

Standing up for farming and rural communities



Alternative Budget 2018

INTRODUCTION

For decades successive governments have not been on the side of rural and farming communities.

Rural Ireland was damaged and neglected by regressive government policy and must be repaired and nurtured to return to being a sustainable place to live and work.

Quality of life must be matched by quality of public services.

We must strive to make rural Ireland a place where young graduates are attracted to build their futures and returning emigrants can make a living and a home.

The aim of Sinn Féin's policy on agriculture and food is to make the family farm prosperous and to maintain a farming industry that provides careers and a livelihood to Irish men and women, including those of the next generation who should be able to continue the proud tradition of agri-food and fish production on this island

1) PROTECTING FARMING INCOME

Beef Data Genomics Programme €20 million

Sinn Féin are proposing an additional suckler cow support payment of €40 per cow per year and in the coming years Sinn Féin would bring the payment up to €200 per cow.

Sheep Welfare Scheme €5million

The Sheep Welfare Scheme should be increased by €5 million so that payment per ewe could rise by €5. Sheep farmers are often those who deal with the most serious natural constraints on peripheral and hilly land and must be supported to continue farming in those circumstances.

Areas of Natural Constraint €25 million

Sinn Féin proposes to restore rates to pre-2008 levels. We are aware that the forthcoming review of this scheme may change the payment schemes attached to it, but we are committed to ensuring that those farming in areas of most constraint will continue to be supported. The Department of Agriculture underspend alone would more than cover the estimated €25 million for this restoration.

Increase Tax Credits for the Self Employed Farmers

Sinn Féin would increase the tax credit for the self-employed to €1,400, in acknowledgement that the tax credit system discriminates against the self-employed in comparison to PAYE workers.

Income averaging

Farmers and their spouses who have a separate source of self employed income are excluded from income averaging. Sinn Féin are propose to remove this discrimination and remove the current restrictions on eligibility for income averaging where the farmer and/ or spouse has separate self employed income.

2) PROTECTING THE FAMILY FARM

Farm safety €870,000

The tragedy of farm deaths continues at an alarming rate, including the deaths of children on farms so more must be done to prevent farm accidents. Sinn Féin would increase the farm safety promotion and prevention budget by €870,000.

Flood relief works €105 million

Each year many farmers and rural communities have been subject to the devastation of severe flooding. Sinn Féin believes that the level of investment in flood relief and prevention measures is inadequate and would increase the government allocation by 50%. We propose an additional investment of €35 million to bring the total to €105 million for 2018 in order to escalate flood mitigation works.

Walks Scheme €4 million

The Walks Scheme has been a success in terms of its impact on boosting rural tourism, developing recreational activities and supporting farmers who provide access to their land. Sinn Féin propose that the number of walks under the scheme be increased to 80, with a funding allocation of €4 million.

3) SUPPORTING FARMERS AGAINST BREXIT

Brexit Export Support Fund €10 million

With 98% of businesses surveyed by InterTradeIreland still without a Brexit plan in place, this funding is aimed at those SMEs and farming enterprises that are in need of Brexit support funds. Some SMEs and farmers, who are not directly exporting, are not yet aware of the impact Brexit could have on their business. This funding will allow these enterprises to investigate their level of exposure to Brexit and examine the feasibility of diversifying into different markets or products or adapting their supply chains. Enterprise Ireland must be provided additional recourses to expand current programmes to provide all required assistance to our SMEs, including those in the agri business sector.

Research on impact of Brexit on Rural Development €150,000

The Action Plan on Rural Development proposes that specific research be undertaken to identify the impact of Brexit on rural areas, particularly in the border region. To date, this research has not commenced. Sinn Féin believes that it is critical that this project commence without further delay so that a clear understanding of the challenges presented by Brexit to farming and rural communities can be achieved and plans put in place to mitigate negative consequences.