

a quality future for rural Ireland

Labour's 21 point plan

October 2006

A **QUALITY** Future for Rural Ireland:
Labour's 21 Point Plan

A **QUALITY** Future for Rural Ireland:

My Vision for Rural Ireland

'Quality' is what the Labour Party believes the future should hold for rural¹ Ireland. Quality lives. A quality environment. And quality products.

A quality future for rural living people means government playing its part in maintaining an equitable balance between farmers' income needs, consumers' demands for improving food quality, higher environmental standards, more effective rural development and the agri-food industry's desire for improving profitability.

And a quality future for rural Ireland means taking full advantage of the changes taking place in all agriculture-related sectors of our economy.

The gradual reduction and the de-coupling of agricultural supports from agricultural production means farmers who want to thrive must produce what consumers want.

Mariann Fischer Boel, the E.U. Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, is on record² as saying she does "not think we will have the same direct payment available after 2013" so by then we must be prepared for a time without substantial E.U. 'subsidies'.

Enlargement of the European Union continues to be consolidated, and Ireland will go from being a net recipient of E.U. funds to becoming a net contributor.

2008 will see further reforms of the Common Agriculture, when the E.U. milk-quota system is restructured.

But even with all of these changes taking place, as long as we continue to focus on constantly improving the quality of Irish agricultural produce, Irish farmers, whether they farm part- or full-time, will have a quality future ahead.

I am as committed to a quality future for rural Ireland as my party is and together in government we will implement the following policies for a quality future for rural Ireland.

MARY UPTON TD
Labour Party
Spokesperson on Agriculture
and Food

¹ In this context, the Labour Party understands rural as meaning: areas outside the immediate vicinity of the cities of Cork, Dublin, Limerick and Galway.

² See: <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/DDebate.aspx?F=AGJ20060510.xml&Node=H2#H2>

A **QUALITY** Future for Rural Ireland:

The 21 Points

1. Fair and Equitable Rural Development

- We will pursue policies consistent with balanced regional development.
- We will implement policies that encourage part-time farming.
- The Labour Party is in favour of spending the majority of Ireland's rural development funding on improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy.
- We support the careful rolling-out of the Rural Transport Initiative nationally.
- We will extend a 50% mandatory rate relief to village shops, pubs and/or garages where they are the last one, two or three remaining in their communities.
- We want women who experience poverty and social exclusion in rural Ireland to be targeted with policies that address the symptoms and underlying causes of such inequity (for instance, rural women with children have particular requirements in relation to childcare, training and education).
- The Labour Party also wants TEAGASC, FÁS and the Department of Social and Family Affairs to continue to work on developing solutions to such women's alienation from the mainstream economy.
- And because of their importance as determining factors of rural development, addressing electricity, broadband and other infrastructure deficits will be prioritised by the next Labour government.

2. Irish Agri-Food Industries Must Compete on Quality

- The Labour Party will work closely with everyone involved in the production and processing of food to ensure the high quality of raw materials and added value products.
- We will also continue to support the marketing of quality Irish agri-food products throughout the world.

3. Unitary Department of Agriculture & Rural Development

- We will create a unitary Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to ensure the proper coordination between these related areas of government and to take advantage of increasing payments from the E.U.'s Common Agriculture Policy (C.A.P.) budget for rural development initiatives.

4. Continue Assistance to Farming Families

- The Labour Party is committed to ensuring optimal take-up of the Farm Assist and Rural Social Scheme programmes.
- We want to find effective ways of ensuring farm spouses can have their contributions of work on the farm appropriately recognised by the social welfare system.

5. Support Young Farmers

- The Labour Party will continue recently instituted young farmer training schemes.
- We will foster, particularly through distance and after-hours learning courses, an ethos of continuing education amongst farming and rural families.

