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Issue 3

From the Minister of State's Desk

News from Shane McEntee TD

February 2012

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Minister of State McEntee promotes potatoes to international markets

Shane McEntee TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, meeting, left, Lorcan Bourke and Mike Neary of An Bord Bia and right, with Ross and Peter Keogh of Keogh Potatoes, during his visit to Fruit Logistica, the world's leading trade fair for the fresh fruit and vegetable industry, in Berlin.

Minister of State Shane McEntee TD recently returned from Fruit Logistica, in Berlin, the world's leading trade fair for the fresh fruit and vegetable industry where he was promoting increased wholesaler and consumer interest in buying Irish potatoes.

Speaking at the event, the Minister of State praised the involvement of six Irish potato companies and Bord Bia in promoting Irish potatoes - and in particular the Rooster variety - to the German and wider international market. He stated that *'The Rooster variety was bred by Teagasc and has established a tremendous reputation on the Irish market. It is expanding on the British market and is now being introduced to Germany and further afield. It is a high quality variety and can be used in many different ways: boiling, chipping and processing.'*

Mr McEntee emphasised the international basis of the potato industry and the importance of Ireland becoming more involved in exports. He said *'The Irish market is relatively small and can easily suffer from an oversupply situation and therefore it is vitally important that we look to developing*

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exports'.

More than 2,400 companies from across the entire fresh produce value chain were in attendance, including global players and small and medium-sized suppliers. The buyers included leading players in retail, wholesale, packaging, importers and exporters. The event attracted over 50,000 visitors from over 100 countries

'*We must continue to focus on maintaining the highest standards when it comes to food safety and quality*' - Shane McEntee TD

Dr. Geraldine Duffy, Teagasc, Ashtown with Shane McEntee TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Professor Gerry Boyle, Director Teasgasc, at a major international conference on beef 'Advancing Beef Safety and Quality Through Research and Innovation'

Opening a recent conference on improving beef quality and safety, Shane McEntee TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, highlighted the continuing need to maintain high standards in the European beef chain saying *"We must continue to focus on maintaining the highest standards when it comes to food safety and quality, because it is these elements that underpin the already excellent reputation of Irish beef in an ever-more challenging market environment."*

The conference was organised by Teagasc at its Ashtown Food Research Centre to showcase the results of an EU-funded international R&D project called ProSafeBeef. This is an integrated five-year project which started in March 2007 and involves forty-one leading research and industrial organisations operating in eighteen countries.

Minister of State McEntee urged the industry to apply best practice when it comes to food safety, and utilise the project's findings in areas such as

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novel products and new technologies to meet and anticipate market requirements. *'Investment in product quality and safety is paramount in promoting and protecting the reputation of Irish beef in worldwide markets'*, the Minister said.

Food entrepreneurs need to link with food companies to help them grow

Pictured at the Bord Bia East Region showcase were speakers, Bobby Kerr, Insomnia and Dragon's Den, David Bagnall, Spar Store Owner, Clondalkin and Minister of State Shane McEntee TD

Speaking at a Bord Bia Regional Food Showcase in Blanchardstown, county Dublin, Shane McEntee TD said the challenge for people showcasing their products at the event was how to grow their businesses. He said the answer lay in building partnerships with established food companies. '*The strong growth in the Irish food and drink exports sector opens up opportunities for smaller producers to grasp and develop. I recognise the tremendous challenges facing small producers but I encourage you to be optimistic because food production is our national success story and each of you can are contribute to it',* the Minister of State said.

Bord Bia have produced a Directory which provides details of almost 3,200 outlets for producers in the region and the vast majority of these are very interested in sourcing products from the region. The Directory also contains names of nearly 260 food producers in the participating counties.

Ireland's CAP reform priorities: maximum funding and maximum flexibility

Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Minister of State Shane McEntee TD met with European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Dacian Ciolos, in Dublin, and impressed upon him the key CAP reform priorities for Ireland. Our first

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priority is to secure the maximum possible funding from the EU budget negotiations in order to provide for a strong and well-resourced CAP. The second priority is to ensure that Ireland's funding for both direct payments and rural development is maintained at current levels and that there is the maximum possible flexibility for Member States to implement the payment models and transitional arrangements that best suit their farming conditions.

'Rural Ireland will be a main driver of our economy' - McEntee

Speaking in Nenagh, county Tipperary at a Bank of Ireland Agri Seminar, Minister of State Shane McEntee TD said *'One of the main drivers for the Irish economy over the next five years will come from rural Ireland. I refer, in particular, to the work of the hundreds of indigenous food companies across the country.'*

'The Government intends to drive a very aggressive growth agenda for the agri-food sector and to increase the value of exports from the sector to €12 billion by 2020. I recognise that this is an ambitious target but I am consistently struck and encouraged by the tremendously positive 'vibe' around agriculture and the agri-food sector. There is a welcome and increasing realisation that the agri-food sector will play a critical role in our economic recovery.'

Applications for grants towards new planting of trees are up 37% compared with last year

I am pleased to update you on a major increase in interest among farmers in getting involved in Forestry. Applications to our Department for grants towards new planting of trees are up by 37% compared with the same time last year.

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This is an encouraging sign that farmers are responding to the stability and confidence the Government has brought to the sector since I took on my job as Minister of State with special responsibility for Forestry. At almost €112 million, the investment in Forestry this year is virtually unchanged on the previous year. This investment will provide funding for more than 7,000 new hectares of forestry, as well as grant schemes to support new forest roads and the thinning and management of existing broadleaf plantations.

