



A SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY FOR MAYO





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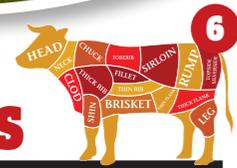
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

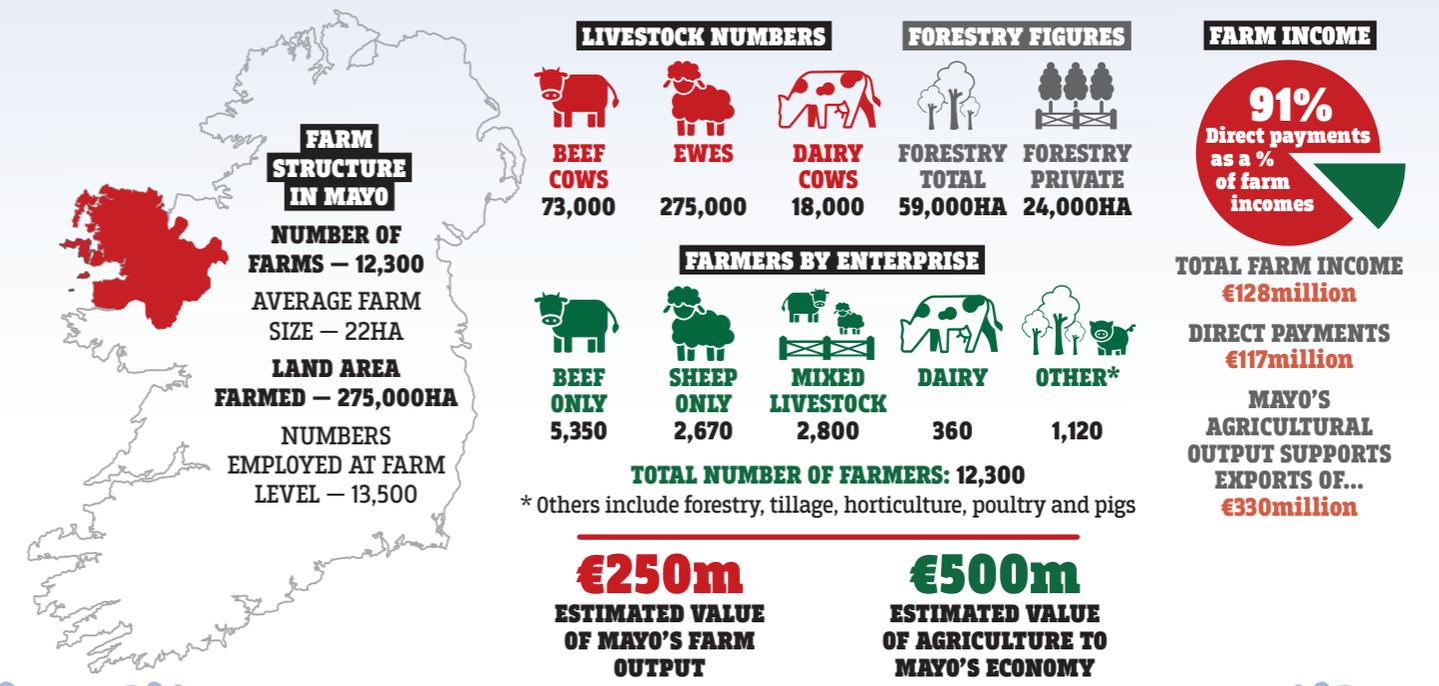
Mayo is a rural county where agriculture plays a vital role in underpinning the rural economy.

Mayo County Council has engaged with stakeholders to develop an agriculture strategy that will drive economic development, support employment and create sustainable jobs in the county.

The purpose of the strategy is to set out a series of actions that will help Mayo capitalise on its opportunities and overcome the barriers to developing this critical component of the local economy.

The Agriculture Strategy will inform the County Development Plan and the Mayo Local Economic and Community Plan.

The strategy summarises the agriculture sectors in the county and sets out how they will be developed. The objective is to do this in a balanced way whilst maximising their contribution.





THE STRATEGY AIMS TO:

- ◆ Improve farm incomes in the long-term;
- ◆ Maximise the value of all food produced;
- ◆ Ensure farmers are encouraged to play a key role in the county's future development;
- ◆ Support continued investment in the sector;
- ◆ Ensure sustainability from an environmental perspective.

FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED THE STRATEGY

- ◆ The diversity of agricultural enterprises;
- ◆ The predominance of part-time farming;
- ◆ The high percentage of designated land;
- ◆ Ensuring a balanced approach to afforestation;
- ◆ The key role of agriculture in supporting tourism;
- ◆ Food processing as a key indigenous sector in the county.

STRENGTHS OF MAYO'S AGRICULTURE

- ◆ The county has a strong direct payment base and tradition of farming;
- ◆ Mayo has an ability to grow grass – a low cost input;
- ◆ Water quality is excellent by national and European standards;
- ◆ Agriculture is estimated to be worth €500m to the county's economy – or four times Mayo's total farm income;
- ◆ There is a high number of young qualified farmers with secondary qualifications.

CHALLENGES

- ◆ The agriculture sector relies heavily on the CAP budget which could be significantly reduced in the future;
- ◆ Input costs are high and markets are uncertain;
- ◆ Farmers are price-takers rather than price-setters;
- ◆ The physical and regulatory impacts of climate change;
- ◆ Maintaining and improving water quality;
- ◆ The elderly age profile of farmers;
- ◆ The lack of processing infrastructure.

FARM VIABILITY CHALLENGES

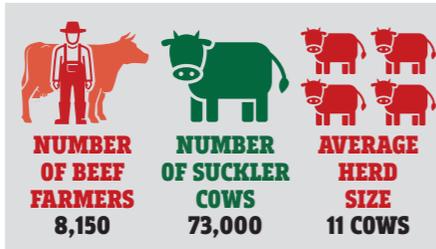
- ◆ Average farm size is just 22HA;
- ◆ Farm profitability and income is low;
- ◆ Overall farm numbers continue to decline, and this results in rural depopulation and a potential threat of land abandonment in some areas;
- ◆ Progressive farmers require access to land long-term, but the poor mobility culture makes this difficult.



There is a high dependency on CAP payments and farmers suggest that suckler cow numbers could collapse if support payments were significantly reduced

BACKGROUND

◆ Around two-thirds of Mayo's 12,300 farmers are involved in beef production of some sort, with around 5,350 carrying beef stock only, while close to 2,800 others have mixed livestock enterprises which carry both cattle and sheep.



◆ Sucklers are the primary beef enterprise in the county, with 6,600 farmers keeping close to 73,000 beef cows in Mayo in 2017. This figure has dropped back from a recent high of 78,000 in 2012.

◆ Many of the county's beef farmers are part-time operators. This is a function of both holding size and herd size. As already stated, the average farm size in Mayo is 22 hectares – the average nationally in 33 hectares – while 11 cows is the average size of a suckler herd in the county.

◆ The part-time nature of beef farming is also a function of profitability. Teagasc's e-Profit Monitor for drystock farms in 2015 shows that the average suckler-to-weanling enterprise lost €16 per hectare. This figure is exclusive of the various CAP payments and schemes. When these payments are added the average return is €464 per hectare.

◆ Income from suckling is also dependent on the profitability of the wider beef industry and demand for quality weanlings on export markets. The volatility of returns from both these outlets has undermined confidence in the suckler sector in the past.

◆ There is a strong tradition of weanling and store cattle production in Mayo. For example, an Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) report for 2015 showed that beef sires were used on 90pc of the local beef and dairy cows.

◆ Confirmation in the same ICBF report that there were 57,000 animals in 12-24 month age category in the county suggests that, allowing for replacements for the suckler and dairy herds, approximately 30,000 animals are kept to weanling or forward store stage each year. This illustrates the extent of local farmers' commitment to the beef industry.

◆ However, farmers do not have to keep cattle to qualify for their CAP payments. A situation where stock owners are effectively subsidising their farming operations from EU direct payments is therefore unsustainable in the long-term.



OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To help improve the financial performance of Mayo's beef farmers;
- ◆ To support the sustainable development of beef farming in the county;
- ◆ Identify strategies that enhance the technical performance of local beef producers.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Mayo farmers have a long tradition of producing top-quality weanlings, store animals and finished beef stock;

◆ Focussed breeding over the last 30 years has transformed the genetic profile of the beef herd, with more than 80% of suckler cows being crosses of continental breeds such as Charolais, Limousin, Simmental and Belgian Blue;

- ◆ Export markets in Italy and other EU countries have been developed over the last 20 years for locally-produced, top quality continental-bred weanlings;
- ◆ A traditional export market also exists for locally-produced Angus-cross heifers for suckler herds in Scotland and Northern Ireland;
- ◆ Local livestock marts in Ballina, Balla, and Ballinrobe ensure an established sales point for local

farmer producers and outside buyers;

- ◆ The Dawn Meats plant in Ballyhaunis, Jennings in Ballinrobe, and Dunleavys in Ballina, provide a ready outlet for finished cattle and cull cows.

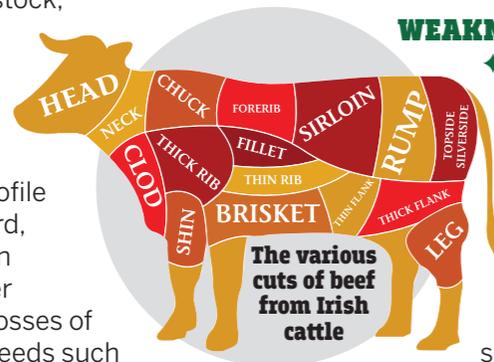
◆ The grass-based feeding systems employed by most Irish beef farmers ensures lower production costs than other EU producers;

- ◆ Grass-fed beef has the potential to be promoted and sold as a premium product.