6. Facilitate Larger Farms

- The Labour Party will implement policies which encourage farm consolidation, such as continuing provision of stamp duty relief for qualifying farmers under fifty.
- We will also raise the thresholds in the leased land exemption scheme in line with inflation.
- We will consider dropping the off-farm income limit which applies to potential transferees' income for the year before they apply to participate in early retirement schemes for farmers.
- In addition, we shall explore the possibility of increasing the maximum pension payable to retiring farmers whose farms are partially or fully transferred to young or consolidating farmers, by renting, leasing or selling their lands.

7. Maintain Efficient Farmer Payment Systems

- The Labour Party will review the working of the Agriculture Appeals Office and ensure that it fulfils its duties as effectively as possible.

8. Reorient the Direction of Dairy Farming

- The Labour Party will implement measures to support the further development of high added value and specialist milk products by small and larger-scale operators.
- We will promote integrated research, production and marketing techniques in order to do this.

- The Labour Party will help the processing sector to implement the recommendations of the Strategic Development Plan for the Irish Dairy Processing Sector (2003).

9. Nurture our Livestock and Meat Industries

- The Labour Party will support the livestock and meat processing industries in achieving the necessary adaptations to current global economic trends.
- A core element in the Labour Party's emphasis on improving the quality of the output of Irish farming is its support for organic livestock agriculture.
- In sheep, cattle, pig and poultry farming, aggressive marketing campaigns which emphasise the quality, nutrition and traceability benefits of Irish food over much of the food imported from non-E.U. countries must be initiated and refined.
- The quantity and quality of the suckler herd - which is an important factor in the meat production capacity of the national beef herd - may well have been adversely affected by de-coupling. The Labour Party will ensure the precise effects of de-coupling on the suckler herd are determined and, where adverse effects are identified, we will implement appropriate mitigation measures.

10. Help Sheep Farmers and Disadvantaged Areas

- The Labour Party wants the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme to continue beyond 2010 and will work with the European Commission to secure this goal.
- The Labour Party will implement the Sheep Industry Development Strategy.

11. Improve the Rural Environment Protection Scheme

- We will consider introducing a maximum payment threshold to ensure large land owners do not receive the lion's share of the payments.

12. Grow More Forests and Develop Related Industries

- In line with the Bacon Report, the Labour Party wants to continue the forestry funding programme so that annualised planting targets of 20,000 hectares per annum are achieved. Fulfilling such targets will ensure minimum critical mass levels for a sustainable and quality oriented forestry industry are maintained well into the future. To this end we will increase the annual payment to farmers to keep the real value of the payments constant.
- We support Dr. Bacon's suggestion that the payment period for the farmers' compensatory premium be reduced from twenty-years to ten-years.

- Furthermore, we will also consider implementing Dr. Bacon's proposal that the State guarantees purchase of timber from farmers after ten-years' growth.

13. Promote An All-Island Food Policy Perspective

- We believe Safe Food should continue to work with the FSAI and the Northern Ireland authorities.
- In order for the eventual goal of free movement of animals and animal products within the island of Ireland to be achieved, we will support the North South Ministerial Council's work in developing all-island animal health policy and import regime.

14. Keep Our Food Safe

- Where the safety of Irish consumers is at risk and where evidence exists that countries importing food into Ireland from non-EU countries are not observing the same standards as our farmers do, the Labour Party will take appropriate mitigation measures.
- Food that actually originates outside the E.U. may, in certain circumstances, be labelled as if it was produced inside the E.U. – sometimes not even meeting minimum requirements for safety and traceability which Irish and E.U. products are obliged to do. The Labour Party will work to end such anomalies at the national and E.U. levels.
- Where appropriate labelling laws already exist, the Labour Party will ensure these are rigorously and proactively enforced.

15. Eliminate Food Poverty

- The Labour Party will ensure that for the first time a national nutrition policy for all sectors of society at risk of food poverty is developed and mainstreamed.
- The Labour Party will also develop a programme whereby school children all over Ireland who already participate in the school milk programme will receive a piece of fruit every day.
- Finding ways of extending the provision of free meals, which fulfil evidence-based nutritional goals, to every school child in Ireland who needs them, is one of the Labour Party's priorities.

