

# A Teagasc\* Perspective

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\*Views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of Teagasc

# Strategic Dialogue and the Challenges for Irish Ag

- In many respects **Strategic Dialogue align with key issues** of concern to **Irish agriculture**
- **Stakeholder engagement could assist in developing solutions**
- **Benefits of stakeholder engagement:**
  - **Build trust**
  - **Give farmers the voice** they feel they don't have
  - Centre the **engagement** around the **key issues**
  - Give farmers a role in **identifying** the **challenges** and **solutions**
  - Rumours spread in an information vacuum, **good communication** can help drive **positive engagement**
  - **Communicate** in a way that's **accessible to farmers** – leaving the Brussels jargon at the door
  - Establish ways to **identify and acknowledge progress** made by farmers (positive messaging)
  - **Recognise the differences** between farmers by age groups, sector and even between regions in Ireland
  - **Address the imbalance** that exists in different group of **farmers being heard**

# Stakeholder Engagement

- **Build stronger partnerships between**
  - policymakers
  - farming organisations (eg., IFA, ICMSA, ICSA etc),
  - young farmers (e.g., Macra na Feirme)
  - rural communities in general
- **Foster a culture of collaboration, trust and transparency**
  - policymakers, farmers, agri-businesses, research institutions, NGOs and rural communities
- **Three means to support Stakeholder Engagement**
  - A. Structured Platforms for Dialogue
  - B. Transparent and Inclusive Communication
  - C. Leveraging Technology to Support the Communication Process



# A. Structured Platforms for Dialogue

## • Regular Consultative Forums

- Establish **regional and national forums**
  - national equivalent of the **European Agricultural Advisory Board**
- Key issues like sustainability, generational renewal and rural development
- **Diverse representation** including
  - young farmers, women in agriculture and environmental NGOs

## • Sector-Specific Working Groups

- Create working groups focusing on pressing issues
  - e.g., dairy emissions, land mobility, CAP reform
- To develop **actionable recommendations** in a collaborative way

## • Participatory Policy Design

- Involve stakeholders in drafting and piloting agricultural policies
  - ensuring that their **practical knowledge** and experiences **shape the interventions**



## B. Transparent and Inclusive Communication

- **Accessible Communication Channels:**

- Use **multiple channels**
  - (e.g., online portals, workshops, and newsletters)
- Keep stakeholders informed and engaged

- **Accessible use of Language:**

- Using **non-technical language** to engage the audience

- **Respect for age, regional and sectoral differences**

- Consider **regional, sectoral and age related differences** in farmer attitudes when engaging stakeholders
- Foster an **inclusive approach** and limit feelings of isolation/alienation



## C. Leveraging Technology to Support the Communication Process

### • Digital Platforms

- **Increasing acceptance** since COVID experience
- Digital tools for **real-time consultation** and updates
  - (e.g., mobile apps, forums, and webinars)
- Use **social media to engage younger farmers** in particular (and **young people contemplating farming**)

### • Data-Driven Engagement

- Use social media **data analytics** to **identify stakeholder concerns** and **target engagement efforts** more effectively



# Some Key Challenges for Irish Agriculture

## 1. Generational Renewal

- Challenge of driving change in a cohort of farmers with a **high age profile and lack of successors**

## 2. Very low levels of land mobility

- A barrier to entry/expansion particularly for young ambitious farmers

## 3. Farms with widely differing characteristics in terms of

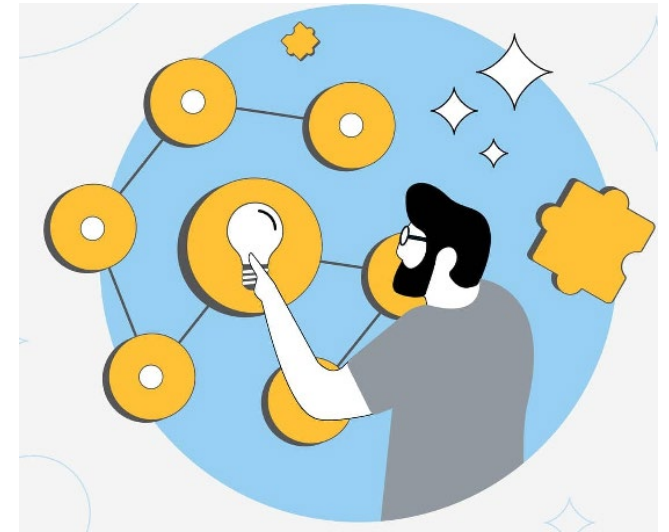
- **profitability**
- **environmental impact**
- **engagement with advisory services**
- **technology adoption**

## 4. High prevalence of part time farming

- with a high **dependency on income supports** and income from **off farm employment**

## 5. Farmer Alienation

- **farmers' perception** that they are **not valued by wider society**
- **negative messaging** about agriculture in the main stream media and even in the school curriculum



# 1. Fostering Generational Renewal

- **Incentivising Succession Planning (Financial Driver)**

- Facilitate transfer of farms to successors or farm partnerships
- Develop **financial supports and tax incentives** to support succession

- **Fostering Engagement from farming families (Social Driver)**

- Support initiatives to **promote farming** as an **attractive career**
- Better representation of younger voices in policy decision-making forums

- **Education and Skills Development (Environmental Driver)**

- Agricultural education on **sustainability** and **tech. adoption**





# 1. Challenge of High Age Profile and Resistance to Change

- **Peer-to-Peer Learning**

- More central role for **early adopters** or **innovators** in farm discussion groups

- **Tailor Advisory Services to life stage**

- Practical, low-cost changes for **older farmers**
- More ambitious/dynamic changes for **younger farmers**