WEAKNESSES

◆ As already noted, suckler-to-weanling beef production systems are generally loss making concerns. This is not sustainable in the long-term;

- ◆ There is a high dependency on CAP payments for incomes. Indeed, beef farmers suggest that suckler cow numbers could collapse if support payments were significantly reduced. For example, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) delivers up to €80 per cow for suckler farmers;
- ◆ The advanced age profile of suckler and beef farmers means that continuity of production is not guaranteed;



- ◆ The small and fragmented nature of beef farms in the county pose significant challenges;
- ◆ The low profitability in the sector mean that opportunities for expansion through leasing are limited;
- ◆ Low profits, age and labour requirements could result in more farmers moving out of suckling to a simpler store-to-forward-store drystock system.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Improved usage of grass through better grassland management can drive profitability by increasing stocking density and improving efficiencies;
- ◆ It is worth noting the top one-third of suckler farmers in the 2015 e-Profit Monitor made a net profit of €226 per hectare plus direct payments. The top operators in Mayo are realising

these profit levels, proving that returns of this order are achievable in the county;

- ◆ As already noted, grass-fed beef has the potential to be promoted and sold as a premium product – as is already the case in the US. This would be a positive development for Mayo farmers;
- ◆ The increase in dairy cow numbers offers opportunities to diversify into calf-to-beef systems

using beef-cross calves. Such an enterprise could be run in tandem with an existing suckling operation;

- ◆ Contract rearing of heifers for the dairy sector is another possible alternative enterprise. It offers an agreed monthly income for farmers, in contrast to the volatility of beef prices. Again, such an enterprise could be run in tandem with an existing suckling or beef enterprise.

CHALLENGES

- ◆ Retaining supports for the beef herd – such as the BDGP payments which is worth around €3 million to the county’s economy – will prove difficult given the possible reduction in CAP payments post Brexit;
- ◆ Suckler cow payments will also be more difficult to defend in the context of the climate change debate and Ireland’s growing dairy cow numbers;
- ◆ The low margins and profitability in beef means that enticing young people and new entrants into the sector is increasingly difficult;
- ◆ Continuing price volatility and low margins in the suckler and beef sector discourages investment;
- ◆ The small size and fragmented nature of Mayo’s beef farms means some could struggle to compete at a national level, where prices are set, with bigger and more compact units in the east and south of the country.

GOALS

- ◆ As already stated, the top one-third of suckler farmers in the 2015 National Farm Survey made a net profit of €226 per hectare plus direct payments. Increasing the number of suckler farmers in Mayo who are achieving profit levels of over €150 per hectare should be an attainable goal;
- ◆ Increase farmer participation in beef discussion groups, farmer involvement in the Knowledge Transfer initiative, and the Teagasc BETTER Farm Programme to grow farm output and cut input costs;
- ◆ Mayo should aim to retain or grow its suckler cow herd given that this system is of far greater benefit to the county’s economy in terms of ancillary spending (veterinary fees and supplies, feed, fencing, etc) than enterprises such as summer grazing of store cattle.

ACTIONS

- **Utilise Teagasc’s BETTER Farm Programme to improve the technical and financial performance of Mayo’s beef and suckler farms;**
- **Showcase the best examples of profitable local beef farming via video clips and associated content;**
- **Engage with Bord Bia on the possibility of marketing the ‘grass-fed’ and natural manner in which stock are reared and finished in the county;**
- **Engage with local processors to examine opportunities for finishing more cattle in the county.**



SHEEP

It is estimated that close to 75% of Mayo’s flock owners are in hill sheep

BACKGROUND

◆ Sheep farming is central to Mayo’s agricultural heritage. The county has the third highest number of sheep in the country at over 400,000 with 274,400 ewes. As there are 5,470 flock owners, sheep are kept by close to 45% of the county’s farmers.



◆ The county’s historic association with the sheep sector is a consequence not only of tradition, but also of geography and topography. Indeed, the heavy lands of the Mayo’s mountains and hills ensure that sheep farming is a matter of necessity – it is the enterprise that best suits the local conditions.

◆ In addition, with more than 30pc of the county having some level of environmental designation (Natura, Special Area of Conservation or Natural Heritage Area), sheep farming represents the only realistic option for many of these land owners.

◆ It is estimated that close to 75% of Mayo's flock owners or around 4,000 farmers are in hill sheep. These holdings generally produce light lambs for sale as stores in the back end of the year. There is also a lucrative business in producing crossbred breeding ewe lambs.

◆ Around a quarter of the flocks in the county are lowland operations, with farmers producing and fattening lambs for slaughter. In addition, some farmers finish store lambs, including light lambs off of the hills.

◆ However, the economics of hill and lowland sheep production are not enticing. The National Farm Survey findings from 2011 to 2016 show that the average sheep farm (taking a unit of 51ha) lost €2,800 per year over the period when farm subsidies were excluded. This means that most sheep farmers are using direct payments to subsidise their farming operations.

◆ Despite the disappointing figures, the survey highlights that it is possible to make a margin on sheep. On lowland farms the top one-third of holdings in the National Farm Survey recorded a net profit of €335/ha and a gross margin €58/ewe.

◆ Teagasc's BETTER farms' programme shows that achieving these margins in a lowland sheep enterprise requires an increase in stocking rates to maximise the number of ewes per hectare and consequently the number of finished lambs per hectare. Improved grassland management is therefore essential.

◆ Emulating these results in Mayo will be difficult



given the fragmented and small size of the farms, and the small flocks. As we have seen, the average farm in Mayo is just 22ha, while the average flock has just 82 ewes. Even so, matching the top output per hectare would generate profits of €7,500 (22.4 x €335) on the average Mayo holding.

◆ In terms of hill sheep farms, the National Farm Survey found that gross margins were €30/ewe; but this still represented a net loss of €3/ewe when subsidies were excluded.

◆ The hill sheep sector in Mayo has an important role to play environmentally as well as agriculturally

and economically. The county's hills and mountains are a major tourist attraction, and offer the potential to be developed further for pursuits such as hill walking.

◆ Indeed, there needs to be a wider appreciation and realisation that a hill farmer's output is much more than his/her economic return from lambs sold. Also, while lowland farmers may have the option to change or combine farming enterprises, hill sheep farmers have no such luxury.

◆ Therefore, there needs to be an economic value placed on the bio-diversity and environmental enrichment of the hills that can only be provided by farmers farming those hills. To some extent Europe has recognised this fact by decoupling CAP payments from output.

◆ It has been asserted that the carbon sequestration levels that the farming of mountain-type land delivers far outweighs the net benefits brought by forestry.

◆ The public good which hill farmers provided cannot be underestimated, particularly in a county like Mayo which has a huge tourist industry. To some extent, the mountain ewe is a grazing management tool for the hills. It produces light lambs and crossbred breeding ewes for the lowland flock, but she primarily maintains the traditional hill environment. However, this does not lessen this farming system's importance.

◆ People travel through this landscape and see a mosaic of fields and small well-kept holdings on the side of those hills which has been created by farmers over centuries. The interaction of visitors with those same farmers is an added attraction for the tourism sector.

OBJECTIVE

The objective for both hill and lowland sheep farming is to:

- (i) Improve the technical and financial performance of hill and lowland sheep farms;**
- (ii) Maximise the value of sheep produce through the appropriate branding and marketing.**

◆ In this context, it is essential that farming on the hills and mountains is maintained and land abandonment is avoided. Farming activity protects existing flora and fauna, and prevents overgrowth on the hills, which would limit access to these scenic areas and would undoubtedly pose a serious fire threat if allowed to develop over time.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Lambs produced off the lowlands and hills in Mayo are perceived as a healthy and natural product;
- ◆ The potential for branding Mayo lamb with a view to securing a premium price is already recognised by farmers involved with the Connemara Hill Lamb and Achill Lamb initiatives;
- ◆ Mayo has a strong tradition of sheep production and a reservoir of experienced and skilled farm producers;
- ◆ The sector is serviced locally by two of the country's leading sheep processors in Dawn Ballyhaunis and Kepak Athleague. In addition, local farmer groups have strong trading links with ICM Navan and Kildare Chilling;
- ◆ Existing sales centres in Ballina, Balla and Ballinrobe provide an established trading infrastructure;
- ◆ Producer groups such as the Mayo Mule and Greyface Group, Bluefaced Leicester Society, Mayo Blackface, and the West of Ireland Lanark Breeders, have a track record in securing a premium price for their breeding stock and store lambs;
- ◆ Sheep production suits the part-time operations of many Mayo farmers;
- ◆ The supports delivered by the

Department of Agriculture and Teagasc provide farmers with strong administration and the back-up of an excellent advisory service;

- ◆ Despite the low margins in sheep, there is an opportunity to cut costs and increase output by maximising the use of grass.

POSITIVE

Mayo lambs are perceived as being a healthy and natural product

NEGATIVE

Unsustainable reliance on direct payment subsidies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Low profit margins in both hill and lowland sheep enterprises mean farmers are subsidising their farming operations from their direct payments — this is unsustainable;
- ◆ Expansion through lease or purchase of land is not viable given the low margins in sheep;
- ◆ The elderly age profile of farmers involved in sheep production;
- ◆ The heavy restrictions under which farmers with designated lands must work, this includes most hill farmers;
- ◆ The lack of branding locally, regionally or nationally, means that the natural environment in which Mayo lamb is produced is not in any way levered to secure a better return for farmers and the local economy;
- ◆ The seasonal nature of lamb production in the county, which limits branding and marketing initiatives.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- ◆ Industry stakeholders believe an opportunity may exist to establish a Wild Atlantic Way Lamb brand for stock produced off the county's hills and mountains.
- ◆ Such an initiative would obviously require engagement with Bord Bia to ensure research and development of new markets for this light lamb.