16. Bio-Energy Improves Ireland's Economic Security

- We will ensure intensive research is carried out on which bio-fuel crops might be most profitably grown in which areas and in what kinds of soils.
- We will continue monitoring what measures elsewhere have succeeded in stimulating bio-energy production, and where appropriate we will adopt them here.

17. Nurture Local Food Production and Distribution Systems

- We will explore ways of encouraging the greater availability of small tracts of land to qualified horticultural farmers by extending the leased land exemption scheme to cover such land.
- We will support research into the question of how far and with what environmental, social, and economic consequences the food we eat actually travels from the farms where it is grown to our fridges - the 'Food Miles' issue.
- Shops which take advantage of the 50% rate relief referred to in Point 1 above would be incentivised to stock local produce.
- The Labour Party would also like to see commercial kitchens for research and production purposes being made available at reasonable rents to artisan food producers.
- Recent renewal of local markets throughout the country is very welcome and will be supported wherever possible by the Labour Party.

18. Expand Organic Agriculture

- We will ensure intensive research is carried out on which crops might be most profitably grown in which areas and in what types of soils; And once such research is done, we will ensure the products of this research are made available to farmers in the field.
- We will work on establishing the levels and the kinds of supports necessary for the widespread production, processing and sale of indigenously produced organic food in Ireland and abroad.
- We also want supermarkets to reserve certain amounts of shelf-space for locally produced organic and non-organic produce.

19. Safety First: Genetically Modified Organisms

- The Labour Party will work towards the aspiration of a G.M.O. production free island of Ireland within the context of the relevant E.U. and U.K. legislation and in the relevant national and international fora.
- Until that aim is achieved, the Labour Party will push for the strongest possible evidence-based rules governing the release of G.M.O.'s into the environment.
- Where it is not possible under existing E.U. legislation to prevent G.M.O. production in Ireland, the Labour Party believes those who plan to grow G.M.O.'s should be responsible for securing comprehensive insurance against the contingencies which might arise before they actually plant their G.M.O. crop.

20. Better and More Co-ordinated Research

- The Labour Party will build upon the nucleus of high quality agri-food related research and the basic scientific infrastructure in the universities and Teagasc and establish an Environment Research Centre. The Centre's mission will be to provide research based understanding of the fundamental chemical, biological, pedological, engineering and socio-economic needs of the agri-food industry (including the artisan food sector) allied to the sustainable rural economy and the protection of Ireland's rural environment.
- We will continue funding for the Farm Institutional Research Measure.

21. Revolutionise Animal Health and Welfare

- We plan to enact legislation to provide courts with new powers to protect neglected or abused animals, even before a conviction has been achieved.
- The responsibility for all animal health and welfare issues, including animal experimentation and enforcement of the Dog Control Acts should be vested in a single Minister. We consider it unacceptable that no Minister currently accepts responsibility for animal welfare issues affecting non-canine pets.
- The Labour Party wants to make it unlawful to sell or buy any product from the international trade in cat and dog fur.
- The Labour Party will audit the management of animal control measures carried out by local authorities.
- We also favour lengthening the minimum allowable time between capture and destruction of stray animals.

Policy Focus: How to Grow Irish Organic Agriculture

- We will prioritise the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Organic Development Committee Report.

