



**PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT**  
**SOCIALISM FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

## **AGRICULTURAL POLICY 2018**



## Summary

- **Reduce concentration of farm assets and control of big agri-producers.**
- **Promote the establishment of small local processors.**
- **Promote cooperative models of farm ownership.**
- **Reduce the dependency of small and medium sized farmers on the CAP.**
- **Impose a profit levy on the major producers and supermarkets**
- **Intervene to make prices less volatile.**
- **Incentivise the development of organic farming for local consumption and direct farmer markets.**
- **Incentivise an increase in tillage farming from 10% -40%.**
- **Look at the viability of creating a domestic hemp industry.**
- **Prioritise organic fertilisers – turn slurry into biofuel.**
- **Reform the Glás Scheme**
- **Reform the Commonage Rules**
- **Support for farmers affected by Brexit.**
- **Complete opposition to CITA, TTIP and other forms of neoliberal free trade agreements.**

## Reduce Control of Agri-Business

Big business dominates the agri sector. In meat processing for example, three companies – ABP, Dawn Meats and Kepak - dominate the industry. The big processors also use the Quality Assurance programme to stifle competition. This means ordinary farmers get roughly 15-20% less than their counterparts in Britain.

PBP wants to re-balance the sector in favour of small and medium sized ventures. To do this, we would impose a special levy on the profits of the major processors, the major supermarkets and the biggest farmers. This would bring in €1.3 billion annually. In order to gather this levy, the processors will have to make their full financial accounts publically available – even if they have become unlimited firms.

Supermarket's should also be legally obliged to declare profits made in Ireland and produce full Irish accounts. This, however, can only be regarded as a first move. The big processors are motivated entirely by the search for profit rather than the nutritional value of food. They will need to be taken into public ownership so that 1) fair prices can be guaranteed for primary producers and 2) there can be an orderly re-orientation away from a focus on beef production.

## Alternative Models of Agriculture

Employment in the farming sector is declining by around 8,000 per year. Between 1991 and 2015, the number of farms fell from 170,000 to 140,000. The age of the average farmer



is 57 and only 7% of farmers are under the age of 35. The current model of agriculture is gradually eradicating small and medium sized ventures. To combat this, People Before Profit advocate,

- Promote the establishment of small local processors. A significant proportion of Irish agricultural products are processed by the major food groups or exported directly out of the country. PBP would look at the viability of small local processors to service co-operatives in Ireland.
- Co-operative farming – One way to make rural life more sustainable is to promote co-operative farms. These would be owned by the farmers who run them with credit provided by the state. This would help to generate efficiencies of scale, promote employment and enhance rural life more generally. Currently an individual can claim €2,500 for a start-up enterprise. This should be increased to make cooperative ventures viable.

## Make Farming Viable

- **Reform CAP to make payments more equal.** In the EU-15, 80% of CAP payments go to the wealthiest 20% of farmers. Although the average payment in Ireland is only around €3,000 per annum, the biggest farmers get many multiples of this. In 2015, for example, Glydee Farms (majority owned by Larry Goodman, the main shareholder of ABP) received €238,000, while the Queally brothers, John and Peter, owners of Dawn Meats, received €259,000. Our policy would be to bring all farmers up to an average payment of €10,000 per annum. We would also cap direct payments - perhaps around €30,000 annually.
- **Redistribute Profit Levy.** To bring farmers to an average of €10,000 we will need to redistribute part of the €1.3 billion from the profit levy to the 130,000 farmers in Ireland. Reorganising CAP and the new profit levy will make farming more viable for many small and medium enterprises. Within the broad redistributive framework we will also incentivise nutritious food grown for the domestic market and environmental initiatives.
- **Reduce Price Volatility.** The prices received by Irish farmers vary considerably. Changes in global supply and demand have major impacts on the viability of small and medium sized ventures. People Before Profit would aim to smooth out this price volatility without incentivising overproduction. The aim would be to rationalise domestic supply and give farmers a more predictable long term pricing structure.

## Shift the Focus Away from Beef and Dairy

- **Incentivise the development of organic farming for local consumption and direct farmer markets.** Organic farming is a small (1776 units) but growing sector. To date it has not been given the right incentives, however. Our policy would look to incentivise farmers through direct grants to move into organic farming. We want to break the control that large retail chains have on food production and create a network of farmer's markets in free, serviced public spaces.