◆ There was a traditional market in Spain and Italy for light lamb in the past, which would indicate that the consumer demand is there. Using the hugely popular Wild Atlantic Way as a platform on which to base the marketing strategy is an innovative and interesting approach.

- ◆ Around 35% of Irish consumers eat lamb on two or more occasions each month, however, selling the

merits of lamb among younger consumers has proven challenging over the last decade.

◆ While lamb consumption across the EU has been boosted by Europe's growing Muslim population, maintaining sales among Member States' indigenous citizens has been more difficult.

- ◆ Bord Bia has been involved in a joint information and promotion

campaign in Ireland, Britain and France over the past three years. This has sought to raise awareness of alternative cuts and cooking recipes which can make lamb more of an everyday meal option.

- ◆ It would be a matter for discussion where exactly light hill lamb would fall into this overall strategy, but it would obviously be a branded niche product that would have to deliver a premium return for producers.

◆ The involvement of local farmers and a lamb processor would also be required to develop the necessary scale in order to make such a strategy viable and of benefit to hill farmers throughout the county – and possibly the west as a whole.

◆ Connemara Hill Lamb and Achill Lamb are existing groups producing and marketing hill lamb. Any new proposal would not in any way seek to undermine these initiatives but look to learn from them and co-operate with them in developing a broader approach.

◆ There are obvious challenges in getting an adequate year-round supply of hill lamb. In addition, the lambs must be of the correct type. A common complaint from factories is that lambs off the hills kill out at under 10kgs and are consequently too light to grade.

◆ Farmers will therefore need to change how they present the lamb. Lambs might have to be fed meals prior to slaughter to put on extra weight and fat cover so that they can kill out at around 12kg. Another possible approach is to restrict dosing of the lambs and thereby market the product as 'antibiotic free'.

◆ Putting additional weight on hill lambs is not a new concept, Kildare Chilling is already paying French prices to the Mayo Blackface Group down to 14kgs.

◆ Interestingly, Teagasc has undertaken trials in Athenry on feeding of light lambs and bringing them to French weights. The research team has produced accurate tables which show a viable margin for store lamb finishers who buy those hill lambs. This is work that could be built on.

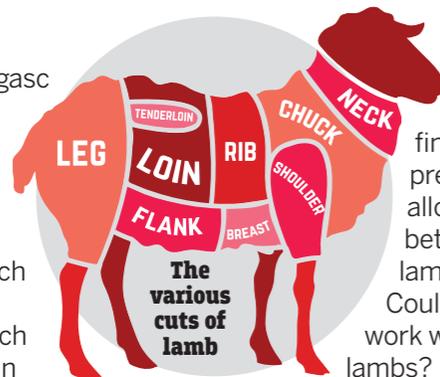
◆ Mayo has a track record of producing crossbred breeding stock and top quality store and finished lambs that command a premium price.

◆ These markets have been developed by the work of producer groups such as the Mayo Mule and Greyface Group, Bluefaced Leicester

Society, Mayo Blackface, the West of Ireland Lanark Breeders, and the South Mayo Lamb Producer Group.

◆ In the case of the Mayo Mule Group, the 5,000 breeding ewes produced returned close to €100,000 in additional revenue or €20/head. For the 50 farmers involved it provided an extra €2,000 in income.

◆ On the store lamb front, it has been pointed out that a premium is paid in Britain on Blackface lambs born in Scotland but finished in southern England. The finisher gets the premium, thereby allowing him to give a better price for the lamb to the producer. Could such an initiative work with Mayo store lambs?



TO SUMMARISE, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Examine the feasibility of establishing a Wild Atlantic Way brand for Mayo Mountain lamb;
- ◆ Expand output from the producer groups in the county that are already achieving a premium price for their stock;
- ◆ Improve grass usage through better grassland management.

This can drive profitability by increasing stocking density and improving efficiencies;

- ◆ Utilise the Teagasc BETTER programme to improve the technical and financial performance of Mayo's lowland farms to match that of the top one-third in the National Farm Survey. This could generate profits of €7,500 (22.4 x €335) on the average Mayo holding.



CHALLENGES

- ◆ Raising profitability and margins in sheep farming is the primary challenge;
- ◆ Lamb remains the most expensive meat offering, so increasing consumption is a constant battle;
- ◆ Retaining supports for the county's sheep farmers could prove difficult given the possible reduction in CAP payments post

Brexit. Direct payments to Mayo's farmers are worth in excess of €110 million annually;

- ◆ Suggestions that EU Commission directives could significantly reduce the area of commonage ground that is eligible for the Basic Payment Scheme could seriously reduce overall CAP payments to Mayo's farmers and pose a definite risk to farm incomes in the county;

◆ It is a continuing challenge to get administrators to accept that hill farmers deserve payment for the public good they deliver in maintaining and preserving the country's uplands;

◆ Continuing problems with the GLAS programme in relation to the commonages and hills mean that upland farmers' incomes have yet to recover from the loss of the REPS environmental scheme;

SHEEP



◆ The low margins and profitability in sheep means that enticing young people and new entrants into the sector is increasingly difficult;

◆ Continuing price volatility and low margins in the sheep sector discourages investment;

◆ The small size and fragmented nature of Mayo's beef farms means some could struggle to compete at a national level, where prices are set, with bigger and more compact units in the east and south of the country.

GOALS

◆ Improve the market and increase the outlets for Mayo lowland and hill lamb;

◆ Increase the number of lowland sheep producers matching the top

performers in the National Farm Survey and achieving profit levels of €335/ha;

◆ Raise public awareness of 'public goods' delivered by the county's hill sheep farmers.

ACTIONS

■ Engage with Bord Bia to ensure new market opportunities are researched and developed;

■ Examine the feasibility of establishing a Wild Atlantic Way brand for Mayo Mountain lamb;

■ Develop a project on promoting local lamb;

■ Develop a project to outline the 'public goods' delivered by the county's hill sheep farmers;

■ Support the activities of the various producer groups

in the county that are already achieving a premium price for their stock;

■ Secure more focussed technical advice in upland management that incorporates all aspects of hill farming. For example: habitat management, mixed grazing on hills, and targeted education programmes;

■ The provision of a more focused Green Cert option for young hill farmers;

■ Utilise the Teagasc BETTER Farm programme to improve

the technical and financial performance of Mayo's lowland and hill sheep farms;

■ Support the initiative undertaken by a number of Blackface breeders to develop a pure Mayo-Connemara studbook. The main concern among farmers is that the Blackface breed is losing its purity and ability to forage in extreme locations with the influx of Lanark etc;

■ Develop suitable templates to assist in meeting environmental and planning regulations.



DAIRY

Dairying is worth close to €30m per annum to the local economy

BACKGROUND

◆ Dairy farming is among the smallest farming enterprises in the county in terms of the number of participants; however it offers considerable potential for sustainable growth.



◆ There are around 360 milk suppliers in Mayo, or just 3% of all farmers in the county. The vast majority supply the local processor Aurivo Co-op, which has a major processing centre at Ballaghaderreen, as well as liquid milk plants in Sligo and Donegal.

◆ The county has a milk pool of roughly 95 million litres, with the average production per supplier of 270,000 litres or close to 60,000 gallons. Dairying is worth close to €30 million per annum to the local economy (based on an average milk price of 30c per litre, including fat and protein bonuses and VAT).

◆ Local Teagasc figures suggest that 20% of the county's milk suppliers match the best efficiency and profitability standards attained across the sector nationally. These farmers produce 1,250kgs of milk solids per hectare, giving a net profit of €1,202 per hectare – excluding CAP direct payments.

◆ On a 30 hectare holding, this level of output equates to a total net profit of €40,000 per annum plus EU direct payments. These are viable income levels.

◆ Ireland's dairy industry has experienced a period of unprecedented growth since the abolition of quotas in 2015, with total milk output growing by 21pc to exceed 7 billion litres in 2017.

◆ Growth within the industry in Mayo has been more modest, but milk output is still expected to grow by 5pc per annum over the next five years. Teagasc figures show that the total number of cows in the county increased by 18% since the start of the decade, rising from 15,300 in

2010 to around 18,000 by 2017. The average herd size increased from around 40 cows to 55 cows.

◆ This growth is being driven primarily by expansion from within the sector, with existing operators expanding by increasing cow numbers and yields. Numbers of new entrants to the industry have been small, at less than 10, even though dairying offers far higher returns than either beef or sheep.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the Agricultural Strategy for dairying is to support the sustainable growth of dairying in the county.

STRENGTHS

◆ Milk production in Mayo is primarily a grass-based, spring-calving system -- as with Ireland's dairy sector in general – which means that efficient producers have among the lowest production costs in Europe;

◆ The fact that 20% of Mayo's dairy farmers are as efficient as the country's best proves that milk production is viable in Mayo;

◆ This grass-based production system is environmentally friendly and a real marketing plus for dairy products produced in the region;

◆ The strong presence of the farmer-owned processor, Aurivo Co-op, in the county guarantees producers an outlet for their milk at a competitive price, and a reliable



route to market for dairy products;

◆ The supports delivered by organisations such as the Department of Agriculture, Teagasc and the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation provide farmers with dependable administration and cutting-edge research to support the sector;

◆ The dairy farmer discussion group network in the county is the ideal forum for peer learning and problem solving.