Labour's 21 Point Plan

1. Fair and Equitable Rural Development

Given farming's importance to the rural economy, how Irish agriculture and its associated industries fare will, to a large extent, determine the degree and nature of rural development in Ireland. The new E.U. modulation procedure means that every year until 2013 an increasing amount of the E.U. agriculture budget will be spent on rural development projects. In total, the E.U. will contribute around 500 million Euros until 2013 towards rural development in Ireland. Much of this funding will also be matched by the Irish exchequer. In order to optimise rural Ireland's benefit from all of this money over the coming years:

- We will pursue policies consistent with balanced regional development.
- We will implement policies that encourage part-time farming.
- The Labour Party is in favour of spending the majority of Ireland's rural development funding on improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy.
- We support the careful rolling-out of the Rural Transport Initiative nationally.
- And we will extend a 50% mandatory rate relief to village shops, pubs and/or garages where they are the last one, two or three remaining in their communities.
- We want women who experience poverty and social exclusion in rural Ireland to be targeted with policies that address the symptoms and underlying causes of such inequity (for instance, rural women with children have particular requirements in relation to childcare, training and education).
- The Labour Party also wants TEAGASC, FÁS and the Department of Social and Family Affairs to continue to work on developing solutions to such women's alienation from the mainstream economy.
- And because of their importance as determining factors of rural development, addressing electricity, broadband and other infrastructure deficits will be prioritised by the next Labour government.

2. Irish Agri-Food Industries Must Compete on Quality

In an increasingly globalised world it will not always be possible for Irish farmers and food processors to beat their competitors in all other countries on scale alone. However, there is no reason why Irish farmers and food processors cannot compete with any other producers in the world on the quality of the goods they produce. Irish agriculture and the downstream food industry have already proven their abilities to compete successfully on world markets in terms of quality. We need to build on this success – to maintain current markets and to find new ones.

- The Labour Party will work closely with everyone involved in the production and processing of food to ensure the high quality of raw materials and added value products.
- We will also continue to support the marketing of quality Irish agri-food products throughout the world.

3. Unitary Department of Agriculture & Rural Development

As production supports to farmers are reduced, payments in respect of rural development will be increased - at least until 2013. Meanwhile we must maintain an equitable balance between consumers' demands for improving food quality, higher environmental standards, more effective rural development and greater profitability in the food industry. The experiment of having part of a government department dedicated to questions of rural affairs has been moderately successful. However, since the primary source of employment and land use in rural areas is agriculture and food-producing related activities, it is now time to unify the rural affairs aspects of the Department for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs with the Department of Agriculture and Food's statutory responsibilities.

- We will create a unitary Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to ensure the proper coordination between these related areas of government and to take advantage of increasing payments from the E.U.'s Common Agriculture Policy (C.A.P.) budget for rural development initiatives.

4. Continue Assistance to Farming Families

Farming families who need financial assistance should be encouraged to avail of what help is available to them. And those families which farm part-time must not be discouraged from doing so.

- The Labour Party is committed to ensuring optimal take-up of the Farm Assist and Rural Social Scheme programmes.
- We want to find effective ways of ensuring farm spouses can have their contributions of work on the farm appropriately recognised by the social welfare system.

5. Support Young Farmers

The future of Irish agriculture depends on attracting young well-trained farmers into the industry, even if they only wish to farm part-time.

- The Labour Party will continue recently instituted young farmer training schemes.
- We will foster, particularly through distance and after-hours learning courses, an ethos of continuing education amongst farming and rural families.

6. Facilitate Larger Farms

Continuing trends in the globalised economy favour economies of scale that in the context of Irish agriculture can best be achieved by having larger farms. Recent Irish government policy has rightly supported the establishment and consolidation of large-scale agri-food enterprises which are capable of competing in a global market-place.

- At farm level, the Labour Party will implement policies which encourage farm consolidation, such as continuing provision of stamp duty relief for qualifying farmers under fifty.
- We will also raise the thresholds in the leased land exemption scheme in line with inflation.
- We will consider dropping the off-farm income limit which applies to potential transferees' income for the year before they apply to participate in early retirement schemes for farmers.
- In addition, we shall explore the possibility of increasing the maximum pension payable to retiring farmers whose farms are partially or fully transferred to young or consolidating farmers, by renting, leasing or selling their lands.

