

# From the Minister of State's Desk

*News from  
Shane McEntee TD*



December 2011

## Minister of State's appeal to 'support local forestry owners and farmers'

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The Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Shane McEntee TD, has urged families and households to *"keep their money at home and support local forestry owners and farmers by buying home grown Christmas trees"*. He said *"Christmas is a time for families and children to celebrate but we can also make it an opportunity to put something back into our local communities by shopping and buying locally. This is particularly true when the choice is between a fine, locally-grown Christmas tree and an artificial imported tree manufactured in a distant country"*.

The Christmas tree market is worth €15 million to Irish forestry owners and farmers. Between now and Christmas around 100 growers will harvest 700,000 trees for sale on the domestic and export markets. Christmas trees are grown mainly in counties Wicklow, Wexford and Carlow but also in counties Kerry, Tipperary, Roscommon and Dublin.



Niamh and Aisling McManus, from Wilkinstown, County Meath helped Minister McEntee to select his family Christmas tree this year. He met the girls when he visited Mr Joe Gogarty's tree plantation and sales room in Kilmainhamwood, County Meath, to see for himself how sales of Christmas trees are progressing.

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## The Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 is now Law



The Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Shane McEntee TD, marked the passage into law of the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 by visiting the greyhound premises of one of the country's leading breeders and trainers, Mr Pat Savage, near Slane, Co Meath. President Michael D Higgins signed the Act into law on 16th November 2011. It was the first piece of legislation signed by him since he took up office on 11th November. The new Act puts in place a modern, comprehensive framework—with appropriate sanctions—to ensure

nothing but the best levels of welfare for our greyhounds. The legislation provides a sound legal basis for welfare inspections to be carried out at all premises where registered greyhounds are kept. It gives a wide range of powers to welfare officers and empowers them to issue welfare notices outlining improvements where they are required.

## New Renewable Energy Feed-In Tariff will benefit farmers and forestry owners

A significant number of farmers and forestry owners will benefit from the introduction shortly of a new Renewable Energy Feed-In Tariff (REFIT) to encourage the generation of electricity from biomass sources. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources will seek approval from the Government within a couple of weeks to formally open the scheme. The REFIT 3 scheme will provide a guaranteed price for fifteen years of between 8.5 cent and 15 cent per kilowatt hour for electricity generated from renewable energy sources and exported into the national grid.

Minister of State McEntee said *"I have talked to quite a number of farmers throughout the country who have been waiting on the introduction of a new REFIT scheme before getting into electricity generation from renewable sources. Since I took up my job as Minister of State I have been pushing hard for this. The scheme will allow farmers to generate a new income stream or to cut their costs through building Combined Heat and Power plants or anaerobic digestion units, for example, in dairy enterprises. It will also increase the demand and therefore the price of wood thinning for farmers who are involved in forestry and will give a boost to the production of energy crop."*

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## Food Safety the foundation on which the Irish Food Industry is built

The Agri-food sector is the largest indigenous industry in Ireland and is playing a key role in the recovery of the economy. The expected increase in Irish Food and Drink exports to an all-time high of €8.9 billion is an increase of more than 12%, or almost €1 billion, on 2010 levels. This follows growth of



€700 million in 2010 and an overall 25% growth in exports from the sector in two years which is a tremendous performance by any standards. Food safety is the foundation on which the Irish Food Industry is built and Irish food products have an excellent reputation which continues to develop, helping to maximise returns from a competitive local and international market place. Safety of the food chain can never be taken for granted by food businesses and routine checks and balances are required by businesses to ensure that they produce safe food.

## Proposed Third-Level Course in Organic Horticulture



↑ Pictured above: Prof Alan Reilly, CEO of the FSAI, Minister of State Shane McEntee, TD and Prof Gerry Boyle, Teagasc

Pictured on left at Liss Ard Estate in Skibereen, West Cork:

Professor Peter Jones of UCC, Minister of State Shane McEntee TD and Roman Stern, owner of Liss Ard

*"I welcome the plans by UCC to develop an outreach third-level programme in Organic-Horticultural Crop Production on an estate in West Cork. The proposed MSc in Organic Horticultural Crop Production is expected to be accredited and supported by UCC through the School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences. I visited the Liss Ard Estate in the Skibereen area of West Cork where plans to develop a third level horticulture college are at an advanced stage. The course is a positive step towards providing the levels of expertise→*

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*to develop the organic horticulture sector in Ireland to its full potential.”*

The proposed course is scheduled to commence in September, 2012. Initially, an annual intake of 15 students is envisaged. It will help to improve the knowledge base of the sector and to promote best practice. *“I commend community leaders in West Cork for the initiative they have shown in promoting this innovative development. “*

### Autumn Forestry Planting - 1,500 additional hectare

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is issuing financial approvals for 1,500 hectares of new forestry planting for the current Autumn planting season. Planting grants in respect of over 5,100 hectares have been paid this year to date and these new approvals are in addition to that figure. The Minister of State said, *“I am very aware of the importance of the Autumn grant approval in maintaining confidence in the forestry sector”.*

Forestry represents an extremely valuable and sustainable resource and is an indigenous Irish industry supporting many thousands of jobs, many of them in rural areas. The forestry sector makes an overall economic contribution to meeting national greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. The ongoing roll-out of financial approvals for the autumn planting season shows that the Government recognises the importance of forestry to the economy and reflects its commitment to supporting the development of the sector.

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## The Mushroom Industry is one of the success stories of Irish Agriculture over the past 30 years



At the 2011 All Ireland Mushroom Conference and Trade Show in Monaghan, the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Shane McEntee TD said: *“The mushroom Industry is one of the success stories of Irish agriculture over the past 30 years”.*

The conference is a cross border event with speakers and visitors from both Ireland and the North as well as further afield. Gerry Lavery, Permanent Secretary

at the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, in Northern Ireland also spoke. Minister McEntee also said *“There is general agreement on the importance of agriculture and the agri-food sector locally, nationally and internationally. I am optimistic that this vitally important, indigenous sector can help lead Ireland’s economic recovery. The mushroom sector has always been market led and has shown that it can survive even in challenging circumstances because it is open to innovation and quick to adopt technical developments as they arise”.*

The Government has allocated €1million to investments under the National Development Plan, underlining its commitment to the mushroom industry.

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