

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and fellow Macra na Feirme members.

I'm delighted to welcome you all here today to Loughrea in County Galway for our national AGM. On the 7th of April I was honoured to have been elected the 35th President of our wonderful and vibrant organisation. I look forward to serving you the members over the next two years and following in the footsteps of previous presidents who have represented our organisation with distinction.

Over the past two years, I have worked closely as Northwest Vice President with our outgoing president Kieran O'Dowd. Well done on your presidency Kieran. You have been an excellent ambassador for our organisation and will be remembered for a number of notable achievements including The Land Mobility Service - an initiative which is changing the structure of Irish agriculture, as well as the introduction of young farmer measures in the new CAP proposals to name but a few. Kieran has travelled Ireland and indeed the world representing Macra na Feirme. I look forward to continuing to work with you Kieran on national council for the next two years.

I would also like to acknowledge Alan Jagoe's presence here today. As Kieran's predecessor, Alan will finish serving on our National Council today. I have no doubt Alan has a bright future ahead of him in farming or national politics. I wish him the very best of luck in the future.

Today, I become the second Roscommon man to proudly wear this chain of office following on from Laurence Fallon who was our 22nd president from 1989 to 1991. I am also the 5th person from the Northwest region to hold the position of President. I assure you that over the next two years I will do my utmost to represent all members equally regardless of their geographical location.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Arrabawn Co-op for their generous sponsorship of this year's AGM. Arrabawn and Macra na Feirme have a long tradition of working together and Arrabawn contribute significantly to the economy in this area and to the overall dairy industry.

A huge amount of effort and work goes into organising the National AGM. Thanks to Ger Harney and his diligent organising committee and to members of Galway Macra for making today's AGM a success. I hope you can stay for the Masquerade Ball which will take place later this evening.

Thanks to Edmond Connolly, Terry Cooke, Kate Markey and Aoife Helly for their presence here today and work involved in organising this year's AGM.

I thoroughly enjoyed the election campaign and relished the opportunity to travel around the country and meet members and listen to your concerns and ideas for the improvement of our organisation. I would like to acknowledge my fellow presidential candidates in the campaign Michelle O'Callaghan, Paddy Delaney and Eamon Cassells and I wish you all the best in your future Macra endeavours.

I would like to thank all the clubs who supported me and voted for me. It would not have been possible for me to have been successful in the election without the help and guidance of my committed campaign team, who travelled the country with me to support and encourage

me throughout. 33 people helped out on my campaign. My team was made up of members from my club, Castlereagh Macra na Feirme, Roscommon Macra na Feirme and from counties of Galway Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan across the Northwest region. Thank you for your help and support.

I would like to thank my family for all their support and encouragement down through the years. Thanks to my mother Mary, father Padraic and brothers Kevin and Brian who drove me everywhere and anywhere during the campaign.

We should be very proud of the history of our organisation and the contribution Macra na Feirme, and its members, has made in developing Irish Agriculture over the past 71 years. I was delighted to see the huge acknowledgement our organisation received in the establishment of the NFA which later became the IFA in the recently published IFA book "The Path To Power" which celebrates 60 years of the IFA. I will work with members and young farmers to continue to ensure Macra na Feirme contributes significantly and our work delivers for young farmers. The inclusion of the young farmer measures in the recent CAP Package shows the huge influence that we as Macra can have in shaping young farmer agricultural policy in Ireland and on a European level.

The Agri sector is thriving at the moment. It is an exciting time to be a young farmer. Milk quotas are gone, a new CAP is being rolled out. Profitability and efficiency at every level is very important. As president, I will encourage all young farmers to be efficient and technically aware to ensure the success of their businesses.

During my term as president, I intend to further improve the young farmer development groups so that we, as farmers in these groups, can identify issues directly affecting us including access to finance, access to land or succession and inheritance to name but a few. In turn, Macra and the young farmers affairs committee can then effectively lobby politicians and ensure that our voices are heard as young farmers in agricultural policy formation both nationally and on a European level as part of CEJA – the European council for young farmers.

Macra na Feirme needs to be an organisation that represents all young farmers equally regardless of the sector they're involved in. We need to encourage more women to enter the industry as they have a vital role to play in its development and growth.

The Young Farmer Top up and National Reserve, which Macra lobbied hard for, are very welcome elements as part of the New CAP. We have seen the success of the National Reserve scheme this year with a huge number of applications. The National Reserve is a very important mechanism for young farmers and new entrants to get access to a payment. I'm calling on the Minister to come up with a funding mechanism for the National Reserve over the next few years.

Macra was happy to see the inclusion in the Rural Development Programme of the TAM 2 grant for on farm investment with a 60% grant for young trained farmers. However, Macra had called for the 60% grant to be available for all young farmers regardless of start-up date. I now call on Minister Coveney to immediately open up this important scheme to ensure that farmers have an opportunity to commence work and to have facilities in place for the upcoming winter.