7. Maintain Efficient Farmer Payment Systems

The Department for Agriculture and Food has so far succeeded in transferring single farm payments to farmers without major hic-ups. The Labour Party will not take the smooth running of current systems for granted. We will ensure that whenever necessary changes are implemented, no risks are taken with the effective delivery of existing payments to farmers and their families.

- The Labour Party will review the working of the Agriculture Appeals Office and ensure that it fulfils its duties as effectively as possible.

8. Reorient the Direction of Dairy Farming

The E.U. Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development is on record as saying that in the light of trends in world trade, the E.U. "would probably lose most of our share of the world export market for dairy products"³. Because of the relative importance of dairying to Irish agriculture, Ireland risks bearing the brunt of any such loss of market share.

- The Labour Party will implement measures to support the further development of high added value and specialist milk products by small and larger-scale operators.
- We will promote integrated research, production and marketing techniques in order to do this.

³ Mariann Fischer Boel in a Europa Lecture delivered in Wellington New Zealand on 6 March 2006.

- The Labour Party also will help the processing sector to implement the recommendations of the 2003 Strategic Development Plan for the Irish Dairy Processing Sector.

9. Nurture our Livestock and Meat Industries

We must help our livestock and meat industries prepare for a time when export refunds have been eliminated and market access for non-E.U. countries' products has increased. The Irish livestock and meat sectors must face these and other challenges over the coming years and they will have to adapt if they hope to hold and grow their positions on the world market.

- The Labour Party will support the livestock and meat processing industries in achieving the necessary adaptations.
- A core element in the Labour Party's emphasis on improving the quality of the output of Irish farming is its support for organic livestock agriculture.
- In sheep, cattle, pig and poultry farming, aggressive marketing campaigns which emphasise the quality, nutrition and traceability benefits of Irish food over much food imported from non-E.U. countries must be initiated and refined.
- The quantity and quality of the suckler herd - which is an important factor in the meat production capacity of the national beef herd - may well have been adversely affected by de-coupling. The Labour Party will ensure the precise effects of de-coupling on the suckler herd are determined and, where adverse effects are identified, we will implement appropriate mitigation measures.

10. Help Sheep Farmers and Disadvantaged Areas

One consequence of the de-coupling of agricultural supports from agricultural production has been a reduction in the number of sheep in Ireland. Another consequence has been a greater take-up in the Disadvantaged Areas Compensatory Allowance scheme.

- The Labour Party wants this scheme to continue beyond 2010 and will work with the European Commission to secure this goal.
- The Labour Party will implement the Sheep Industry Development Strategy.

11. Improve the Rural Environment Protection Scheme

In order to maximise the environmental, economic and social benefits to Irish farming and rural Ireland from the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS), it is important that the greatest number of farmers possible participate in the scheme. The Labour Party believes that this can be achieved by improving the links between the costs of compliance with E.U. and national legislation and the level of payments made to participants in REPS.

- We will consider introducing a maximum payment threshold to ensure large land owners do not receive the lion's share of the payments.

12. Grow More Forests and Develop Related Industries

The Labour Party wants to see more of Ireland afforested with a better mix of species. We recognise that a good mix of timber species can help water and landscape quality, as well as biodiversity. Growing more and better forests will help Ireland meet its Kyoto commitments and nurture its nascent bio-energy industries.

- In line with the Bacon Report, the Labour Party wants to continue the forestry funding programme so that annualised planting targets of 20,000 hectares per annum are achieved. Fulfilling such targets will ensure minimum critical mass levels for a sustainable and quality oriented forestry industry are maintained well into the future. To this end we will increase the annual payment to farmers to keep the real value of the payments constant.
- We support Dr. Bacon's suggestion that the payment period for the farmers' compensatory premium be reduced from twenty-years to ten-years.
- Furthermore, we will also consider implementing Dr. Bacon's proposal that the State guarantees purchase of timber from farmers after ten-years' growth.