WEAKNESSES

◆ Mayo has a shorter grass growing season and higher rainfall levels than the south and east,

which result in poorer ground conditions. This limits the grazing potential of its lands, meaning cows must be housed for longer;

◆ This increased requirement for housing drives up both capital costs and milk production costs;

◆ Farm holdings in the county tend to be small (the average

farm size in Mayo is 22ha) and fragmented which restricts opportunities for existing producers or new entrants to develop commercial units;

◆ There is limited access to sizeable land holdings for farmers – either to purchase or to lease on a long-term basis;

◆ There are significant costs in establishing a modern dairy operation, with the start-up investment varying from €2,000 to €3,500 per cow.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ As already mentioned, the fact that 20% of Mayo's dairy farmers are as efficient as the country's best proves that milk production is viable in Mayo and can be expanded;
- ◆ National supports are available for dairy expansion under the Government's Food Harvest strategy which aims to grow Irish milk production to 7.5 billion litres by 2020;
- ◆ Local milk suppliers who have substantially grown their dairy operations over the last five years – primarily on land secured under long-term leases – prove that expansion is possible and these farmers have effectively sketched a roadmap for others to follow;
- ◆ The 5pc increase in the county's dairy output adds around 5 million litres to Mayo's milk pool each year and adds an additional €1.5 million to the local economy;
- ◆ The Teagasc National Farm Survey shows that dairying is consistently the most profitable farming enterprise – it must therefore be attractive to young and existing drystock farmers;
- ◆ Contract heifer rearing arrangements for dairy farmers offer drystock farmers an alternate enterprise to beef production;

◆ Teagasc research carried out at Ballyhaise in Cavan has identified new management practices which drive dairy profitability on heavy land, offering the possibility of improved dairy sector margins for counties such as Mayo.

CHALLENGES

- ◆ Greater volatility in milk price since 2009 – with prices varying from 20c per litre to 42c per litre – has undermined confidence among farmers;
- ◆ As already mentioned, the capital costs for new entrants are prohibitively high – costs are estimated to range from €2,000 to €3,500 per cow;
- ◆ The low number of new entrants, less than 10 over the last two years, ultimately weakens the long-term viability of dairying in the county. Indeed, it has been estimated by Teagasc that 6,000 new entrants will be needed in the dairy sector nationally over the next decade to replace retirees and provide labour for expanding herds;
- ◆ Hiring suitably trained staff for dairy farms is proving difficult;
- ◆ Proposals for greater consolidation within the Irish dairy sector poses a potential threat to the region's processing capacity and, as a consequence, to Mayo's milk pool;
- ◆ The increased scale of dairy farms in the south and east of the country, with their lower production costs, could undermine



the viability of smaller units in the west;

- ◆ A further expansion in cow numbers will add to the national difficulties in terms of greenhouse gas emissions from the farm sector.

GOALS

- ◆ Sustain the dairy processing sector in the region;
- ◆ Mayo must seek to increase the number of dairy farmers achieving profits of €1,200/ha by 2022;

◆ Increase farmer participation in dairy discussion groups;

- ◆ Raise farmer awareness of the environmental risks associated with expanding dairy operations.

ACTIONS

- Map the county's dairy sector regions and areas with potential for growth;
- Communicate the opportunity for sustainable growth;
- Stakeholders to work with Macra na Feirme, ICMSA and IFA in further developing and supporting a land mobility network;
- Assess the potential of dairy heifer rearing as an enterprise for drystock farmers;
- Ensure support for dairy farmers with their key infrastructure requirements;
- Work with Teagasc and private agricultural consultants to facilitate the establishment of more dairy discussion groups in the county;
- Engage with dairy farmer discussion groups and knowledge transfer groups to ensure water quality is maintained.



FORESTRY

Typically there are 60 to 70 farmers a year planting 300ha to 350ha

BACKGROUND

◆ European and Irish forestry strategies are rooted in the Oslo Ministerial decision, entitled 'European Forests 2020', agreed at the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe in 2011. The latest



Department of Agriculture policy document on the development of forestry "Forests, products and people. Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision" published in 2014 reflects the Oslo decision and the vision it contains for Europe's forests.



FORESTRY

◆ The Oslo decision and the vision underpinning it are a summary of all the possibilities offered by forestry. This vision and policy holds great opportunity for farmers in Co Mayo but the challenge is how to monetise and realise the environmental and social benefits that forestry provides.

◆ This growth of forestry is currently driven by the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme 2014 to 2020, and associated schemes, which are managed by the Department of Agriculture. These schemes seek to drive forestry cover in Ireland to 18pc by 2020. While the percentage of land under forestry in Mayo already surpasses the 2020 Irish target by 3pc it is important to note that the EU average for forestry coverage is 32pc.

◆ There are two aspects to grant support for forestry. The first is the Afforestation Grant paid when establishing the forest and planting the trees. The second is an Afforestation Premium Grant paid annually for a minimum of five years to a maximum of 15 years. The level of the grant is determined by the quality of the land and the type of trees.

◆ The establishment grant covers all costs (aside from land purchase) associated with establishing the forest and includes a fencing grant. A

portion of 75pc is paid on planting, with the remaining 25pc payable four years after planting and when the trees are bedded in and growing.

◆ The Afforestation Premium Grant range from €180/ha to €635/ha depending on the quality of the trees. Broadleaves, especially native species, attract the highest premiums of up to €635/ha for 15 years. Conifers such as Sitka Spruce, the most popular crop, attract premiums averaging at €530/ha for 15 years, while 'agro forestry', planting a portion of tillage/grazing fields with forestry attracts premiums of €260/ha for a maximum of

five years. Finally, biomass crops deliver lower premiums of €180/ha for a maximum of 10 years.

MAYO

◆ Of the 279,000 hectares of agricultural land in Co Mayo, 24,214 hectares are in privately-owned forestry. This equates to a 10.5pc level of planting. In total there are 58,679 hectares planted in the county, with remaining 34,465 hectares owned by Coillte and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). In 2014 there were 1,044 private forestry owners in Mayo, with premiums worth €3.65m being paid to them. The economic output from forestry is calculated at €5.9m.

◆ Currently all new afforestation is being undertaken by private landowners as Coillte is not undertaking any new planting. The planting is typically carried out by farming landowners, with 60 to 70 owners planting 300-350 hectares per annum. On average, the area planted is 5 hectares per farmer.

◆ The main species being planted is Sitka Spruce and the planting is done on marginal agricultural land. It is estimated that under the national forestry policy timber production in Co Mayo will more than treble by 2035.

◆ The primary objective of the agricultural strategy for forestry is to achieve sustainable growth in the sector and highlight the significance of increased timber output in driving employment, and expanding the county's carbon sinks — which contribute to climate change mitigation. This will follow the Forest Service best practice guidelines and will ensure no impacts on Natura 2000 sites.

STRENGTHS

◆ Growing the forestry sector is underpinned by government and EU policy, with detailed implementation plans and funding.
 ◆ Mayo already has a thriving timber sector with 21pc of farmland in forestry, well ahead of the national average, and 300 to 350 hectares being added each



year. Timber production will almost treble in Mayo by 2035 to almost 400,000 cubic metres per annum.

◆ Premiums from forestry continue to be a significant source of income for Mayo farmers bringing in €3.65m per annum currently, with an economic output of €5.9m. Under the current afforestation grant and premium scheme this is set to continue and grow in the foreseeable future.

◆ Mayo has a strong rural tourism product with much potential for growth. Forestry is regarded as a key element of sustainable green tourism and it should be possible to integrate tourism and forestry development.

◆ Mayo has an abundance of land suitable for planting for a variety of tree species including biomass.

OPPORTUNITIES

◆ The growth of income from forestry is almost certain to

increase into the foreseeable future.

◆ The social, environmental and economic potential of forestry and the timber sector are significant for the county. The role of forestry could be a key element in branding Mayo as a 'sustainable county'.

◆ Timber and forestry are a source of sustainable and renewable energy, carbon sequestration, a source of jobs, and a counter to climate change.

◆ Forestry is a key element of tourism and leisure in many countries. A recent example of this is the manner in which the NPWS has taken over 4,000 hectares of Coillte's plantations in Ballycroy to develop a Wilderness Project aimed at the tourist market.

The success of the Westport to Achill Green Way using an existing amenity is a model for the development of forestry tourism.

◆ Forestry offers huge potential for innovation and experimentation — especially in the area of renewable energy. For example, timber farmers in Sweden have set up their own co-ops to supply heating chips and pellets to local hospitals, schools and other institutions.

◆ For young farmers forestry is a long-term investment in which they have huge input and control. It has the potential to provide them with a significant income at pension age.

◆ There are possible work opportunities for farmers working with or for forestry contractors.

WEAKNESSES

◆ Convincing farmers to convert to forestry is challenging. Unlike converting from dairying to beef or vice versa, forestry is a one-way street and there is no turning back. It is a lifelong commitment.

◆ There is strong local opposition to the 'blanket planting' of former farmland, as forestry is viewed as a driver of rural depopulation.

◆ Mayo has an under-developed processing infrastructure and again, without having an input into the final product, means that Mayo

farmers are 'price takers' rather than 'price setters'.

◆ The high level of designated land in Mayo means that up to 30pc of the county's farmland and upland is excluded from planting.

◆ Farmers have found it difficult to source contractors for thinning operations.

THREATS

◆ According to Teagasc expert Steven Meyen there is a danger that forestry will be confined to

what has come to be known as 'planting land', a euphemism for bad ground. "Land that grows good grass will grow good trees and land that grows poor grass will grow poor trees," he said. Using 'good land' for forestry could lead to competition between forestry and other farm sectors.

◆ There can be a significant social cost to mass planting, it can increase rural isolation and accelerate depopulation if it is not managed properly.

ACTIONS

■ A detailed forestry action plan needs to be drawn up for the county to include clear goals in relation to amounts of land to be planted, and targets for the various species of trees to be planted. This should be done in consultation with local communities.

■ This plan should be synchronised with tourism plans for the county. The plan would include proposals for the development of forest trails, off-road biking, camping routes, along with the development of educational tourism in forestry and woodland studies for schools and third level institutions.

■ The action plan will set out a framework for the development of a processing sector, including local wood and biomass markets.

