



Food Harvest

A vision for Irish agri-food and fisheries

2020.

Context

Agri-food, fisheries and forestry represent Ireland's largest indigenous industry with notable economic, social and environmental interdependencies that pervade the island of Ireland. Collectively, the industry employs some 150,000 people and has an annual output of over €24 billion, including a multi-billion export industry.

Published in 2004, *The Agri Vision 2015 Report*, published by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, provided a decade-long framework for the development of the sector. Given the challenges and opportunities now facing the industry, 2010 was considered an opportune time to renew the strategy and the 2020 Committee was convened by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Mr. Brendan Smith, TD, in March 2010 for this purpose. Under the chairmanship of Dr. Sean Brady, and informed by the in-depth analytical assessments available for each sector, as well as a public consultation process and the outcome of the Farmleigh "Food Summit" convened by Bord Bia and facilitated by Harvard Business School, **Food Harvest 2020** Report was developed as a cohesive roadmap for the industry to build capacity, adapt to challenge and grow in the context of emerging opportunities in the decade ahead.

Vision – Smart, Green, Growth

'Smart'

Food Harvest 2020 foresees a sector that acts 'smartly' to achieve a competitive critical mass in the international marketplace and targets those consumers in key markets who recognise and reward Ireland's food producers for their 'green' output. The Committee believes this will require:

- The adoption of new technologies at primary producer level;
- Developing new working relationships within the food production chain;
- Piloting new product streams;
- Targeting resources at new markets;
- Enhancing levels of productivity and competitiveness; and,
- Developing production and management skills across the sector.

This will be achieved by investment in ideas, knowledge and skills, and recognising that collaboration across the food supply chain, with other competitors and, broadly, within the framework of the smart economy, is central to unlocking opportunity.

'Green'

Capitalising on Ireland's association with the colour 'green' is pivotal to developing the marketing opportunity for Irish agri-food. This will build on our historic association with the colour and highlight the environmental credentials associated with our extensive, low-input, grass-based production systems.

However, this 'green' image must be refined, be substantiated by scientific evidence and communicated effectively over the coming decade if Ireland's commitment to sustainability and the implementation of world-class environmental practices is to become a platform for export growth.

Ultimately, through the development of the 'Brand Ireland' concept, consumers in key markets will learn to recognise implicitly that, by buying Irish, they are choosing to value and respect the natural environment.

'Growth'

The compelling vision of this report is of efficient, environmentally sustainable production that delivers significant growth benefiting primary producers, processors and the food-manufacturing sector. Achieving this vision will allow the sector to play its part in Ireland's economic recovery and, by 2020, increase:

- The value of primary output by €1.5 billion;
- Value-added outputs by €3 billion; and
- Exports to €12 billion, representing growth of 42% over the period 2007-09.

Realising this vision

The Committee's detailed sector-by-sector analysis resulted in a number of broad recommendations relating to competitiveness, environmental sustainability and consumer focus of relevance to all sectors at both primary producer and processing level. In addition, a further 123 recommendations, specific to individual sectors, are contained in the body of the report. A number of recurring themes were seen to emerge over the course of the Committee's deliberations, and this short overview provides the opportunity to highlight the common areas where the Committee believes progress is critical if the growth targets set out in this report are to be met.

Achieving competitiveness

In an increasingly volatile trading environment, and with fierce international competition, competitiveness must underpin sustainability strategies across all sectors. Consolidation and restructuring of processing capacity will be necessary to achieve the scale required in some sectors, while the 'co-opetition' model, whereby Irish competitor companies co-operate in supplying into international markets may also offer a strategic advantage.

To deliver competitiveness within farm management, new models, such as partnership arrangements or joint farming, will come under consideration. While improvements in animal health and breeding will deliver productivity gains, these must be matched with a systematic reduction in input costs.

Food safety regulation must continue to underscore Ireland's commitment to being one of the safest centres of food production in the world, but must be 'smart' to avoid imposing unnecessary burdens on the supply chain.

Investing in human capital

Developing the skills set of the agri-food and fisheries sector is fundamental to the industry playing its role in the smart economy and the Committee supports prioritising the implementation of the relevant findings of the *Future Skills Requirements of the Food and Beverage Sector* report.

A considerable knowledge dissemination infrastructure already exists for the farming community, stretching from universities, third level institutes, agricultural colleges, discussion groups to Teagasc's BETTER farms programme. In the coming decade, this infrastructure could be further harnessed as a resource for continuous 'life long' education among the farming community.

Increasing the skills base within the processing and manufacturing sector must also be a priority with a particular focus on developing opportunities in lean manufacturing and innovation, as well as in building marketing and leadership skills.

Focusing on the customer and consumer

Responding to the changing needs of the market and the preferences of the consumer must be a priority for all stakeholders in the industry. DAFF's Market Access Group, involving industry and Bord Bia, identifies new export markets with the potential for growth. Innovative and competitive products, developed through increased investment in R&D and emphasising the fact that Irish food is produced in a natural, sustainable and environmentally-friendly manner, will be key to achieving growth in all markets.

Securing Ireland's environmental credentials

Environment deterioration is a global issue and consumer awareness has never been higher. While Ireland's primary food production is sustainable and environmentally friendly, potential negative impacts on the environment must be addressed comprehensively and credibly. With this in mind, a strategic environmental assessment of the impact

of the recommendations of **Food Harvest 2020** has been advised by the Committee. Greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture have fallen by 8% since 1990 but some of the output targets in this report have the potential to increase emissions. Farmers should be given the information needed to enable them to alter their production methods to reduce their carbon intensity per unit of output and to maximise carbon sequestration in soils and forests.

A new umbrella brand 'brand Ireland', highlighting Ireland's good environmental stewardship, and built on best practice and credible science, may be the most effective means of leveraging Ireland's sustainability message.

Resourcing an effective R&D strategy

Investment in research and development is essential to meeting changing consumer demands and realising new growth opportunities. To deliver on the industry's growth potential, R&D must be targeted at areas such as functional ingredients, prepared consumer foods, value-added meats, genomics, environmental sustainability and the speciality sector. Strategies to reduce sectoral GHG emissions can also be seen to link the R&D remit with environmental concerns and a focus on the consumer.

In a climate of decreased resources, a smart R&D approach must also involve an increased commitment to strategic collaborative partnerships and a focus on stimulating and mentoring innovation and entrepreneurial activity to increase employment creation.

Implementation

Food Harvest 2020 represents the Committee's agreed collective view of the way forward for Irish agri-food and fisheries. To achieve this vision it is important that clear mechanisms, metrics, responsibility and timeframes for measuring progress must be established. In this context, the Committee recommends the establishment of a high-level Implementation Committee, led by DAFF, to oversee and progress its delivery.

Although this report stresses the need to look beyond the current economic challenges, it recognises that any evolving framework must be grounded in emerging national fiscal realities. In this regard, any envisaged reprioritisation of policy emanating from the report will be on the basis of a reallocation of existing resources as opposed to making any new sources of state funding available.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
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