13. Promote An All-Island Food Policy Perspective

The Labour Party wants to vest complete responsibility for food safety in the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (F.S.A.I.) right from farm-to-fork. The F.S.A.I. should have the power to carry out farm inspections.

- We believe Safe Food should continue to work with the F.S.A.I. and the Northern Ireland authorities.
- In order for the eventual goal of free movement of animals and animal products within the island of Ireland to be achieved, we will support the North South Ministerial Council's work in developing all-island animal health policy and import regime.

14. Keep Our Food Safe

Irish farmers are subjected to stringent food safety regulations which add considerably to their costs. It is important that the producers of food imported into Ireland from non-E.U. countries observe the same standards.

- Where the safety of Irish consumers is at risk and where evidence exists that countries importing food into Ireland from non-EU countries are not observing the same standards as our farmers do, the Labour Party will take appropriate mitigation measures.

Comprehensive and accurate labelling of the food we buy for ourselves and for our families is a precondition of the assurance of its quality.

- Food that actually originates outside the E.U. may, in certain circumstances, be labelled as if it was produced inside the E.U. – sometimes not even meeting minimum requirements for safety and

traceability which Irish and E.U. products are obliged to do. The Labour Party will work to end such anomalies at the national and E.U. levels.

- Where appropriate labelling laws already exist, the Labour Party will ensure these are rigorously and proactively enforced.

This will serve at least two purposes. Consumers will know more about what they are purchasing and will be in a position to make better informed choices than they might be at the present time. And the extra costs certain producers incur because of their products' higher quality are more likely to be recouped if consumers understand why one product might be more expensive than another.

15. Eliminate Food Poverty

Food poverty affects rural dwellers in disproportionate numbers due to a variety of reasons including a relative absence of shops and public transportation. Food poverty is the inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet. Food poverty impacts on health, culture, social participation and is often a cause of anti-social behaviour. In Ireland 300,000 people are at risk of suffering food poverty.

- The Labour Party will ensure that for the first time a national nutrition policy for all sectors of society at risk of food poverty is developed and mainstreamed.
- The Labour Party will also develop a programme whereby school children all over Ireland who already participate in the school milk programme will receive a piece of fruit every day.⁴
- Finding ways of extending the provision of free meals, which fulfil evidence-based nutritional goals, to every school child in Ireland who needs them, is also one of the Labour Party's priorities.

16. Bio-Energy Improves Ireland's Economic Security

Recent increases in oil prices coupled with the fear of diminishing oil supplies are rightly seen as an opportunity for Irish farmers. The Labour Party also considers the future role of both indigenously and non-indigenously produced bio-energy products as a key contributor to Ireland's economic security. We believe it is a great pity that the Carlow and Mallow sugar beet processing factories are not being converted into 'bio-ethanol fuel from sugar beet' facilities, now that the Government has agreed to close down Ireland's sugar beet industry.

- We will ensure intensive research is carried out on which bio-fuel crops might be most profitably grown in which areas and in what kinds of soils.
- We will continue monitoring what measures elsewhere have succeeded in stimulating bio-energy production, and where appropriate we will adopt them here.

⁴ We estimate this would not cost much more than the school milk scheme currently does (i.e. close to a million euros/year) in providing around 90,000 school children with milk.

17. Nurture Local Food Production and Distribution Systems

The true social cost of food is becoming a more important element in the decisions we make about what to buy and consume. Brazilian beef, for example, might seem cheaper at the cash register in your local shop than beef produced on a farm within a few miles of the shop. But that apparent cheapness may well have been bought at the expense of, for example, rain forest degradation, the pollution of the air or sea and the increased health risks associated with consuming meat which might contain banned hormones. Promoting local production and distribution mechanisms is one way of addressing the problem of the hidden social, environmental and animal welfare costs of food which has travelled a long way to reach our plates. We believe government should play an enabling role in the development of niche products which have the potential to succeed on local, regional and national markets.