■ Timber is an important source of renewable energy, and Mayo County Council planning policy could assist in the creation of a sustainable market for wood chip and wood pellets by supporting centralised wood-fired heating systems for small housing developments and using the planning guidelines to encourage the use of timber and wood, or other renewable fuel sources, as an energy provider for heating.

■ The promotion of the increasing value of sustainable forestry at events throughout the county, perhaps during the promotion of the county development plan.

■ Encourage young farmers to become early adopters of forestry as a farm pursuit and as a long-term investment for their retirement.

■ The plan should indicate the job creation potential of forestry and set targets for job creation.

■ Highlight the importance of forestry in the battle against climate change.



RENEWABLE ENERGY

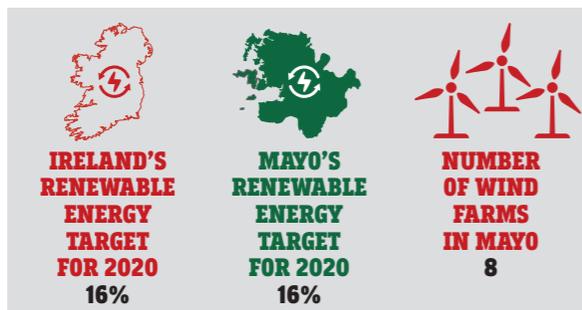
RENEWABLE ENERGY

Renewable energy is defined as a clean and infinite source of energy which can be harvested continuously without damaging the environment

BACKGROUND

◆ The use of renewable energy sources is a key element in the fight against climate change.

◆ Ireland as a member state of the EU has committed itself to tackle climate change under the terms



of EU directives, under the terms of the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Paris Climate Agreement of 2016. Core parts of these commitments involve a measurable reduction in the use of fossil fuels and an increased use of renewable energy sources.

◆ According to the National Renewable Energy Action Plan 2010 Ireland's overall target is to achieve 16% of energy from renewable sources by 2020. The key target areas for reduction in the use of fossil fuels are electricity, transport and heating.

◆ Renewable energy is found in wind, wave, water, tides, rain, sunlight and geothermal heat. According to the 'Renewable Energy Strategy for Mayo 2011-2020,' renewable energy is defined as "a clean and infinite source of energy which can be harvested continuously without damaging the environment."

◆ Renewable energy offers a range of opportunities to farmers to engage in alternative land use for wind and solar energy, the growing of alternative crops for biomass production and anaerobic digestion to use farm and municipal waste for biogas fuel.

◆ In Co Mayo these latter elements from the renewable energy menu offer the most practical opportunities for farmers along with a programme of on-farm energy efficiency.

◆ Developing renewable sources of energy has the potential to generate new sources of income for farmers and for communities.

◆ It is timely that the farming community is becoming engaged in exploring the potential of renewables, especially in Mayo as the "Renewable Energy Strategy for Co Mayo 2011 to 2020" is due for review. Structured input from the farming community in the form of a renewable energy strategy for the agri-sector will be most important.

◆ The current strategy commits the county overall to sourcing 16% of the county's energy needs from renewables by 2020, while it is intended that 42.5% of electricity will be generated from renewable sources.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AS AN AGRICULTURE IN MAYO

"Renewable energy has the potential to provide additional income for farm families and also contribute to the Climate Change Mitigation targets."

1. WIND

◆ By far the most harnessed source of renewable energy in Ireland is wind, and in fact the first wind farm in Ireland was commissioned at Bellacorick in Co Mayo in 1992.

◆ Off-shore and on-shore wind turbines are feeding into the national grid. On-shore turbines are the ones with which this strategy is concerned.

◆ According to the Irish Wind Energy Association the current grid-connected and operational wind capacity on the island of Ireland is 3025 Megawatts (MW) with 228 wind farms operational over 27 counties on the island.

◆ It is estimated that 1MW of wind capacity can provide enough electricity to supply approximately 650 homes. Based on this figure, an installed capacity of 3025MW can provide enough electricity to power over 1.97 million homes.

◆ In 2012 a total of 2,200 were employed in the wind energy sector and by 2020 the number will be in the region of 10,700.

◆ Wind produces little or no pollution and it is estimated that a turbine will have paid for itself within three months of operation.

◆ The 2003 Wind Atlas for Ireland produced by the Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland (SEAI) shows the majority of Co Mayo has wind speeds that make the harnessing of wind economically viable at heights of 75m and 100m above ground level.

◆ In terms of income generation there is initially a range of possibilities for the landowners considering involvement in wind energy projects. Wind energy companies seeking land for projects will offer the farmer €5,000 to sign an option for up to five years. In that period his or her land can be included in the wind development plans for that company, subject to planning. If and when the farm becomes operational the income to the farmer from each turbine can be anything from €18,000 to €25,000 per annum and can include a premium determined by megawatts produced.

◆ According to the Irish Wind Energy Association the amount of space required by a wind farm depends on the number and type of turbine being deployed. A typical wind farm accommodating four to five V90 3MW turbines might extend over an area of 240ac but only 1% of the land area is used to house the turbines, electrical infrastructure and access roads; the remainder can be used for farming or as natural habitat.

WIND POWER – STRENGTHS

- ◆ Mayo has some of the best wind speeds in the country;
- ◆ Many of the speeds are recorded in areas of sparse population and open land;
- ◆ It is a completely renewable source with little pollutant effect except at the manufacture and erection stages of the turbines;
- ◆ It can give a solid, substantial and long-term income to farmers;

CURRENT WIND FARMS IN MAYO

There are five windfarms in Mayo. The original Irish wind farm at Bellacorick has 21 wind turbines with a total installed capacity of 6.45 megawatts and produces enough electricity to supply 4,500 households. It is due to be expanded in the near future. A wind farm at Cuillalea near Kiltimagh has six turbines producing 5.6 megawatts, while there are other farms at Cluddaun, Lackan and at Graune Pet farm.

- ◆ Only 1% of the land is taken up by turbines and service area, leaving the rest available for farming.

WIND POWER – WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Visual impact on the landscape;
- ◆ Impact on birdlife;
- ◆ Can cause noise problems;

- ◆ Complaints over light flicker;
- ◆ Difficulties with electromagnetic interference;
- ◆ Inconsistent generation of electricity due to varying wind speeds;
- ◆ Needs large landholdings to be viable.

WIND POWER – OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Local energy generation;

2. BIOMASS

◆ Biomass is the use of plants for energy production. Sources include crops grown specifically for energy use, waste from forestry, or the residue of plants used for other purposes. The reputation of biomass was somewhat dented by the suspension of works on the biomass energy plant at the former Asahi site at Killala. Nevertheless, as a renewable energy source biomass is an important part of the picture.

◆ Biomass is mainly derived from wood, be it conventional forestry or specific crops such as miscanthus and willow. Up to 10.5% of Mayo's agricultural land area is under private conventional forestry, much of it suitable for biomass. There are also extensive Coillte forests. In total, between private and Coillte forests there are close to 59,000 hectares of forestry in the county.

◆ According to Teagasc miscanthus can be used to produce heat or combined heat and power. This can be done on a range of scales from large power stations requiring hundreds of thousands of tonnes of biomass annually, to small-scale systems requiring just a few dozen tonnes during winter months. The Renewable Energy Action Plan (2010) includes measures to encourage the development of the biomass supply chains and



- ◆ Possibility of community involvement;
- ◆ Steady income source for landowners and possibly for communities;
- ◆ Creates job opportunities;

- ◆ Good use of marginal land;
- ◆ Little disruption to farming when located on good land.

WIND POWER – THREATS

- ◆ Divisive in communities;

- ◆ Inconsistent delivery of power may lead to obsolescence;
- ◆ Turbines have a visual impact on the landscape;
- ◆ Opponents claim wind farms accelerate rural depopulation.



the utilisation of biomass for heat. Among the favoured crops are miscanthus and coppice willow.

- ◆ According to Teagasc, heavy brown earth soils with a high clay content are ideal for willow giving good yields. It is harvested every second year and precision chopped between December and April.
- ◆ The crop delivers a high yield, is easy to maintain and it burns very well. On the down side it has a high establishment cost, a specialist harvester is needed, drying is needed and it is bulky to store and transport. However, a Government grant scheme announced in 2015 gives a once off capital grant of up to 40% towards establishment costs to a maximum of €1,040 per hectare.
- ◆ The main problem with biomass is that large amounts of land are required, and burning biomass can be polluting in itself, while harvesting and transport can leave a heavy carbon footprint.

BIOMASS – STRENGTHS

- ◆ Renewable source of energy;
- ◆ Land in Mayo would be suitable for growing willow;
- ◆ Up to 59,000 hectares of Mayo's land area is under conventional forestry, which is a ready source of biomass;
- ◆ Good use of the land.

BIOMASS – WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Takes a lot of land to grow

economically viable biomass crops;

- ◆ Investment costs for new machinery can be high;
- ◆ Harvesting season is in wet months when land can be inaccessible;
- ◆ Carbon footprint in harvesting and transporting.

BIOMASS – OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Alternative use for land;
- ◆ Job creation in processing;
- ◆ There are spin-off industries in boiler manufacture, storage facilities and transport.

BIOMASS – THREATS

- ◆ Market for product may not survive its infancy;
- ◆ Low oil prices hit the viability of the industry;
- ◆ Labour and machinery costs are high.

3. BIOGAS

- ◆ Biogas is produced by anaerobic digestion of organic material such as farm wastes, waste from food processing, along with sewerage and organic waste from urban sources. It can be used for renewable heat or electricity on a small domestic scale or in a small to a large scale.
- ◆ According to the Renewable Energy Strategy for Mayo 2011 to 2020 it is estimated that the use of

193,000 tonnes of agricultural and municipal waste at a centralised digester in Mayo could generate 24MW of electricity per annum.

- ◆ The main disadvantage is the foul smell that can be associated with its production.

BIOGAS – STRENGTHS

- ◆ Positive use of waste and organic material;
- ◆ Reduces landfill requirements;
- ◆ Reduces landfill odours.