- **Collaborative Farming Models**

- **leasing arrangements** to allow entry of younger farmers
- without pushing older farmers (without successors) to exit entirely



## 2. Addressing Low Level of Land Mobility

- **Land Leasing Incentives**
  - Strengthen long-term leasing tax incentives
- **Legal and Financial Support**
  - Simplify legal processes for farm transfers and land leases
- **Address Entry and Expansion Barriers**
  - Access to finance and grants specifically targeting young farmers



# 3. Matching Research/Advice to Differing Farm Characteristics

- **Tailored Supports to Specific Farm Characteristics**

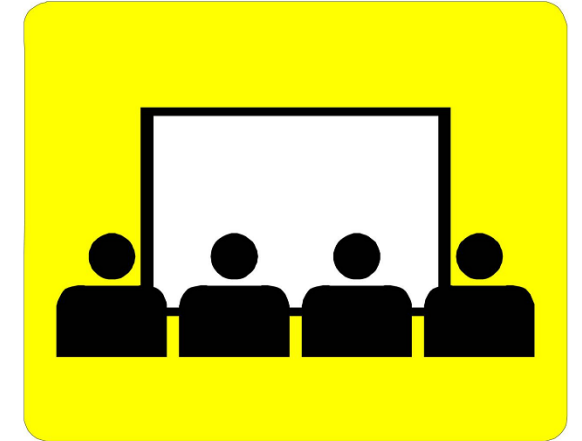
- Profitability and sustainability benchmarks
- Advisory services

- **Targeted Policy Frameworks**

- Use **National Farm Survey (FADN)** data to **help design policies** addressing specific needs
- e.g., high-input vs. low-input farms

- **Digital Agriculture Incentives**

- **Promote technology adoption** through training and **peer demonstrations** (Teagasc Signpost Farms)



# 4. Addressing High Prevalence of Part Time Farming

- **Support Diversification**

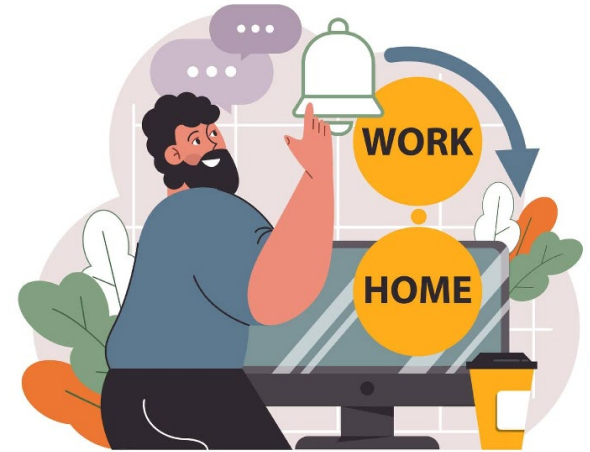
- Alternative enterprises like **forestry** or **renewable energy**

- **Flexible Scheme Design**

- Reality of **time constraints** of **part-time farmers** (those working on farm and off farm)
- **Simpler schemes** with more basic requirements

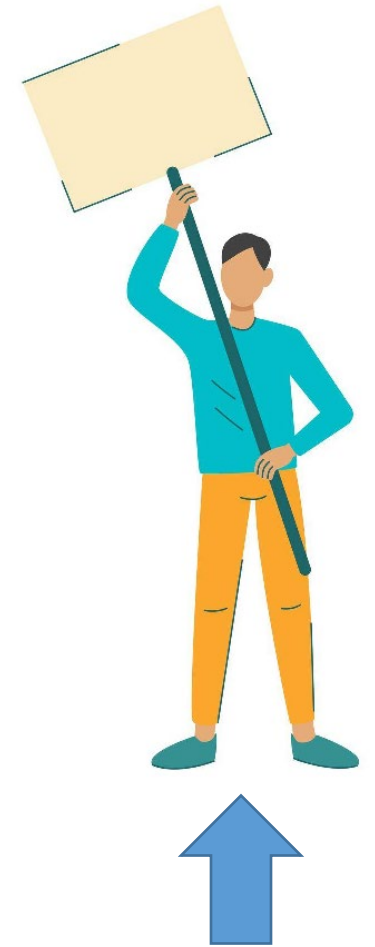
- **Enhance Off-Farm Income Opportunities**

- >50% of farmers in Ireland work off farm
- While **Ireland** is at **full employment**, that situation could change at a future point



# 5. Combatting Farmer Alienation

- **Public Awareness Campaigns about Farming**
  - **Highlight farmers' contributions** to food security, biodiversity and landscapes
  - Via **positive media campaigns** and **school initiatives**
- **Engage the Education Sector**
  - Include **accurate and balanced content** about modern agriculture in school curriculum
- **Inclusive Communication in the Mainstream Media**
  - **Involve farmers** in media discussions on agriculture
  - Ensure their **perspectives are represented**
- **Highlight Farming Success Stories**
  - Spotlight on **innovative and sustainable farming practices** to improve societal perception



**A farmer or  
someone protesting  
about farming?**

# So how has the Dialogue been perceived in Ireland?

## Positives

- **Recognition of Farmers' Role** in Delivering Environmental Sustainability
- Commitment to Support **Land Mobility** and **Generational Renewal**
- Innovation and Technology Emphasis to Deliver Solutions (**Techno Optimism**)

## Negatives

- Resistance to Perceived **Over-Regulation** (GHGs and Biodiversity targets)
- **Lack of Specificity** (good ideas, but limited detail – “Motherhood and apple pie”)
- **Mistrust about Motivation** (a diversion to quell farmer discontent?)

Thank You