- We will explore ways of encouraging the greater availability of small tracts of land to qualified horticultural farmers by extending the leased land exemption scheme to cover such land.
- We will support research into the question of how far and with what environmental, social and economic consequences the food we eat actually travels from the farms where it is grown to our kitchen tables - the 'Food Miles' issue.
- Shops which take advantage of the 50% rate relief referred to in Point 1 above would be incentivised to stock local produce.
- The Labour Party would also like to see commercial kitchens for research and production purposes being made available at reasonable rents to artisan food producers.
- Recent renewal of local markets throughout the country is very welcome and will be supported wherever possible by the Labour Party.

18. Expand Organic Agriculture

The Labour Party believes we need to establish a new brand to do for Irish organic production what Kerrygold has done for the global marketing of conventionally produced Irish agriculture products.

- We will ensure intensive research is carried out on which crops might be most profitably grown in which areas and in what types of soils; And once such research is done, we will ensure the products of this research are made available to farmers in the field.
- We will work on determining the levels and the kinds of supports necessary for the widespread production, processing and sale of indigenously produced organic food in Ireland and abroad.
- We also want supermarkets to reserve certain amounts of shelf-space for locally produced organic and non-organic produce.

19. Safety First: Genetically Modified Organisms

Ireland is in danger of losing out on the economic and scientific benefits that will accrue to countries which remain substantially free from production of Genetically Modified Organisms (G.M.O.'s).

- The Labour Party will work towards the aspiration of a G.M.O. production free island of Ireland within the context of the relevant E.U. and U.K. legislation and in the relevant national and international fora.
- Until that aim is achieved, the Labour Party will push for the strongest possible evidence-based rules governing the release of G.M.O.'s into the environment.

As scientific knowledge of the risks involved in G.M.O. production evolves, then so must the mechanisms for managing these risks.

- Where it is not possible under existing E.U. legislation to prevent G.M.O. production in Ireland, the Labour Party believes those who plan to grow G.M.O.'s should be responsible for securing comprehensive insurance against the contingencies which might arise before they actually plant their G.M.O. crop.

20. Better and More Co-ordinated Research

Ireland's knowledge-based economy needs constantly evolving, relevant and innovative research to continue growing. Such research is expensive and difficult to coordinate and unless government plays a role it may be that Ireland's aim of maintaining and improving its position as the E.U.'s fourth largest food exporter is not realised.

- The Labour Party will build upon the nucleus of high quality agri-food related research and the basic scientific infrastructure in the universities and Teagasc and establish an Environment Research Centre. The Centre's mission will be to provide research based understanding of the fundamental chemical, biological, pedological, engineering and socio-economic needs of the agri-food industry (including the artisan food sector) allied to the sustainable rural economy and the protection of Ireland's rural environment.
- We will continue funding for the Farm Institutional Research Measure.

21. Revolutionise Animal Health and Welfare

The B.S.E. and Foot and Mouth crises have ensured the connection between animal welfare and food safety is foremost in all of our minds. The Labour Party is committed to the highest possible evidence-based standards in its animal health and welfare policies. Where gaps in the setting of standards in animal welfare exist, for instance because the scientific evidence is absent, the Labour Party will seek to develop that evidence and where it exists, such standards will be improved accordingly.

- The Labour Party will enact a Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill to ban fur farming of mink, fox and rabbits and will pay compensation to producers to exit the trade.
- We also plan to enact legislation to provide courts with new powers to protect neglected or abused animals, even before a conviction has been achieved.
- The responsibility for all animal health and welfare issues, including animal experimentation and enforcement of the Dog Control Acts should be vested in a single Minister. We consider it unacceptable that no Minister currently accepts responsibility for animal welfare issues affecting non-canine pets.
- The Labour Party wants to make it unlawful to sell or buy any product from the international trade in cat and dog fur.
- The Labour Party will audit the management of animal control measures carried out by local authorities.
- We also favour lengthening the minimum allowable time between capture and destruction of stray animals.