BIOGAS – WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Smells, hygiene and vermin problems may be a problem at the digester sites;
- ◆ Volumes of waste needed is considerable;
- ◆ There are transport and carbon footprint issues.

BIOGAS – OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Provides an opportunity to harness new sources of energy;
- ◆ Reduces fossil fuel usage and costs;
- ◆ Possible job creation opportunities.

BIOGAS – THREATS

- ◆ Local opposition;
- ◆ Planning issues;
- ◆ Foul odours can result in an unpleasant working and living environment.

4. SOLAR POWER

- ◆ To the outsider photovoltaic solar energy could be the ‘no-brainer’ of renewable energy sources, especially for farmers.
- ◆ Photovoltaic solar energy is active solar energy that can be used to generate electricity. On the Continent the solar industry is well developed. By the end of 2013, Germany had over 35 GW installed, more than any country in the world with enough to account for about 6% of electricity consumption.
- ◆ Depending on how the solar panels are set up, farming can continue around them and smaller animals such as sheep can graze under the panels.
- ◆ One could argue that Mayo would be an ideal county for solar energy with its broad expanses of open territory.
- ◆ Some experts claim that, given the paucity of sunlight and the fact that solar does not work at night, in a country like Ireland it is far less efficient than wind. According to some estimates wind produces power in Ireland for 25% of the time while solar works for just 10% of the time.
- ◆ The only solar farm in Ireland at the moment is a 4.8MW plant in Belfast servicing the airport.
- ◆ A recent study by KPMG estimated that the industry could support as many as 7,300 jobs and that activity in the sector could contribute as much as €800 million a year in tax.



SOLAR POWER – STRENGTHS

- ◆ The technology is developing very rapidly;
- ◆ It is a continuous source of power;
- ◆ It is free;
- ◆ It can be harnessed domestically or on a larger scale.

SOLAR POWER – WEAKNESSES

- ◆ It is not as efficient in Ireland as

it is in other countries;

- ◆ It takes up large amounts of physical space;
- ◆ Solar needs to be subsidised to become established.

SOLAR POWER – OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Mayo has large swathes of open countryside ideal for solar farms;

- ◆ The industry has strong job creation potential;
- ◆ It could add significantly to Mayo’s renewable profile.

SOLAR POWER – THREATS

- ◆ Failure by the Government to support its development;
- ◆ Slow to move beyond domestic use.

ACTIONS

■ The renewable sector offers a whole new set of opportunities for counties like Mayo. At the very least renewables are an opportunity to revisit farming priorities in the county and explore alternative land uses, with environmental, social and economic benefits for individuals and communities.



■ Farmers need to have a direct input into the revised Mayo renewable energy strategy. This will mean devising a very clear renewable energy policy at agri-sector level;

■ The agri-sector in Mayo needs to identify the parts of the renewable sector it is going to prioritise. There may be different priorities for different parts of the county;

■ There is a need for the agri-sector to be very focussed on how it wants to make the most of the opportunities for farmers in the era of climate change;

■ Clear information must be given to farm families on the opportunities offered by schemes associated with climate change mitigation;

■ A series of workshops/ public meetings should be held to put the possibilities offered by renewables before farmers and farm families;

■ Inside the farm gate a comprehensive energy efficiency programme needs to be devised and applied and this could include on-farm micro generation of sustainable power;

■ Many of the renewable energy sources such as wind farms, solar farms and bio-gas generation could cause friction in local communities. Any new renewables strategy needs to be devised with widespread community consultation and communities need to be engaged as partners in these ventures.



HIGH NATURE VALUE FARMING

HNV farmland is important for the conservation of semi-natural habitats

WHAT IS HNV FARMING?

“High Nature Value (HNV) farmland is extensively managed farmland that has high biodiversity. This farmland is important for the conservation of semi-natural habitats and the plants and animals linked with them. Supporting this type of farmland will ensure high levels of farmland

biodiversity, vibrant rural communities, high water, air and soil quality and resistance to flooding among other things.

“These farms occur most frequently in areas that are mountainous, or areas where natural constraints prevent intensification. Farming sustains the biodiversity of these landscapes and is integral to

maintaining their high nature value.

“High Nature Value (HNV) Farmland comprises the hot spots of biological diversity in rural areas. They are often characterised by extensive farming practices, associated with a high species and habitat diversity or the presence of species of European conservation concern.” **Eurostat**

CONCEPT

The concept of High Nature Value (HNV) farming emerged in the context of studies and actions in relation to biodiversity in Europe in the early 1990s. It arose out of a recognition that the continuation of low intensity farming systems was a vital aspect of the conservation of biodiversity. Many of Europe’s most endangered habitat types and species are dependent on farming practices that have evolved in specific regions in response to specific environmental conditions.

TYPES OF HNV FARMLAND

There are three types of HNV Farmland, Whole Farm HNV, Partial HNV Farmland and Remnant HNV Farmland.

Whole Farm HNV

Whole farm HNV is found where grassland is managed extensively and is dominated by peatland and semi natural grasslands. In Ireland these are often upland farms that have peatland habitats such as blanket bog and heath.

Partial HNV Farmland

Partial HNV farmland is where part of the farm has low stocking levels on semi-natural habitats, while other sections of the holding can be farmed more intensively. This type of farmland is generally located at the foothills of mountain areas where the lowlands are more intensively managed, while the uplands are



HNV FARMING

more extensively farmed. Many areas of Mayo could be classed as Partial HNV farmland.

Remnant HNV Farmland

These farms in most cases are not HNV farms but holdings with small parcels of semi-natural habitats that can be maintained for cross-compliance or agri-environmental scheme payments such as AEOS or GLAS. Nature conservation designations such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA) can also create remnant HNV farmland.

LOCALLY-LED HNV SCHEMES IN IRELAND AND BEYOND

◆ Throughout Europe HNV areas have accessed EU and national supports to develop their areas through Locally-Led Agri-Environmental Schemes (LLAES). There is currently funding of €70m under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for such schemes. The best known Irish incarnation of these schemes is the Burren Life project. It is a farmer-led initiative which aims to protect the Burren’s unique landscape.

- ◆ The Burren programme is farmer led, results based, flexible, adaptable, local and practical. About €5m was paid out to farmers between 2010 and 2014 representing €6,600 per farmer.
- ◆ A simple action plan is agreed with each farmer who is paid on the basis of participation and on achievement of agreed outcomes. Actions include scrub control, stone wall repair, water provision, access tracks, new gates and habitat restoration.
- ◆ Part of the outcome of the Burren Life programme has been widespread recognition of the Burren as a well-managed and cared for environment and anything with the Burren label, from food products to crafts to tourism or leisure activities has an added value thanks to the sustainable nature of the farming and social processes in the area.

HNV AND LLAES IN MAYO

- ◆ As of now groups from Nephin Beg and Achill are in the process of applying for recognition and inclusion as LLAES Schemes and there are opportunities for many more.
- ◆ There is a clear need to identify specific areas/target species for High Nature Value Farming. Such identification will have to be careful to include the local farming community in all aspects of the identification, designation and action plan. However, HNV Farming in Mayo supported by the LLAES



should prove to be an attractive farming avenue for many farmers in Mayo, especially those farming in upland peatlands.

- ◆ Supporting farmers and activists involved with the protection of rare farm breeds is another HNV initiative. Groups such as the Old Irish Goat Society work to protect endangered breeds of Irish farm animals that are now threatened with extinction. They also offer a niche opportunity for farmers.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths of potential HNV Farming in Mayo

- ◆ According to Teagasc, much of Co Mayo has a 'high' to 'very high' probability of being HNV farming territory;

- ◆ HNV farming can also give recognition to high value food produced in upland and designated parts of Mayo;
- ◆ HNV farming initiatives such as those envisaged under LLAES are farmer led and community based;
- ◆ Farmers remain in charge of the process;
- ◆ Their roles as food producers and custodians of the environment are equally recognised and there is a financial reward for both;
- ◆ The outcomes for the environment are hugely positive;
- ◆ Added value to food produce;
- ◆ Added value to the tourism sector;
- ◆ Consistent government and EU support;
- ◆ Solid body of documented

experience of HNV farming in Ireland and throughout Europe;

- ◆ Raising awareness of environmental issues.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Can be a hard sell to farmers who will not regard HNV as 'real' farming;
- ◆ Building a partnership between farmers, agencies and organisations can be challenging;
- ◆ Getting a buy-in from the various sectors is often difficult;
- ◆ Competition between areas for funding.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Farmers can generate income from environmental protection as well as from food production;

- ◆ Adding value to the tourism, craft and food products;
- ◆ Improved local environment;
- ◆ Improved local awareness and

- ◆ appreciation of the ecosystem, biodiversity and the challenges of sustaining it;
- ◆ Development of a sustainable area 'brand' for Mayo;
- ◆ Local employment in implementing and monitoring the programmes;
- ◆ Building relationships with similar communities nationally and throughout Europe.

THREATS

- ◆ Failure to get consensus among farmers;
- ◆ Competition with other schemes such as GLAS. Farmers will have to choose;
- ◆ Failure to sell the idea;
- ◆ Failure to capitalise on unique features of each of the areas concerned;
- ◆ Unreasonable expectations;
- ◆ Unfair comparisons with other schemes and areas.

