

WEXFORD COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of Special Meeting of Wexford County Council
held on Monday 9th September, 2019 – 6.00 p.m.
in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Wexford.**

Attendance:

In The Chair: Councillor M. Sheehan

Councillors: P. Barden; M. Bell; P. Breen; A. Browne;
C. Byrne; M. Byrne; G. Carthy; J. Codd;
A. Connick; D. Devereux; A. Donohoe; M. Farrell;
J. Fleming; T. Forde; D. Hynes; W. Kavanagh;
L. Kelly; D. Kenny; G. Laffan; L. McDonald;
B.A. Murphy; F. O'Suilleabháin; J. Owens;
F. Staples; J. Sullivan; O. Walsh; M. Whelan.

Officials: Mr. T. Enright, Chief Executive.
T. Larkin; E. Hore, J. Carley, E. Taaffe, Directors of Services;
Ms. A. O'Neill, Head of Finance;
Mr. P. Collins, Meetings Administrator;

Apologies: Councillors K.Codd Nolan; J. Hegarty; G. Lawlor; J. Moore; B. Murphy;
J. O'Rourke;

1. Deputation from Beef Farmers

Members from the farming community present: John Johnson, Wexford Beef Plan, John Joe Kavanagh of the Wexford Livestock Chairman, Brian Byrne of the Beef Plan Movement, Ned Lyng Vice Chairman IFA, Sarah Mackey County Chair of Wexford Macra na Feirme, Matt White, Bannow, Pat Kent, Pat O'Toole Farmers Journal.

At the outset the Cathaoirleach welcomed representatives of the farming community who are currently involved in the beef crisis. Cllr. P. Breen stated the meeting that the situation with regard to beef farmers is now past the critical point and the future for beef farmers is unclear - the purpose of today's meeting is that the Members of the Council could hear about the beef crisis issues first-hand from the farmers involved in the dispute. He advised that suckler farmers are most under threat in this current crisis.

He then handed over to John Joe Kavanagh the IFA Livestock Chairman. He set out the context of the dispute, advising that the processor gets €4 per kilo, the retailer gets €4 per kilo and the farmer gets €2 per kilo. He also pointed out that the farmers input into the process is 2-3 years to raise sucklers, that the processor deals with the beef for a period not exceeding 2-3 weeks and that the retailer sells the beef in a period covering 2-3 days.

He went on to give further figures to show that it was unsustainable for suckler beef farmers to continue in business with such low margins and in many cases carrying heavy losses both in terms of trading and bank loans. He advised that the farmers are not looking for the consumer to pay more – they are asking Minister Creed to call together the meat industry processors and the retailers for talks. He noted that the current talks had broken down because the MMI had walked

away and that the retailers didn't turn up. He is of the opinion that this whole crisis can be solved if there is a fair share for the farmers.

He said there was a need for transparency and to see transparency in the system required figures being released by all parties. He also said that South American beef should not be allowed to come into the market place because it does not conform to the same standards as the Irish beef farmers do with their beef.

He finished off by calling for three requirements from the IFA

- Transparency in the beef process
- What processes are making
- What retailers are making

Next to speak was Ned Lyng, Rathnure and Vice Chairman IFA who outlined his own background and the role the GAA in rural Ireland and how they cement the local community, held the local community together. He advised that the tillage sector will also be under attack, the sheep and dairy are all under pressure. All people of involved in farming have one common goal which is to protect future generations and to stop the attacks in local rural areas and that the farmers generally are not getting income out of the work that they carry out.

The next speaker was Brian Byrne of the Beef Plan Movement. He highlighted that there was too much control in the beef factories and the supermarkets and this was unfair to farmers. He was of the opinion that the price per kilo was not the issue. He noted that there was talk that suckler cows were bad for the Environment but stated that there are more suckler cows in Brazil than there was in Ireland.

He said the beef crisis was all about communities where part-time farmers have to be able to make some money and the cost of keeping the suckler cows is not cheap and the price does not cover the cost of keeping the cattle. The Beef Plan Movement was set up because something had to be done about the price.

It is a pity it had come to this and he is seeking the Council's support. He also noted that TD's had voted for Mercosur deal whereby the South American countries are chopping down rain forests to produce sub-standard beef. There are no young farmers coming through and there is a danger that all small communities will collapse.

He asked the Council Members to talk to politicians up the line to bring in the factories and retailers and to answer questions. The cost of processing for supermarkets and retailers is required.

The next speaker was John Johnson, Wexford Beef Plan - he started by saying that all people have to eat and that 80% of farmers depend on suckler farming. Basically farmers are now working for nothing; there is no income from suckler farming. He asked that the Council support farming and do their best to influence others to try and resolve the situation. He finished by saying he wanted to keep rural Ireland going.

The next speaker was Sarah Mackey who is the County Chairperson of Macra na Feirme. She started by saying that the future for farm families is unsure. The money is not there and farmers are facing losses of €200 - €450 per head of cattle. Young people are not staying in farming - they are going abroad and don't want to take part in farming. The banks won't support beef farmers. Hope is needed for farm families and the small family farm is in crisis. She urged all the Councillors present to use their influence on senior politicians to resolve this issue.

The next speaker was Matt White; he thanked the Council for the opportunity to speak at this crisis meeting. He noted that suckler farms have been robbed blind for twenty years. He has an 80 acre farm whose turnover last year was €1500, €6000 the previous year. He said that the farmers need to stand up against the meat companies. He likened this to a war and that if it was not resolved there would be trouble down the line.

He spoke about his community and his family and that many farmers are living in pure desperation with the state of their businesses and he noted that the main political parties have let the farmers down. He advised that there are 65,000 suckling farmers in Ireland and they make up rural families and communities. The speed at which meat companies can get the injunction was something that was of concern to him and there is a political failure by the main parties in dealing with the meat companies.

The next speaker was Pat Kent of the ICMSA. He spoke of a crisis in the industry, which it is anti-competitive and there is no resolution at present. He gave a number of examples of where improvements can be brought about for example the licencing of extra local abattoirs.

The next speaker was Pat O'Toole from the Farmers Journal. He invited the previous speaker to send on a letter to the Farmers Journal with any issues he had with that newspaper.

A questions and answers session with Members of the Council then took place.

Following the question and answer session, the Chairman of the Wexford Beef Plan, Brian Byrne pleaded with the Council members to inform themselves on what's going on.

Cllr. P. Breen then brought the meeting to a close by thanking everyone for attending and highlighted the aim of defending the livelihoods of farmers.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

County Secretary

Daingithe ar an 14ú la de Deireadh Fómhair, 2019.

Cathaoirleach