Policy Focus: How to Grow Irish Organic Agriculture

Between 1996 and 2003 the number of supported organic and in conversion farms in European countries grew by the following approximate percentages: Belgium – 200%; The Czech Republic - 400%; Denmark – 300%; Germany – 120%; Estonia - 700%; Greece – 800%; Spain – 700%; France – 300%; Italy – 110%; Latvia – 1000%; Lithuania – 1000%; Luxembourg - 300%; Hungary – 1000%; Netherlands – 200%; Poland – 800%; Portugal – 500%; Slovenia – 1500%; Slovakia – 260%; U.K. – 700%.

Ireland's equivalent record was 30%⁵.

The Labour Party will implement the following policies to ensure Ireland's organic agriculture and processing industries are nurtured.

- Establish an Organic Advice, Research and Marketing Service (O.A.R.M.S.);
- Task O.A.R.M.S. with the establishment of a "Kerrygold"-like brand for the marketing of Irish organic produce throughout the world;
- Carry out commercial appraisal of the organic food sector;
- Establish a full range of courses for the organic sector;
- Support the development of organic-related publications in print and on the web;
- Appoint a dedicated O.A.R.M.S. adviser with first-hand experience of local organic production in each county and supported by a team of trained specialists;
- Develop advisory and information services to support organic horticulture;
- Inform consumers about the reasons for the cost of organic food;
- Carry out wide ranging research into the nutritional and environmental benefits of organic food;
- Establish virtual and real organic-related information-sharing discussion groups;
- Set up a quality assurance scheme for organic food;
- Establish the feasibility of developing new distribution channels for small-scale producers to link to central distribution;
- Focus on the promotion of Irish organic food products;
- Develop export markets for Irish organic food;
- Incentivise the main farming organisations to give due priority to organic farming and assist in its marketing;
- Increase financial supports under REPS;
- Fund research, training and advisory partnerships for organic agriculture and horticulture;
- Implement the Western Development Commission's Action Plan for the implementation of its Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West;
- Equalise possibilities available to organic and non-organic farmers for receiving investment support;
- Establish a dedicated Organic Conversion Information Service, as a division within O.A.R.M.S., to provide free expert advice from an adviser experienced in organic production and marketing who will be able to provide impartial advice relevant to farmers in every part of Ireland who are willing to consider conversion. This service will also provide one free half-day initial on-farm consultations and report. It will follow this up with

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/agrista/2005/table_en/42493.pdf

a free full-day on-farm visit to farmers who are willing to consider converting their holdings. And it will provide an expanded report on the particular measures necessary to convert their farm and the financial assistance available for doing so. O.A.R.M.S. will be established in partnership with the three Irish organic certification bodies, and will be funded by the next Labour government;

- Increase grants to existing farmers or a trained horticulturalists, to assist them in establishing an organic farming or growing enterprise;
- Extend the current rental income tax exemption for land leased out on a long-term basis to include an exemption for rental of small plots of land on a short-term basis by trained farmers and horticulturalists of any age, in order to help smaller organic producers;
- Encourage the development of appropriate distribution systems, particularly those relating to local distribution and public procurement initiatives for locally produced organic and non-organic food;
- Provide, through O.A.R.M.S., financial support for organic producer marketing groups in the context of agreed strategic market development plans and the relevant state aid guidelines for the sector;
- Ensure O.A.R.M.S. organises courses in organic livestock management;
- Initiate, through O.A.R.M.S. and in partnership with the three Irish organic certification bodies, a targeted public education campaign on organic food and farming;
- Execute a new census of organic production in Ireland;
- Use O.A.R.M.S. to build on the currently sporadic and piecemeal extent of knowledge concerning the potential of each organic form of agriculture in every area of Ireland. Labour in Government will intensify the collection of the relevant information and economic data and cause O.A.R.M.S. to prepare harmonised methods for collecting additional official statistics on organic farming, organic food and its markets.