

# *Sinn Féin*



**STANDING UP**

**FOR RURAL IRELAND**



# STANDING UP FOR RURAL IRELAND

Since 2007, successive Sinn Féin agriculture ministers have recognised the vital role of agriculture in the economic and community life of this island with our commitment to supporting all farmers and our rural citizens.

Agriculture Minister Michelle O'Neill has delivered a record £623 million into the Rural Development Fund, creating thousands of new jobs in the agricultural industry.

Minister O'Neill has also decentralised public sector jobs to rural areas by moving the Department of Agriculture headquarters and up to 600 jobs to Ballykelly; 80 Rivers Agency jobs to Tyrone; 65 fisheries jobs to South Down and 60 forestry jobs to Fermanagh.

We continue to lead the way by delivering sustainability for our rural communities, viability for our family farms and developing basic services across rural Ireland.



# LISTENING TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

Sinn Féin's agriculture representatives including Minister Michelle O'Neill, Martina Anderson MEP and Martin Ferris TD have engaged with thousands of farmers and rural dwellers across the island outlining our vision plans and programmes to support the entire agri-food industry over recent months.

We organised public meetings throughout the North attended by a wide cross section of the farming and rural community with senior officials from DARD.

Sinn Féin's Assembly agriculture committee members Oliver McMullan MLA, Declan McAleer MLA and Ian Milne MLA met with the EU Commissioner to challenge him on a range of issues including the Rural Development Programme, greening, CAP and the need for reduced bureaucracy for farmers.

The Sinn Féin agriculture team has also been vocal in supporting faster processing of farm payments and challenging the Groceries Adjudicator on unfairness in the supply chain, particularly for primary producers.



# A FAIR DEAL FOR FARMERS

It is Sinn Féin's view that our primary producers must obtain a fair return for their produce.

Minister Michelle O'Neill plans a farm business improvement scheme worth a quarter of a billion pounds, which will allow us to further invest in the sustainability of the agri-food industry.

There are many challenges for the industry including the European Food Labeling regulations and we will continue to remove barriers, which impede the free movement of all farm produce across this island.

The new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has changed things for farmers. Sinn Féin has delivered a more equitable and fair allocation of basic payments.

These changes, which Minister Michelle O'Neill negotiated, have guaranteed a short transition towards flat rate payments tackling years of historic imbalance.



# SINN FÉIN WILL SUPPORT PLANS TO:

- » Ensure prompt delivery of the new Basic Payment to farmers, which replaces the Single Farm Payment and deliver the new greening payment and the young farmers' scheme designed to offer further financial and training support for our young farmers.
- » Roll out the £250 Million Farm Business Investment Scheme (grants programme).
- » Secure new export markets for local produce, including dairy, beef, poultry and pork and work closely with our counterparts in the South and the European Parliament to maximise opportunities.
- » Further develop initiatives to develop and integrate all-island trade, while ensuring effective animal health and quality food standard measures.
- » Maintain additional funding to support farmers who farm in areas of natural constraint (ANC payments).
- » Continue delivering industry training programmes through CAFRE, preparing the next generation of agri-food workers and farmers.
- » Progress implementation of our current TB eradication research programme.



# TACKLING RURAL POVERTY AND SOCIAL ISOLATION (TRIPSI):

The TRPSI programme is a £16 million framework prioritised by Sinn Féin ministers and administered by DARD which aims to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural issues through the delivery of a range of measures in partnership with other statutory bodies.

The target groups include:

- » The elderly
- » Lone parents
- » People with disability
- » Ethnic minorities
- » The unemployed
- » LGBT people

- » Carers
- » Children
- » Young people
- » Sports bodies

Sinn Féin plans to continue tackling rural poverty and social isolation through the rural transport scheme, farm family health checks, maximising access in rural areas (MARA), Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated project, rural borewells, fuel poverty, rural support, entrepreneurship programme and community development.



Sinn Féin's Assembly Rural Development committee members succeeded in getting a review of the current deprivation methodology included in a recent inquiry, which also positively evaluated the effectiveness of the TRIPSI programme.

**Sinn Féin will support plans to:**

- » Continue delivering rural broadband in hard-to-reach areas. 17,000 homes have been enabled in recent years as a result of £7.5 million DARD funding
- » Develop a wind energy project on Forest Service land, which will raise revenue for the Executive, deliver real community benefits and assist the North to reach European 2020 targets.
- » Roll out the Rural Development Programme across the ten newly formed Local Action Groups – this £70 million programme will provide support for community groups and organisations, rural businesses, broadband and tourism projects and all-island schemes.

- » Increase sporting facilities including working with GAA, IFA and other sporting bodies to increase health and well being of our community.
- » Progress the DARD relocation programme by re-locating DARD headquarters to Ballykelly, the first Executive Department HQ to relocate outside greater Belfast.
- » Ensure effective funding for flood alleviation projects.
- » Secure approval of the Rural Proofing Bill, which will prioritise consideration of rural issues when developing policy by all Executive departments and new councils.



# SUPPORTING OUR FISHING INDUSTRY

Sinn Féin wishes to establish a strong, safe and sustainable fisheries industry through appropriate funding and effective legislation and regulations. Minister Michelle O'Neill recently established the Fisheries Taskforce to strengthen the voice of our fisheries industry, providing an effective platform for direct engagement with her department.

Sinn Féin also successfully negotiated a 3% prawn quota increase for fishermen in the most recent European Fisheries Council meeting and has opened hardship schemes for vessel owners affected by adverse weather conditions.

## Sinn Féin will support:

- » The roll out the European Maritime Fisheries (EMF) fund that will provide support for our local fishing and seafood industry until 2020, improving the economic and environmental sustainability of the industry.
- » Legislating for the Fisheries Bill during the current Assembly mandate which will provide strong regulatory enforcement to deter wrongdoing, to ensure the protection of vulnerable fish stocks and vulnerable environments.
- » Bringing forward an all-island Shellfish Strategy



# IRELAND'S FUTURE IS IN EUROPE

Ireland has benefitted from our membership of the European Union and the agricultural sector and rural communities have been among the main beneficiaries.

Our agriculture industry and rural communities continue to reap the benefits of European Union membership through the Rural Development Programme. Together with match funding, the total invested since the scheme began will surpass £1 billion by 2020.

The European Fisheries Fund has made a significant contribution to our commercial fishing and coastal communities with more than £9 million coming from Europe.

The benefits of our membership of the European Union are clear for all to see. Those who advocate a withdrawal from the European Union cannot possibly ignore them. Nor can they provide a reasonable or viable alternative as a way of supporting our farming and rural communities.

The funding and support provided by the European Union to agricultural and rural communities is vital and irreplaceable.

Simply put, our place and the place for our farming and rural communities are in the European Union.