There is strong demand at home and abroad for forestry products and there are good financial returns for farmers who get involved. A recent report by Teagasc states that *'Prices paid for first thinnings continue to be buoyed by the more valuable pallet wood segment of the harvest. Long term demand for timber is likely to remain strong.'*

I am actively encouraging forest owners to join together in Producer Groups or to consider forming one in their locality because they are a useful forum in which to learn and share information. The Teagasc Forestry Development Department will be conducting a nationwide series of One 2 One forestry clinics running from 13 to 24 February 2012.

Forestry makes an important contribution to the economy, environment and society through employment, exports and climate change mitigation. I believe that the continued development of forestry is essential to ensure that there is a critical mass of timber coming on-stream in the years ahead to meet the demands of Ireland's valuable timber and timber products sector and the emerging wood energy sector.

Minister of State visits Medite in Clonmel and is impressed by their innovation

In front of enormous mountains of processed wood chippings, Left to Right, Pat Beardmore, Operations Director Medite, Neil Foot, Chief Operations Officer Coillte Panel Products, Minister of State Shane McEntee TD and Gerry Britchfield, Managing Director Coillte Panel Products

Commenting on his recent visit to the Medite Europe plant in Clonmel, County Tipperary, Minister of State Shane McEntee TD, said he was impressed by the company's innovation in developing new MDF Products, adding that Medite *'is a real example of what can be achieved with consistent commitment to anticipating and meeting market requirements.'*

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Medite Europe is a wholly owned subsidiary of Coillte. It manufactures a range of Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) products at its plant. The Minister of State has responsibility for forestry and he visited the plant to view at firsthand the processes involved and the range of products manufactured by the company. He noted that *'an integral element of the company's approach is its commitment to innovation, both through the development of new products and improvement of the processes involved.'*

Minister of State launches guidelines intended to assist farmers to burn vegetation safely

Minister of State, Shane McEntee TD, has announced the publication of a set of guidelines intended to assist farmers who wish to burn vegetation safely and within the law, as part of their land management regime. Mr McEntee commented *'I am pleased to announce the publication by our Department of a Prescribed Burning Code of Practice for Ireland. This is one of the most important recommendations of the Land and Forest Fires Working Group because it addresses one potential source of land fires and, as experience has shown us when such fires get out of control, they become the source of many forest fires.'*

Considerable progress has been made in implementing a series of recommendations made by the Land and Forest Fires Working Group which is working on the problem of illegal and uncontrolled burning.

Re-opening of the Forest Roads (Grant) Scheme

The previous Scheme was closed in mid-December 2011 and a consultative process was immediately commenced with industry stakeholders on proposals put forward by the Department for a new Scheme. These consultations are now complete and a new Scheme with revised provisions has been introduced.

The primary aim of the Scheme is to provide funding for the construction of management and harvesting roads and other infrastructural works to facilitate timber harvesting.

Minister of State Shane McEntee TD explained *'Our priority is to achieve the best value from the funding available. The new Scheme incorporates a number of changes to help us achieve this objective and to ensure the continuation of what is one of our most important support measures under the Forestry Programme. I would like to thank the industry representatives for their very useful inputs to the consultative process and assure them of the Government's continued commitment to forestry'.*

There were over 200 applicants at the time of closure of the old Roads

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Scheme whose applications had yet to be determined or approved. The Department will shortly be writing to these applicants offering them the opportunity to switch to the new Scheme subject to their acceptance of the new terms and conditions.

Re-opening of Broadleaf Thinning Scheme

The aim of the Scheme is to stimulate the improvement, protection and development of woodlands and forests for a range of functions, including healthy tree growth, landscape enhancement, soil and water protection, and as a provider of raw material to growing indigenous industries.

Announcing the re-opening, Shane McEntee TD commented: *'This important forestry support measure was temporarily suspended just before Christmas. This was necessary to enable our Department to take stock of its overall financial position following the welcome allocation for forestry announced in the 2012 Budget. There are no changes to the existing Scheme, which provides payments of €750 per hectare, and it is now open to new applicants. Processing of applications already in the system at the time of the suspension will resume immediately.'*

Minister McEntee added *'Having visited woodland owners who have availed of these grants, I am fully aware of the importance of this Scheme. It allows broadleaf forest owners to thin, manage and add value to their plantations, while also supplying much needed raw material to the emerging wood-fuel sector, an important and growing enterprise within our rural communities'*.

Closer involvement in tackling forest loss in developing countries

As a demonstration of its commitment to sustainable forest management and to addressing the global forest loss and the impacts of climate change, Ireland has made a funding contribution of €150,000 to the European Forest Institute EU REDD, which supports better forestry management in developing countries.

Minister of State meets Chinese delegation

A delegation of over twenty government officials and personnel from leading food and fresh produce companies in China recently visited the Keeling Group headquarters in North County Dublin. When he met the delegation, Shane McEntee TD spoke of the strengthening trade relations that exist between Ireland and China. He pointed out that Ireland has developed a

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reputation for producing high quality food in a safe and environmentally sustainable manner with the result that there is now a very strong increase in international demand for Irish food products. Citing Minister Coveney's planned trade mission to China in April, the Minister of State outlined the Government's wish for trading relations between Ireland and China to develop further and re-iterated the Government's commitment to do all it can to facilitate this process.

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