices and address challenges on farms. On an ever-increasing basis, we see highly educated, highly motivated young people accessing the sector and driving forward new and improved practices. It is important that any climate actions in respect of the environment, water quality or biodiversity take cognisance of the importance that young farmers and young people can play in driving this important change. Looking at the statistics over the past 20 or 30 years, the numbers of young farmers and of active farmers under the age of 35 continue to diminish. It cannot be left that young farmers are forgotten and that provisions are not made. Macra na Feirme believes that benefiting young farmers, providing support for young farmers and driving generational renewal will not only have a positive impact on young farmers but will have a major effect on the environmental impact of agriculture.

Certainty for the future must be provided for young farmers. Any young people entering into different businesses and different occupations within a sector, whether public or private, always look for certainty in their careers and for a ladder or pathway to climb. Young farmers and farmers in general face ever-increasing challenges such as legislative burdens or challenges in respect of produce and input costs. We need to provide an environment that is friendly to young farmers; one that encourages and provides pathways into the future and which drives generational renewal. We also have to drive and improve our environmental impact. As young farmers, we are fully committed to playing our role in addressing environmental challenges. Macra na Feirme has never been found wanting in embracing new technologies, in putting forward challenging policies or in embracing what needs to be done to address change. We recognise the important role we have both as farmers and as young farmers.

The distinct situation we are in lies in our ability to sequester carbon in conjunction with reducing our emissions. Given appropriate time and policies that are achievable and complementary to current

farming practices, which deliver on economic success for the future of farming, we, as young farmers, will respond and continue to improve our environmental impact.

Young farmers cannot end up in a situation where our competitive advantage in terms of our grass-based system of production is hampered while the rest of the world moves forward in production and innovation.

A realisation must dawn soon that the world population is due to grow by 20% over the next 30 years, in a time that already has mass starvation across the world. Curtailing one of the most sustainable food producing countries in the world will do nothing to meet the global food demand or the need to reduce global emissions.

In 2018, Ireland’s emissions could be broken down by sector as follows:

	Ireland	EU
Energy	54.2%	82.3%
Industrial Processes	4.7%	9.4%
Agriculture	32.6%	11.0%
Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry	7.0%	-6.4%
Waste	1.4%	3.7%

Most of the reduction in agricultural GHG emissions, particularly in Scenarios D, E and F arise from reductions in bovine agricultural activity levels. With reductions in beef and dairy activity levels, unless other income streams are developed, agricultural output value and agricultural sector income are also reduced. The more ambitious the agricultural GHG emissions reductions scenarios considered, the larger the negative impact on agricultural output value and on agricultural sector income. (Technical Report page 37)

The acceleration of technology development leading to additional mitigation possibilities and increasing the rate of technology adoption could help to avoid the need for a reduction in bovine agriculture activity levels. Teagasc (and other researchers) are investigating a range of technologies that could deliver additional mitigation in the future, but which still require further development before deployment. (Technical Report page 37).