

President's Speech for Rally 2015 Opening Ceremony

Minister Coveney, distinguished guests, sponsors, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the rebel County for Macra na Feirme's Annual Conference. A weekend that guarantees serious debate, competitive competitions, excellent farm tours, an inspiring Agricultural conference and of course a hectic social scene.

The 2015 Annual Conference or Rally as we affectionately call it brings together members from all over the country for this very special weekend which is the highlight of the year for many and which will leave happy memories with us for years to come.

Macra na Feirme continues to actively campaign and work on finding solutions to problems that young farmers and young rural people in Ireland face today. Whether that is working with departmental groups, dealing with banks, involved in policy making or providing opportunities for young farmers to expand their skills and knowledge through involvement in our Young Farmer Development Groups or training programmes, we continue to push the boundaries and look for positive opportunities that young farmers may avail of.

Ladies and gentlemen this is a great time to be a young farmer entering the industry or if you are established and trying to grow and drive forward your business. Huge opportunities exist and the future is bright for young, trained, energetic, technical proficient young farmers.

Recent events and announcement have made the opportunities that exist real for young farmers. Earlier in the year the shackles of dairy quotas have been removed,

Minister Coveney and the government have published and set out their road map for future food production in the country up to 2025 in the Food wise report and we are now witnessing the roll out of a new CAP package which for the first time contains mandatory young farmer measures including a Top up on the Basic payment and a National Reserve as part of Pillar 1 and targeted Young Farmer measures in TAMS as part of Pillar 2.

At the same time Macra na Feirme roles out programmes in land mobility through our land mobility service and an informal education and skills programme through our newly launched Young Farmer skillnet training programme.

As Macra an Feirme President I'm very proud of the role our organisation played in lobbying for the CAP mandatory young farmer measures here in Ireland and at an EU level through our involvement in CEJA the European Young Farmer body. I would like to thank and acknowledge the support Minister Coveney has shown to young farmer by ensuring the measures were mandatory and made their way into the final CAP package.

In spite of the opportunities that exist it would be remiss of me not to highlight briefly some of the challenges that still remain for young farmer within our industry. Macra na Feirme as the only young farmer representative body in this country has a huge part to place in working with young farmer and members to identify the issue, speak about solutions and finding ways to address them and then lobby policy makers for change to improve our lot.

Incomes and commodity price remain an issue this year particularly in the dairy, tillage and pig sectors. Income

volatility remains a huge challenge for the organisation. I am calling on the Minister to look at the state aid rules and put in place an income volatility bond where farmers in a year of strong commodity prices can invest money in this bond and draw it down in a year of harder economic times and that the tax liability would be taken care of on drawdown.

As I travel the country meeting young farmers I hear about the issues on the ground that challenge young farmers and the common denominators are access to land, credit and education.

The land mobility service is a service which sums up what our organisation can constructively contribute pro-actively to the industry. Young farmers first identified land mobility as an issue affecting them. We commissioned a Land Mobility and Succession report to give us the evidence. It identified that 48% of farmers had no identified successor. A service was then devised rolled out. This service means land is no longer a barrier for a career in farming and it also is getting more young blood into the industry through collaborative arrangements.

I'm delighted to tell you that the service is growing steadily with over 300 clients. I would like to acknowledge the financial contribution of FBD Trust and also Dairygold in this area as well as Aurivo and Glanbia coops to the service. As the service grows we have recruited a new Land Mobility Facilitator based in the Northwest of the country. This appointment has been made possible by funding from the Dept of Agriculture so I would like to thank you Minister on behalf of the organisation for the financial support we have received from your department.

You are a huge supporter of land mobility and collaborative farming and measures in last year's budget to incentive long term leases have been very important to encourage farmers to move away from conacre agreements to more long term arrangements and the newly announced family partnership proposal is also very welcomed. The awareness of our service is increasing every week and I would like to mention how the new Irish Farmers Journal land mobility page has also helped raise the profile of the service.

The land mobility service means that access to land is no longer a barrier to farming for young farmers but access to finance to pay for this land and develop our businesses is. We don't have the security in most cases to draw don't loans as we are starting out so I call tonight on the Minister to look at the funds available from the European Investment Bank and how this money at lower interest rates can be funnelled into young farmer hands here in Ireland.

I thank you Minister for meeting us during the week on a number of young farmer issues including the issues with new entrant parent partnerships or older young farmers, issues in TAMS 11, Nominations for Knowledge Transfer groups and Replenishment of the National reserve and I call on you Minister to find workable solutions on all the issues highlighted.

I believe, due to a combination of factors including expanding international demand for food, the ambitions of foodwise 2025, CAP reform and milk quota abolition - that it certainly is a time of opportunity.

