

MINISTER SARGENT LAUNCHES ACTION PLAN TO INCREASE ORGANIC PRODUCTION IN IRELAND

30 April, 2008

Speaking at the launch of the Organic Farming Action Plan 2008-2012, Mr Trevor Sargent TD, Minister for Food and Horticulture at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that he was committed to achieving the very necessary development of the organic sector in Ireland. The Minister said *"the target of 5% of land area in organic production by 2012 set down in the Programme for Government is indeed a challenging target but one that I believe is achievable"*.

Minister Sargent said that *"the Action Plan was an important development in working towards achievement of the Government's target"*, and he thanked the members of the National Steering Group for their input into the document.

The Action Plan has four main objectives; increase production in line with market trends, increase the knowledge base, develop the organic market at home and abroad, and encourage the development of public procurement opportunities for organic products. There are over 60 actions identified in the Plan.

The Minister acknowledged the progress made to date since the establishment of the National Steering Group for the Organic Sector. Since 2005 there has been an increase of over 17% in the area under organic production. The financial incentives to go organic are attractive. The Organic Farming Scheme provides a payment of over EUR21,500 per year in the two-year conversion period to a farmer with 55 hectares who is also in REPS; the annual payment for this farmer when fully organic is almost EUR16,000. It would be helpful if farmers already in REPS could take up the new Organic Farming Scheme without having to switch to REPS 4. This problem has been raised with the Commission and I, and my officials, are doing everything we can to progress the matter.

"The National Steering Group will have a crucial role in guiding and overseeing progress on the Action Plan," Minister Sargent said. *"I intend to bring together key industry leaders, opinion makers, agricultural academics with some of Ireland's top organic farmers and growers to better appreciate what organic farming is and to dispel any misconceptions that may exist"*, the Minister added. Continuing, Minister Sargent highlighted some clear benefits of organic farming. It produces more food for each unit of energy input; it facilitates a greater presence of soil microbes and root fungi which ensure better tolerance of very wet and dry soil conditions, while also increasing the retention of carbon in the soil, which is important in the context of climate change; the practice of organic farming increases the availability of essential plant nutrients.

"The Programme for Government 5% target is indeed challenging. I am confident that, with the full support of all stakeholders, implementation of the actions outlined in the Plan will greatly assist in achieving the target", Minister Sargent concluded.

What is Sustainable Agriculture?

Some terms defy definition. “*Sustainable agriculture*” has become one of them. In such a quickly changing world, can anything be sustainable? What do we want to sustain? How can we implement such a nebulous goal? Is it too late? With the contradictions and questions have come a hard look at our present food production system and thoughtful evaluations of its future. If nothing else, the term “*sustainable agriculture*” has provided “*talking points*,” a sense of direction, and an urgency, that has sparked much excitement and innovative thinking in the agricultural world.

The word “sustain,” from the Latin *sustinere* (*sus-*, from below and *tenere*, to hold), to keep in existence or maintain, implies long-term support or permanence. As it pertains to agriculture, sustainable describes farming systems that are “*capable of maintaining their productivity and usefulness to society indefinitely. Such systems... must be resource-conserving, socially supportive, commercially competitive, and environmentally sound.*” [John Ikerd, as quoted by Richard Duesterhaus in “Sustainability's Promise,” *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* (Jan.-Feb. 1990) 45(1): p.4. NAL Call # 56.8 J822]

Sustainable agriculture was addressed by Congress in the 1990 Farm Bill [Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (FACTA), Public Law 101-624, Title XVI, Subtitle A, Section 1603 (Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1990) NAL Call # KF1692.A31 1990]. Under that law, “*the term sustainable agriculture means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:*

- * *satisfy human food and fiber needs*
- * *enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends*
- * *make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls*
- * *sustain the economic viability of farm operations*
- * *enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.*”

As more parties sign on to the sustainable agriculture effort, perceptions about what defines sustainability in agriculture have multiplied.

AFSIC's publication, **Sustainable Agriculture: Definitions and Terms**,

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/terms/srb9902.shtml>

strives to illustrate the commonality and some of the controversy that defining such a goal entails, and it includes brief descriptions of the methodologies and practices currently associated with sustainable agriculture.

“*In popular literature, sustainable agriculture generally is presented as a new phenomenon. Wes Jackson is credited with the first publication of the expression in his *New Roots for Agriculture* (1980), and the term didn't emerge in popular usage until the late 1980s.*” (“*A Brief History of Sustainable Agriculture*,” by Fred Kirschenmann, in *The Networker*, vol. 9, no. 2, March 2004.) However, the idea of agricultural sustainability – stewarding the food production resource base for use of future generations – is not a new phenomenon.