ACTIONS

- There is a clear need to identify specific areas/target species in Mayo which would qualify as HNV farming;
- Illustrate how HNV farming, supported by the LLAES, could offer an attractive farming avenue for many farmers in Mayo, especially those farming in upland peatlands;

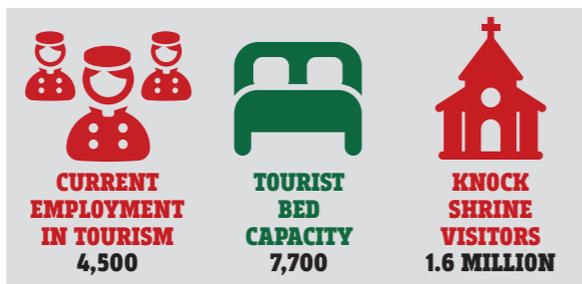
- Support farmers and activists involved with the protection of rare farm breeds;
- Improved local awareness and appreciation of the wider benefits and public goods that derive from HNV farming;
- Brand Mayo as a sustainable farming region.



AGRI-TOURISM

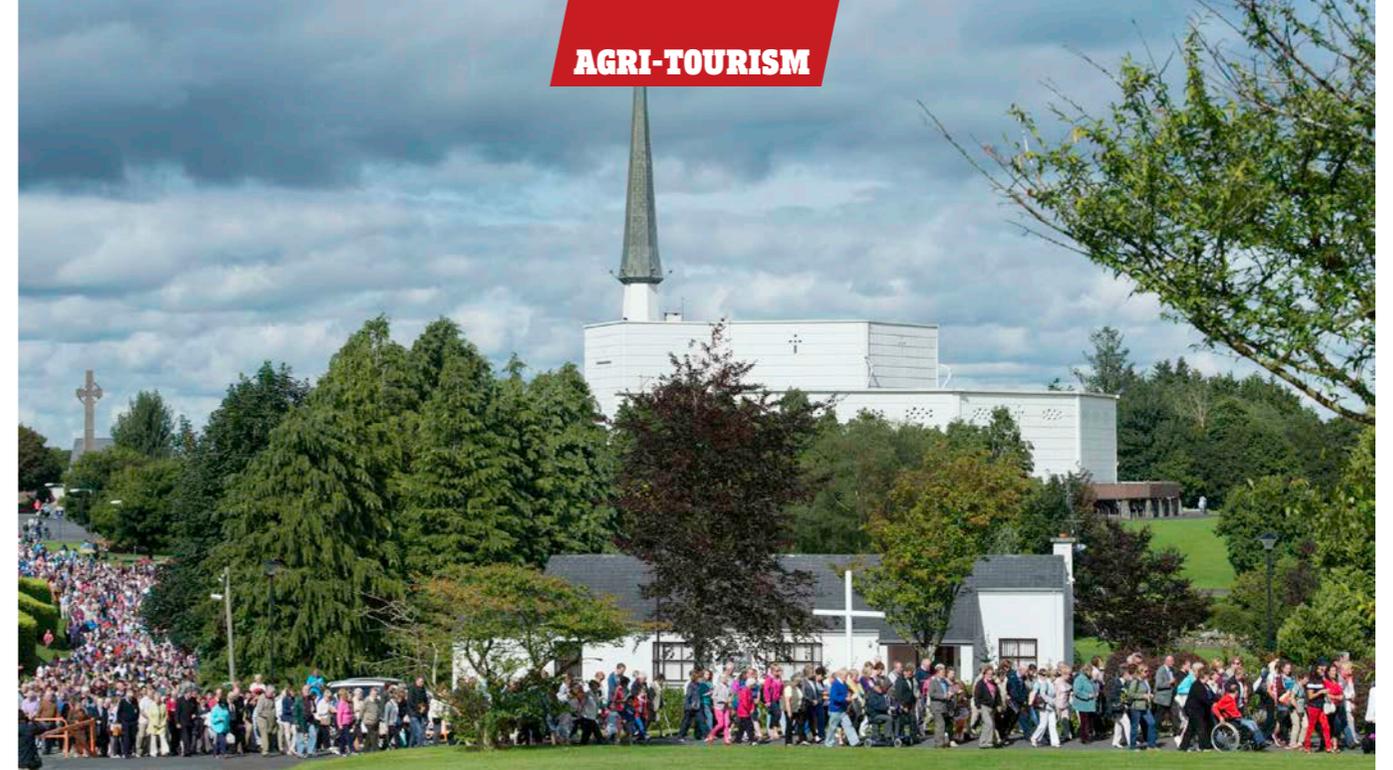
The Great Western Greenway is one of the most successful tourism initiatives in Ireland contributing €7.2m to the local economy in its first year of operation

“The development of Agri-Tourism is a key opportunity to generate additional income for farm families. Agri-tourism can contribute to the county’s tourism strategy targets by significantly growing the sector over the next five years.”



BACKGROUND

◆ Compared to many other counties Mayo has a very healthy tourism sector with internationally recognised attractions. The natural, man-made and spiritual attractions include, Croagh Patrick, Clew Bay, Lough Conn, Lough



AGRI-TOURISM

Mask, a significant portion of the Wild Atlantic Way, Knock Shrine, Westport House, the Great Western Greenway, the National Museum of Ireland – Country Life, the Michael Davitt Museum, the Jackie Clarke Collection, the Céide Fields, Ballintubber Abbey and Ashford Castle.

◆ The county has a multifaceted tourism industry and ranks seventh in the most visited counties in Ireland recording up to 250,000 overseas visitors per annum, with the main body of visitors coming from the UK, Germany and France. Meanwhile, 3.9 million members of the ‘Mayo Diaspora’ visit home at least once a year. The numbers for domestic visitors is highest at

375,000, coming principally from Dublin.

◆ Agri-tourism in Mayo has a firm foundation and context. The development of the agri-tourism element of an overall strategy for agriculture is timely as it coincides with the early implementation of a comprehensive tourism strategy entitled ‘Destination Mayo’.

Intended to cover the years 2016 to 2021 this local strategy fits very well with the highly successful Wild Atlantic Way.

◆ The strategy, in terms of vision and action, is awash with opportunities for agri-tourism. The plan envisages that by 2021 the county will be a high quality and inclusive destination. It aims

to target the next generation of tourists, both in terms of the mass market and the more niche markets.

◆ The main elements of the strategy envisage a rural-based range of tourism products and activities. These should provide farmers with ample opportunity to engage with the possibilities.

The strategy focuses on:

- ◆ Heritage and Cultural Visitor Attractions
- ◆ Walking/Hiking
- ◆ Cycling
- ◆ Angling
- ◆ Water sports
- ◆ Equestrian
- ◆ Adventure
- ◆ Festivals
- ◆ Themed tours (food tours).

AGRI-TOURISM



◆ In terms of property, skills, experience and facilities farmers in Mayo should be well positioned to take advantage of the various initiatives in this strategy, a strategy that intends to add 1,000 tourism jobs to the current 4,500 in the sector. It also hopes to match the tourism revenue generated by Clare and Kerry, which are currently 80pc and 350pc respectively ahead of Mayo.

◆ There is a model and a precedent for farmer engagement in tourism in Mayo. The Great Western Greenway is one of the most successful tourism initiatives in Ireland contributing €7.2m to the local economy in its first year of operation. It has created 35 full-time jobs and sustained 56 part-time jobs, while the involvement of 160 landowners was crucial to the project's development.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ Mayo has a strong tourism sector that is multifaceted and growing;
- ◆ As a tourism product it is almost entirely rural based;
- ◆ Mayo has a range of internationally renowned natural and heritage resources;
- ◆ The Mayo Diaspora numbering 3.9m provides a regular stream of visitors;
- ◆ Man-made, natural and spiritual resources include the Great Western Greenway, the Wild Atlantic Way, the Céide Fields,

Knock Shrine and Ireland West Airport Knock;

- ◆ There is a number of museums and a wide range of historic houses;
- ◆ The county has an established angling sector;
- ◆ It has a wealth of beaches and seaside amenity areas;
- ◆ There is a clear strategy for developing tourism in the county;
- ◆ There are a number of flagship agri-tourism projects in the county;
- ◆ Teagasc, LEADER and the local development companies are excellent sources of expertise for farmers wishing to develop an off-farm income stream.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ There can be a reluctance on the part of farmers to open up the farm to outsiders;
- ◆ Farmers are not inclined to take seriously the opportunities offered by the leisure sector. It was a

missed opportunity that the farm organisations failed to partake more actively in the consultation process leading to the production of 'Destination Mayo';

- ◆ Developing an agri-tourism project takes money, but farmers don't often have access to the liquid funds needed to convert/adapt their property. Grant aid from organisations such as LEADER requires matching funding;
- ◆ There is little education and training available for farmers wishing to enter the tourism trade;
- ◆ The seasonal nature of tourism can make people reluctant to engage or invest.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ An agri-tourism project is a good fit with farming and the farm lifestyle, especially on smaller farms where there is a history of diversification;

- ◆ There is a commitment to significantly increase tourism in the county over the next four years;
- ◆ Walking, cycling, adventure holidays will be located on or near farmland and near farmyards. These will provide opportunities for bike storage, repairs, bike transport and accommodation;
- ◆ There is a dearth of accommodation in the county, with just 194 providers and 7,700 bed nights. There is space for a lot more;
- ◆ Farmers could capitalise on the 'spiritual/pilgrimage' tourism sector in Mayo where an estimated 1.6m visit Knock Shrine every year and 275,000 climb Croagh Patrick. The development

of a pilgrimage trail between the various monasteries is an ideal opportunity for farmers along the way to engage with these developments;

- ◆ 'Themed trails' are mentioned in the Mayo tourism strategy with a food trail being identified as one possibility. As food producers, farmers could certainly benefit from such a development;
- ◆ LEADER funding has just come on stream and a certain proportion will be available for agri-tourism;
- ◆ Teagasc advice and support is available for agri-tourism.

THREATS

- ◆ Negative farmer attitudes to tourism as a source of revenue;
- ◆ Lack of familiarity and lack of

financial resources to establish a viable agri-tourism enterprise;

- ◆ Lack of training in tourism among farmers;
- ◆ The lead-in time to establishing a tourism business and turning a profit can be long;
- ◆ The seasonal nature of tourism is a threat to take-up;
- ◆ There is a preponderance of domestic 'day-trippers' especially on the pilgrimage tours to Croagh Patrick and Knock Shrine, this is of little benefit to the overall tourism sector in the county.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To ensure that more farm families can realise opportunities to develop sustainable agri-tourism projects.