We, as the new generation of farmers to the industry, will have to be technically proficient in our approach to the running of our businesses focusing on the drivers of profitability, utilisation of grass, soil fertility, improvements in breeding, and adopting sustainable practices like the principles of the Bord Bia Origin Green initiative. This excellent initiative make Ireland a world leader in food production and highlights the sustainability of the Irish Agri industry.

Young farmers would like to see future targeted schemes designed around the key drivers of profitability but especially grass utilisation and covering farm roadways and grazing infrastructure which allows utilisation to happen.

As a beef farmer and as President I'm delighted to represent young farmers on the beef forum which deals with the challenges within the beef sector but also I attended the first meeting of the Dairy Forum a few weeks ago. We welcome the establishment of this forum. Young Dairy farmers have been affected most by the fall in milk price. They have not had the time to build up reserves like older farmer have had to see them through hardened economic times and tonight I reiterate the call I made at the dairy forum for a top up for young dairy farmer on top of the standard payment in the EU package that will be distributed shortly.

Young farmers also would like if some this EU fund was put towards measures like subsidising grass measuring equipment for young farmers to help grass utilisation, This would help the strategic development of the dairy industry as price

volatility will remain and looks like an issue we collectively will have to find ways of dealing with as an industry.

We actively encourage young farmers to engage with formal education and continually develop themselves through engagement in continued professional development. We provide this continued professional development through our Macra na Feirme Young Farmer Skillnet programme. This focuses on three main areas: business, technical and personal.

Tonight I call on the Minister to ensure that sufficient resources are provided toward our formal agriculture education system to ensure that young farmers can get their agriculture education and that this education is to the highest standard and equips young farmers with the knowledge and skills they require. As young farmers, we are business men and women and successful businesses require long-term planning, both financial and business.

Minister, ladies and gentlemen the theme of this weekend's conference is "Inspiration for this generation taking the next step".

The reason we picked this theme is to emphasise to our young members who are embarking on their careers that their time has arrived and it is now that they need to seize the opportunities that life is presenting them and take the next steps in the farming careers like the young farmer panellists tomorrow have. The aim of the conference is to inspire young farmer to progress their careers and go away and take the next steps.

We will also address the issues affecting young farmer which I spoke about earlier and highlight them to our special guest

Commissioner Hogan who we are honoured to have attending our conference tomorrow in Macroom.

This weekend is set to be a fantastic weekend. As I already mentioned the theme for tomorrow's conference is 'Inspiration for this generation - taking the next step' and there is a superb line up of farm walks and speakers organised and I'm sure it will stimulate a lot of debate amongst you all. I would like to thank the host farmers and the young farm guest speakers for volunteering their time but also their vast knowledge and experiences but also highlighting the steps they have taken in their farming career.

Ladies and Gentlemen on Sunday afternoon we are holding a Mental Health Seminar titled - 'Lets Talk'. This seminar will focus on a very important issue which affects 1 in 4 people in Rural Ireland. We will be joined by Minister Lynch and also speakers from See Change and Macra na Feirme. At the end of the seminar those in attendance will get an opportunity to think about any negative thoughts that they may have and those thoughts will be attached to balloons which will be released into the air outside the hotel entrance.

Our members and organisation promotes positive mental health through involvement in our 6 key programme areas and in recent months members have received Safe TALK suicide awareness training and also at this year's ploughing championships we released our positive mental health calendar which is available this weekend for anyone who has not picked up a copy yet. This calendar raises funds for Macra na Feirme to allow us to continue

to roll out a service across the country. For the calendar we have partnered with St Patricks walk in my shoes campaign to raise awareness of this very important campaign and the service which St Patricks provide.

Events like this weekend need a significant level of sponsorship and I am delighted that Co Op superstores are this year's main sponsor. I would like to extend a warm welcome to the sponsor representatives from Dairygold Co Op superstores. Dairygold have always been great friends and supporters of Macra and I would like to thank them for their continued support and in particular for their support to Rally 2015.

And finally this weekend could not take place without a host county and I would like to thank and congratulate Muskerry Macra the regional Chair Barry O'Regan but especially their rally committee and its chairperson Margaret Galvin who have done a wonderful job in putting together an excellent programme of activities over the weekend for all concerned.

I would like to wish everyone taking part in any of the competitions over the weekend including the Irish farmers Journal Know Your Agriculture Quiz, Finalist in Club of the year 2015, Entrants in the Best New Member competition and competitors in the Bord Bia Beef and Sheep Stockjudging on Sunday. The very best of luck to you all or if you are just here for the social element well then that's ok too!

Whatever the reason you are here enjoy yourself, make friends and create lasting memories. Thank you!