Learn more:

Sustainable Agriculture: Definitions and Terms, by Mary V. Gold. AFSIC, 2007

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/terms/srb9902.shtml>

Related Terms (Glossary)

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/terms/srb9902terms.shtml>

For Further Reading (Bibliography)

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/terms/srb9902bib.shtml>

For Further Reading, Supplement 2000-2007(Bibliography)

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/terms/srb9902bib07.shtml>

Tracing the Evolution of Organic/Sustainable Agriculture: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography, by Mary V. Gold and Jane Potter Gates. AFSIC, 2007

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/tracing/tracing.shtml>

Exploring Sustainability in Agriculture, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), 2002

<http://www.sare.org/publications/exploring.htm>

Sustainable Agriculture, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_agriculture

What is Sustainable Agriculture? ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

<http://attra.ncat.org/fundamental.html>

Compiled by:

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Alternative Farming Systems Information Center

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/agnic/susag.shtml>

Organic Agriculture Information Access

The Organic Agriculture Information Access is an electronic collection of historic United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) publications related to organic agriculture. In this collection, there are almost 200 documents published before 1942 (before synthetic chemicals became widely used) that contain state-of-the-art information and data that is still very pertinent for today's agriculture. Access to this data is intended to provide growers with new ideas on crop production without chemicals, as well as help researchers conserve scarce resources by avoiding unintended duplication. This collection is provided by the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC), a part of the National Agricultural Library

(NAL), with funding from the USDA National Organic Program and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. This effort is part of the AFSIC "*Organic Roots*" project.

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/n/nal/>

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC)

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/>

Rural Information Center (US)

http://ric.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=5&tax_level=1

Impact of agriculture

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland#cite_note-land_cover-9

The long history of agricultural production coupled with modern intensive agricultural methods (such as pesticide and fertiliser use) has placed pressure on biodiversity in Ireland. Agriculture is the main factor determining current land use patterns in Ireland, leaving limited land to preserve natural habitats (also forestry and urban development to a lesser extent), in particular for larger wild mammals with greater territorial requirements. With no top predator in Ireland, populations of animals that cannot be controlled by smaller predators (such as the fox) are controlled by annual culling, i.e. semi-wild populations of deer. A land of green fields for crop cultivation and cattle rearing limits the space available for the establishment of native wild species. Hedgerows, however, traditionally used for maintaining and demarcating land boundaries, act as a refuge for native wild flora. Their ecosystems stretch across the countryside and act as a network of connections to preserve remnants of the ecosystem that once covered the island.

Pollution from agricultural activities is one of the principal sources of environmental damage. "*Runoff*" of contaminants into streams, rivers and lakes impact the natural fresh-water ecosystems. Subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy which supported these agricultural practices and contributed to land-use distortions are undergoing reforms. The CAP still subsidises some potentially destructive agricultural practices, however, the recent reforms have gradually decoupled subsidies from production levels and introduced environmental and other requirements.

Forest covers about 10% of the country, with most designated for commercial production. Forested areas typically consist of monoculture plantations of non-native species which may result in habitats that are not suitable for supporting a broad range of native species of invertebrates. Remnants of native forest can be found scattered around the country, in particular in the Killarney National Park. Natural areas require fencing to prevent over-grazing by deer and sheep that roam over uncultivated areas. This is one of the main factors preventing the natural regeneration of forests across many regions of the country.

source: **Wikidpedia**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland#cite_note-land_cover-9

Land cover and land use - Environmental Protection Agency

We continue to monitor changes in land cover and to assess the effects of these changes on the environment through our participation in the Corine Land Cover project. Change in land cover and land use is the most noticeable and far-reaching of all environmental changes. Unsustainable land use change can impact human health, have a harmful effect on water, air, soil and biodiversity and conflict with land use planning.

Corine stands for "**Coordination of Information on the Environment**". This EU initiative was set up in 1985. A 1990 Corine database of land cover for Ireland was updated in 2000. According to Corine 2000 findings, Ireland's land cover can be classed as follows:

- * **Agricultural areas - 66.8%**
- * **Wetlands -17.1%**
- * **Forest and semi-natural areas - 11.9%**
- * **Water - 2.3%**
- * **Artificial surfaces - 1.9%.**

During the ten years from 1990 to 2000, artificial surfaces increased in area from 1.5% cent to 1.9% of total land cover, caused by urban sprawl and developments in infrastructure and sports facilities.

Despite this increase, Ireland's land use remains predominantly agricultural. Besides its traditional agricultural value, the countryside is increasingly important for forestry, recreation and tourism. Acting as a foil to escalating urbanisation pressures, it serves as a "*virtual lung*" to the nation

Source - **Environmental Protection Agency**

<http://www.epa.ie/whatwedo/assessment/land/>

Corine Land Cover Mapping

<http://www.epa.ie/whatwedo/assessment/land/corine/>

CIA - The World Fact Book - Ireland

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ei.html>

Common Agricultural Policy

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Agricultural_Policy

CAP reform - a long-term perspective for sustainable agriculture

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/capreform/index_en.htm

Sustainable Development Research in Agriculture: Gaps and Opportunities for Ireland - Trinity Economic Paper No. 13, 2003 - Alan Matthews

http://www.tcd.ie/Economics/TEP/2003_papers/TEPNo13AM23.pdf

Sustainable Agriculture - Northern Ireland Assembly research paper 38/01

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/io/research/3801.pdf>

GM Free Ireland

<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/index.php>

aughty.org welcomes suggestions for links and reading material

mail to: info@aughty.org