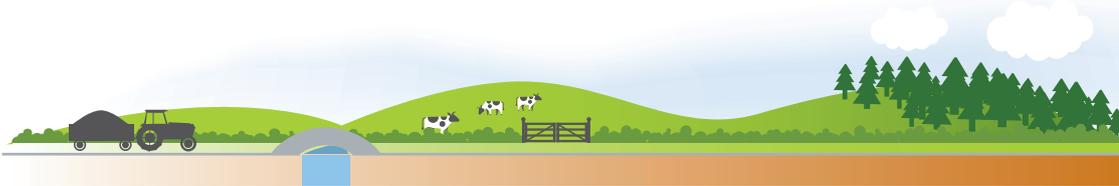


## DID YOU KNOW?

- The agri-food sector contributes over €24 billion per year to the economy
- Agriculture is the single largest contributor to Ireland's overall Greenhouse Gas emissions, accounting for over 30% of the total

The agriculture sector is in a period of transition, responding to increased demand and anticipating changes to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and to changes in milk quotas. The longer-term outlook for the development of the agriculture sector, as outlined in the sectoral strategy document Food Harvest 2020, is positive. The strategy states that Ireland must build on the strengths of its 'green' image and maintain its commitment to sound agricultural practices. It emphasises that Ireland needs to maximise the food production strengths that are key to the Irish agri-food and fisheries industry, while recognising that environmental sustainability is an essential requirement for food production in the future.



## FOOD HARVEST 2020

There is a wide appreciation that agricultural activity must be undertaken in an environmentally sustainable manner if it is to be economically viable. Food Harvest 2020 recognises that agriculture, fisheries and forestry activities can negatively impact on water, soil, air quality and on biodiversity. It stresses that meeting the ambitious growth targets for the agriculture sector will mean meeting these environmental challenges as well as reducing the carbon intensity of Irish agriculture. Food Harvest 2020 explicitly recognises that environmental sustainability is an essential requirement for the food production systems of the 21st century and that there are significant marketing and trading advantages as a result of Ireland's 'green' image.

Nonetheless, a key component of the strategy – that of increasing milk production by 50% with the removal of milk quotas – will pose serious challenges to achieving this environmental sustainability.

Agriculture is the single largest contributor to Ireland's overall Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, accounting for over 30% of the total. EPA emission projections are that emissions from the agriculture sector will increase by 12% by 2020 on current levels as the removal of milk quotas in 2015 and the impacts of expansion under the Food Harvest 2020 plan come into effect.

Similarly, in the area of water quality, Ireland has international obligations under the Water Framework Directive and the Nitrates Directive. However, agriculture is one of the main sources of nitrates in groundwaters and of nutrient enrichment of surface waters. Ensuring that Ireland's water resources are of good quality is vital for public health, the agri-food industry, and for inward investment. There is a particular challenge ahead to deliver the production increases planned under Food Harvest 2020 in a manner that allows Ireland to meet its international obligations in relation to water.

Agriculture is also the largest use of land in Ireland with two-thirds of land devoted to it. The majority of this land is under grass for pasture, silage or rough grazing. Forestry and food production are projected to be the main drivers of land use change over the coming decade. Careful management will be required to prevent adverse impacts on the environment arising from expanded or increased production as envisaged under Food Harvest 2020.

€24<sup>bn</sup>  
per year is contributed  
to the Irish economy  
by the Agri-food  
sector

30%  
Agriculture is the largest  
contributor to Ireland's  
greenhouse gas emissions

12%  
Agriculture emissions  
projected to increase  
by 2020 at  
current levels

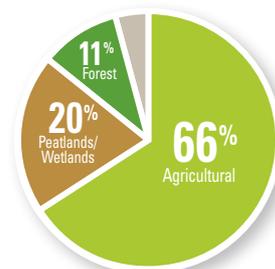


## GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM AGRICULTURE

Ireland's GHG emissions profile is unique among EU Member States, with the highest national proportion of agriculture emissions. This presents particular challenges for Ireland in meeting future GHG emission reduction targets. Ireland's production systems are already at the higher end of efficiencies in terms of efficiency per unit production. This highlights the challenges faced by the sector to identify further cost-effective measures to limit emissions.

For example, a recent EU study has shown that using a full life-cycle approach, Ireland's extensive grass-based systems produces the lowest GHG emissions in the EU for dairy animals and the fifth lowest for beef. In addition, Bord Bia has incorporated an assessment of sustainability on 32,000 beef farms into its Beef Quality Assurance Scheme, which led to accreditation by The Carbon Trust of a carbon footprint calculation for Irish beef production.

The agriculture sector's approach to increasing production while limiting the growth in emissions is based on a 'sustainable intensification' model. This will include establishing farming practices and production methods that reflect the increasing concern for maximising efficiency and limiting emissions. While there are clear benefits to be derived from, for example, optimising nutrient management and livestock management, such an approach is unlikely to deliver the deep emission reductions that are required to reduce overall national emissions.



## RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

The EPA's National Waste Prevention Programme supports the principles of a sustainable approach to agriculture, as set out in Food Harvest 2020. In particular the Agency's Smart Farming programme seeks to influence behavioural change by demonstrating cost savings and environmental benefits that can be achieved by adopting resource efficiency measures on farms. The EPA in partnership with the IFA is being supported by other organisations in implementing the Smart Farming programme. For further information see the EPA's National Waste Prevention Programme at [www.epa.ie/waste/nwpp/](http://www.epa.ie/waste/nwpp/)

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

Environmental sustainability is an essential requirement for the food production systems of the 21st century and there are significant marketing and trading advantages as a result of Ireland's 'green' image. However, Ireland needs to demonstrate substance behind this green image and ensure that environmental priorities are fully considered in policy and decision making in the agriculture sector.

In particular, it is vital that the implementation of **Food Harvest 2020** be undertaken in a manner that ensures that GHG emissions from the agriculture sector are addressed and do not overburden the other key sectors, which would have to take on further emission reductions to make up for any shortfall from the agriculture sector. Similarly, in relation to water quality, it will also be important to ensure that farming and nutrient management practices will be sufficient to prevent environmental damage to water bodies and allow Ireland to meet its international obligations in relation to water.