ACTIONS

■ Farmers, farmer groups and organisations need to seriously explore how a strong agri-tourism element can be developed out of the strategy 'Destination Mayo.' The areas/projects most suitable for farmers and more in tune with their resources and skill-sets should be identified;

■ An alliance needs to be formed with Teagasc, GMIT, the local development companies, Mayo County

Council, Fáilte Ireland and the various Mayo tourism groups to raise awareness and stimulate interest in agri-tourism;

■ Case studies of successful agri-tourism ventures need to be identified and highlighted using video clips;

■ Farmers need to be encouraged to look at their own holding and at the amenities around them and identify agri-tourism possibilities;

■ In collaboration with the local development companies and Teagasc a project development toolkit/manual needs to be developed as a blueprint for the development of rural tourism projects;

■ An information leaflet on agri-tourism opportunities based on the tourism strategy 'Destination Mayo' and drawing on current projects needs to be developed.

BELMULLET COASTGUARD STATION A CASE STUDY IN AGRI-TOURISM

‘People come here to experience the tranquillity, the beauty and the peace’

LAWRENCE and Myra Howard farm a 70ac suckler farm at Claggan Island, Belmullet. The holding has been in the family for generations and in 2004 they bought the old Coastguard station located on the lands. It was practically derelict. Lawrence was working abroad at the time and returned in 2010 to take up residence on the farm.

The Howard family has a tradition of involvement in the hospitality sector, Lawrence’s parents having run the nearby Oyster Bay House for 10 years, so Myra and Lawrence decided to renovate the old coastguard station as a family home and a self-catering unit.

“I had the experience of my parents to draw on but I wrote no business plan. We knew what we wanted to do, we knew the people we wanted to attract and we went for it,” Lawrence recalls.

The self-catering part of the old coastguard station is a three-bedroom, modern house finished

to a high specification. As soon as it opened in 2010 it immediately took off.

“We have had 50% to 60% occupancy from the early days,” he explains. “People come here to experience what we experience, the tranquillity, the beauty of the place and the peace.”

The Howards, meanwhile, continue to farm 70ac of owned land and a further 20ac of rented ground. The family has a 50-cow suckler herd which they are hoping to grow to 60.

“We did the marketing on Facebook and Twitter, and we got good coverage in the farming press. We were named as one of the top 50 places to stay and play in Ireland in *The Irish Times*.”

Lawrence explains that money and time are important when setting up an agri-tourism business.

“I believe you have to do it well if you are going to do it at all. The pods cost €50,000 to build and



once that is done the next thing you have to do is give your guests time. They are paying you and your job is to provide them not just with the facilities but with yourself, your local knowledge and your company. Some people want privacy and to be left alone, that too is fine.”

Lawrence would advise anyone getting into the agri-tourism business to be prepared to give themselves totally to it. But he is no believer in working oneself completely to the bone.

“For instance we outsource the laundry. We have young kids and if we were to do everything they would never see us,” he said.

He would advise people not to be afraid of the venture, “and don’t be afraid of giving back, of being generous, of lighting the fire for the guests before they arrive and having the marshmallows ready for roasting. The little extras win the day,” he maintains.



EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Farmers must be decent financial planners, good time organisers, strong communicators, and excellent people managers

BACKGROUND

◆ The necessity and requirement for agricultural education has changed considerably over the last 15 years.

◆ While there is a requirement



NUMBER OF STUDENTS UNDERTAKING AGRICULTURAL COURSES IN THE COUNTY
450-500



PROVIDERS OF COURSES
TEAGASC AND WESTPORT CFE

for all young applicants for CAP direct payments or Department of Agriculture grants to be a 'trained' farmer, and have at least attained the QQI Level 6 Green Cert, there is a broader necessity for those embarking on

a career in farming to attain a sound educational foundation in agriculture.

◆ Successful farmers must certainly have the technical skills to farm, and a strong foundation in basic animal husbandry is essential. However, today's farmers are no longer simply labour units.

◆ Farming is an increasingly complex business. Ensuring the relevant support and training is provided for young farmers and new entrants is critical for the future of Mayo's agriculture sector.

◆ Education is the key. Farmers

must be decent financial planners, good time organisers, strong communicators, and excellent people managers. They must have a vision for their farm business, and have a strategy — both for the medium-term and long-term — to achieve that vision.

◆ In a sector where farm filling and regulation are essential, they must have a wider appreciation of CAP policy, a good working knowledge of national schemes, and be conversant with current environmental requirements.

AVAILABLE COURSES

◆ There is a range of courses and

a number of providers, both locally and nationally, for those who wish to follow a career in agriculture.

◆ The courses range from the Level 5 introductory course in agriculture, on to the Level 6 Green Cert. In addition, agricultural degree courses are available from the GMIT and Dundalk IT, and are provided in association with the nearby agricultural colleges in Mountbellew, Co Galway and Ballyhaise, Co Cavan.

◆ Third Level courses in agriculture are also available at the institutes of technology in Sligo and Letterkenny.



◆ Along with these local courses, students wishing to complete a degree in agriculture or dairy science can complete their studies in either UCD or UCC.

GREEN CERT

- ◆ The Green Cert in Agriculture is the qualification of choice for the vast majority of prospective and practicing farmers.
- ◆ The Green Cert refers to a list of agriculture courses or agricultural science courses which qualifies a person as a ‘trained farmer’.
- ◆ This course is suited to people who wish to start a career in farming, be it working on their own farm or working as a farm manager. The course also is an ideal stepping stone for students who want to further their studies in the sector.
- ◆ Applicants must obtain a QQI Level 6 Advanced Certificate or a QQI Level 6 Specific Purpose Certificate in Farm Administration to achieve a ‘Green Cert’.
- ◆ There are many ways to obtain one of these qualifications, including fulltime education in an agricultural college. Locally, Teagasc courses are available in Balla, Ballinrobe and Ballina – as well as through distance learning. The Green Cert can also be completed at the Westport College of Further Education (CFE).

- ◆ Having a Green Cert is also one of the conditions of stamp duty exemption on the transfer of a farm to a son or daughter. It also meets the criteria for the various schemes or grants such as the popular TAMS programme.
- ◆ Teagasc generally has between 360 and 380 Green Cert students in total each year enrolled at its various centres.
- ◆ Close to 90 students attend the day courses at Westport CFE studying the Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture, the Level 6 Certificate in Agriculture, and the Level 6 Certificate in Horticulture — both Level 6 options are ‘Green Cert’ courses.

FURTHER COURSES AVAILABLE

- ◆ Among the other courses available locally is an Agriculture Level 5 course at Westport CFE. This course, accredited by QQI, is the introductory course for young people who wish to take up a career in farming.
- ◆ The course is suitable for people seeking employment on farms or working on their own farms. Graduates of the course are also eligible to transfer to linked courses at Institutes of Technology through the Higher Education Links Scheme.

◆ In addition, the college runs a full-time QQI Level 6 Certificate in Horticulture and a QQI Level 6 Certificate in Agriculture.

◆ Westport CFE also runs a night-course QQI Level 6 Certificate in Agriculture — which can also be done by distance learning. There are generally around 180 students enrolled.

◆ In addition, Teagasc offers a wide range of courses, subject to demand. These include:

1. Under the Rural Development Programme umbrella:
 - ◆ Rural-tourism courses
 - ◆ Options for Farm Families programme
 - ◆ Organic Farming Courses
 - ◆ Horse Courses
2. Health and Safety Courses (half-day courses);
3. Computer Courses;
4. Beef Data Genomics Programme training courses;
5. GLAS courses;
6. Forestry Establishment Courses;
7. Dairy Start-ups Development Courses;
8. Farm Financial Management Courses;
9. Grassland Management Courses.

TRAINING STRENGTHS

◆ A wide range of agricultural training and education courses is available to both mature applicants and those pupils completing their secondary education;

- ◆ These accredited courses provide students with the foundation-level training and further educational opportunities necessary in the modern farm sector;
- ◆ The high number of Green Cert graduates in Mayo means the vast majority of farmers in the county have the required qualifications to draw down CAP direct payments and to qualify for Government-funded schemes;
- ◆ The course content of these educational programmes gives students a broad base of farming knowledge — and in some cases practical experience — which deepens the overall skillset in the county;
- ◆ The emphasis in environmental protection in the courses improves overall farming practice in the county.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Supporting young farmers through education and engagement so they can fulfil their potential;
- ◆ Create a positive environment which supports land transfer and/or management arrangements for young farmers.

TRAINING SHORTCOMINGS

◆ Given the importance of hill sheep to the county, the absence of a specific course tailored to the requirements and specifics of the sector is a weakness;



- ◆ The absence of a degree level agricultural course in Mayo means that students must travel for their education;
- ◆ The shortage of suitably trained staff to work on dairy farms in the county was one of the issues raised during workshops. However, this is a national phenomenon, with Teagasc predicting that 6,000 new entrants into the industry will be required over the next decade but just 170 students a year are completing dedicated dairy courses.

ACTIONS

- Liaise with education providers and farm organisations to ensure that all young farmers have the Green Cert in Agriculture and therefore qualify to draw down EU and government direct payments;
- Establish a data base of young farmers in the county;

- Conduct a baseline assessment by researching the training and education levels among young farmers;
- Explore through research what additional training for farmers would be of benefit and how it could be provided;

- Explore the possibility of providing a Green Cert tailored to the requirements of hill sheep farmers;
- Explore the possibility of Third Level courses in agriculture being provided by the Castlebar campus of GMT.



A SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY FOR MAYO