Our founding fathers' vision for Macra na Feirme was to help young farmers, improve their skills and provides informal education. I see a need to provide practical courses to young farmers which will increase their knowledge base and enhance their businesses. Recently, Macra was approved for Skillnets funding which means we will be able to roll out a suite of training courses to young farmers in our young farmer development groups to help them improve their farm businesses and encourage young farmers to run efficient operations. I envisage Macra's role in the provision of informal education through our activities and events with Teagasc maintaining the provision of formal education.

I call on the Minister Simon Coveney to prioritise the adequate resourcing of Teagasc to ensure agricultural education standards are maintained and enhanced so that young farmers are equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver on the targets which will be set out in the Agri Strategy 2025.

I will work with all stakeholders to strengthen and extend the land mobility service. I want to acknowledge the contribution of FBD Trust as well as Aurivo, Dairygold and Glanbia to this programme. We are now a year and a half into the Land Mobility pilot programme. For the Land Mobility service to grow and develop beyond the pilot programme and into the future as a standalone project we need resources and manpower. I call on Minister Coveney and the Department of Agriculture to support the Land Mobility Programme as it will play a significant role in allowing more young farmers access to land, into the industry, thus addressing the rising age demographic of the industry and playing their part in the ambitious growth targets set out by the government.

I will always encourage young farmers to lead the promotion of farm safety. As young farmers, we have to take personal responsibility for safety on our own farms and then lead the promotion of farm safety among our neighbours and friends and play our part in reducing the amount of farm deaths. Education at a young age remains the key to tackling farm safety. We have seen the roll out by the RSA of a primary schools programme for the promotion of road safety and a green flag programme for promotion of environmental awareness. Today I call on the Minister to fund a schools programme on farm safety.

Macra na Feirme has unlimited potential for development and I will work with you, the leaders in your counties and regions, and our staff, to formulate and implement a development plan for each county and region with all these plans feeding into an overall development plan for our organisation. This plan will include ambitious targets for an increase in membership and participation in all areas including cities, rural areas and colleges. I will encourage proficiency and professionalism in all our operations and activities.

We are in the unique position as a rural youth organisation to be able to lobby on issues affecting you, the members. In order to effectively lobby we need to adopt and develop rural youth policies based on your needs. I will hold a series of rural youth policy meetings similar to what we currently hold around the country for young farmers' affairs. These meetings will identify and aid the rural youth committee in the development of policies on issues affecting young people. We can then lobby and collaborate with politicians, department officials, five nation's organisations and Rural Youth Europe on these issues.

We have witnessed the decimation of rural Ireland in recent years with the closure of Post Offices and Garda Stations. Today, I call on the government to invest in rural Ireland to

ensure sustainable communities can be built up where people can live and work. I am calling on Minister Phelan to implement fully the Commission for Rural Development of Economic Area (CEDRA) Report.

Macra with its six key programme areas of activities offers a huge range of activities for our members. We play our part in the promotion of positive mental health by encouraging participation in our programme of activities. Later today, we will launch our See Change Green Ribbon campaign. Recently, we were delighted to receive a small amount of government funding to hold an event to promote positive mental health. I look forward to working with See Change and the Rural Youth Committee to organise this event in the next few weeks.

I have worked tirelessly as Vice President to serve you the members. I have been visible on the ground, identifying growth and development opportunities, encouraging participation and activity. I will continue this work on a national level, be visible on the ground, travelling to county executive meetings and events to meet members, listen to members concerns and ideas and to grow and develop our organisation.

I will endeavour to work with national council and executive to secure new sources of finance and fundraising to guarantee the financial viability of the organisation.

The contribution which you, the members, make to your communities on a daily basis cannot be underestimated. I will continue to promote this essential area of activity to ensure our organisation's positive reputation remains intact.

Competitions are the life blood of our organisation. I will encourage and help counties and regions to organise workshops, train presiding officers and make sure judges are briefed on the rules of our competitions. My objective is to work with you all to improve our competitions and enhance participation among members. I will encourage counties and regions to trial new competitions and ideas.

I will ensure that we continue to train and educate you the members through leadership training, lobbying training and media training to enrich members' personal development and ability to represent our organisation.

It is essential that we communicate successfully internally and externally focussing at all times on how to best sell our organisation to prospective members. I will promote Macra at every opportunity as a positive, attractive, progressive organisation by fostering relations with media including local and national newspapers, TV, radio and social media.

I look forward to working tirelessly and serving you the members as your president. I'm excited and passionate about the future of Macra na Feirme. In two years time when I come to the end of my term as president my vision is for Macra to be a stronger organisation, with increased membership and more activity. I will lead you in this growth and development but I require your help, feedback and support to make this a reality. This growth and development can be achieved by us all working together with a clear focus and plan for how we get there. To quote Henry Ford - whose father William came from Cork - who said "Coming together is a beginning, Keeping together is progress, working together is success".

I challenge you, as the leaders of our organisation, to show vision and be positive and encourage and empower others to show leadership for the betterment of Macra. Be brave, imaginative, forward thinking and ambitious. Our time is now. Thank you.

- Seán Finan