- **Incentivise an increase in tillage farming from 10% -40%.** At present Irish farmers only supply 1% of all fruit and vegetables consumed in the country. A major drive to service the domestic market would be good for the environment and provide new sources of income for many farmers in rural Ireland.
- **Look at the viability of creating a domestic hemp industry.** Hemp is purported to be an excellent building material. Added to this, it can sequester major amounts of CO2 making it a potentially useful crop to grow for environmental purposes. PBP would invest in this industry to reduce our carbon footprint and to tackle the corporate power of companies like Cement Roadstone.
- **Major increase in afforestation.** Our forests are already a huge economic asset for the state, generating thousands of jobs and huge revenue. If we invested in them and managed them properly, as is done elsewhere in Europe, they have the potential to create literally tens of thousands of new jobs. Instead the government have been selling off the harvesting rights to private companies. Afforestation is also an enormously important source of carbon sequestration, but we need to diversify the forestry model from an overreliance on a narrow range of species.

## Protecting the Natural Environment

- **Prioritise Organic Fertilisers.** The intensive use of soil in Ireland coupled with the use of phosphates and nitrates has degraded the top soil. A recent report by the UN stated that Irish agriculture will become unviable in 60 years if the current methods are continued. To tackle soil and nutrient depletion, People Before Profit would task local authorities with developing large-scale composting systems, or biodigesters, which would produce organic fertiliser and biogas – methane. If these processes were implemented we could start to reduce the need for fossil transport and machinery fuel in cities and on farms, and return nutrients to the land.
- **Turn Slurry into Biofuel.** The flip side of nutrient depletion on the soil is an overabundance in our seas. Phosphates and slurry run off land into the seas creating an overabundance of algae and havoc for aqua life cycles. To tackle this problem, PBP would invest in R&D to turn slurry into biofuel. This would reduce our carbon footprint and reduced the damaging run off into our seas. The industrial production of Algae is also a problem. PBP would ban industrial-mechanical algae production in favour of more environmentally friendly methods.

## Reform of Glás Scheme & Commonage Rules

- **Charter of Farmers Rights.** This should re-balance the sector in favour of small and medium sized farmers.
- **Independent Appeals Board.** An Independent Appeals Board to be established in relation to payments lost under inspection without a control report.



- **Equity in Glás Scheme.** Farmers with lands in marginal areas (i.e. bordering designated areas) or with natural constraints should automatically qualify for the Glás scheme. Highly intensive farms on good land should not get access to Glás.
- **Tackle the inequities in pay rates for Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme.** Areas of Natural Constraint should be allocated €25 million for the Sheep Welfare Scheme, targeted at hill type land.
- **Rationalise herd numbers.** The restrictions on min/max stocking numbers should be revised to encourage farmers with stable stocks to enter Glás, thus preventing over grazing when other farmers increase their stocks to compensate for the rules on minimum stock levels. Once this is done it should be compulsory for all farmers in commonage lands to join Glás.
- **Commonage Management Plans.** The Commonage Management Plans required for Glás should take into account the stock numbers of non-Glás farmers.
- **Dept. of Agriculture should take responsibility for commonage plans.** Currently farmers joining Glás need to employ 2 planners at €120/ha - one for the individual plan and the other for the overall plan for the entire commonage. This should be covered by the Department.
- **Collective responsibility should be abolished.** Currently if one farmer on the commonage breaches the environmental regulations the whole collective is penalised. This should be abolished as it is unfair on those farmers abiding by the rules. Also Glás farmers could be held responsible for acts carried out by non-Glás farmers on the same commonage.
- **Review of Birds and Habitats Directive.** Commonage Framework Plans developed for compliance with the Birds & Habitats Directive need to be reviewed with the aim of reinstating all lands made ineligible and reimbursing those affected by loss of payments.

## The International Environment

- **Support for farmers affected by Brexit.** Currently 40% of our farming exports end up in the UK market. To guard against the negative impacts of Brexit, PBP need to think about redirecting farmers way from exports of livestock to the UK and into locally produce and green initiatives
- **Complete opposition to CITA, TTIP and other forms of neoliberal free trade agreements.** PBP recognises the dangers of CITA and TTIP for farmers, particularly as many of the danger flow from the higher levels of food safety standards that apply in the EU.



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