

MINISTER SMITH LAUNCHES €8 MILLION GRANT AID SCHEMES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIC SECTOR

From today, organic farmers can once again apply for generous grants under a new On-Farm Grant Aid Scheme for the Development of the Organic Sector announced by Mr Brendan Smith T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food. Grants are also available for organic operators under a new Off-farm Grant Aid Scheme.

Before the current Organic Grant Scheme closed at the end of last year, the Department of Agriculture and Food received a substantial increase on the number of applications compared to 2005. "This is an obvious indication of the growing interest in the sector," Minister Smith said. The On-farm Scheme provides grant aid of 40% of the cost up to a maximum grant of EUR60,000. For off-farm investments, the maximum grant is EUR500,000.

"I am committed to developing the organic sector as an opportunity for Irish farmers and the Irish agri-food sector in general. These Schemes are important initiatives in this development and their launch is timely," he added. "I am conscious that there are a number of farmers and processors who are ready to make significant investments as soon as the new grants are available."

The Schemes, funded under the National Development Plan 2007-2013, are there to help existing organic farmers and processors meet the growing demand for organic food, both in Ireland and abroad, but that is not their only purpose. These Schemes have been designed with a view to expanding the number of participants in the organic sector. "I hope that those who are considering the organic option will examine the possibilities that these Schemes have to offer," Minister Smith concluded.

A further boost for the Irish organic sector will come shortly with the launch of a new stand-alone scheme for support payments to organic farmers, which is currently with the European Commission for approval as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. Previously, such payments to organic farmers have been available only through participation in the Rural Environment Protection Scheme, REPS. The new measure is designed to encourage small-scale horticulture operators to convert to organic production, and intensive tillage farmers to consider turning over part of their holding to organic cereals. There are shortages of both organic cereals and vegetables on the Irish market but the obligation to participate fully in REPS has deterred some producers in those areas from switching to organics.

Copies of the new Grant Schemes, together with application forms, are available from the Organic Unit, Department of Agriculture and food, which is based at Johnstown Castle in Wexford. They will also be available on the Department's organics page at

<<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/organics>>

12 June, 2007