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CHAPTER 10
Agriculture and the Equine Industry

10 AGRICULTURE AND THE EQUINE INDUSTRY

10.1 (A) Agriculture

Background

The future of farming in Kildare is influenced by developments within Europe and the rest of the world. The recent CAP reform measures, the recent enlargement of Europe and the on-going GATT negotiations will influence this future. The widening gap between farming incomes and the rest of the economy is becoming more apparent and necessitates the need for strategic development within the agricultural sector for diversification. The percentage share of total employment in agriculture in the county fell from 7% in 1996 to 4.16% in 2002.

Agricultural land use in the county follows the suitability and use range of the soils. The north and east of the county is dominated by pastureland. In the south, tillage farming assumes major importance and less than 40% of the land area is under pasture. The central area of the county is an area of mixed farming and in the north west of the county, drystock farming is the main agricultural activity.

There are approximately 112,518 hectares (278,032 acres) of land farmed in County Kildare with approximately 29,500 hectares (52,895 acres) under tillage and the balance in grassland. Livestock production is by far the most dominant farming activity in the county in terms of output, utilisation of land and number of farmers involved. Tillage enterprise ranks second in terms of the number of farmers engaged in this activity producing wheat, barley, oats and root crops. The nursery stock industry is an expanding industry with an estimated 35 nurseries in the county, generating approximately 12.5 million each year, being equal to one third of the national income generated from horticulture.

Table 10.1 Estimates of Current Position and Future Trends in Agriculture in County Kildare 2000-2006

| Year | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| No. of farmers supplying milk | 249 | 249 | 239 | 229 | 204 | 190 | 190 |
| No. of farmers with tillage crops | 700 | 723 | 720 | 720 | 720 | 720 | 720 |
| No. of farmers with cattle | 2230 | 2234 | 2225 | 2220 | 2210 | 2200 | 2200 |
| No. of farmers with sheep | 800 | 691 | 680 | 670 | 620 | 590 | 570 |
| No. of farmers with pigs | | 16 | 16 | 14 | 12 | 10 | 10 |
| No. of farmers with significant alternative enterprises: | | | | | | | |
| Mushrooms | 24 | 21 | 19 | 18 | 17 | 16 | 15 |
| Nursery Stock | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 | 29 |
| Other Horticulture | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| Sport Horses | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Potatoes | 27 | 30 | 30 | 28 | 30 | 28 | 26 |

Source: Teagasc Co. Kildare Business Plan, 2003

According to 'Kildare Farming 2000, Change, Challenge and Opportunity' the consolidation of farm units was more pronounced in County Kildare than elsewhere in the state. The total number of farms in the county dropped by 51% between 1975 and 2002, as can be seen in table 10.2. In Kildare 52% of farm holdings are less than 30 hectares and 28% are greater than 50 hectares in comparison with 17% in the rest of the country, see table 10.2.

Table 10.2 Percentage of farms in various size categories

| Farm Size (Ha) | <10 | 10<20 | 20<30 | 30<50 | 50 Plus |
|----------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| Kildare (no.) | 595 | 443 | 369 | 541 | 746 |
| Kildare % | 22 | 16 | 14 | 20 | 28 |
| Ireland | 20 | 25 | 18 | 21 | 17 |

Source: CSO Census of Agriculture 2000

Table 10.3 Total number of farms

| Year | Kildare | Ireland |
|------|---------|---------|
| 1975 | 5,600 | 269,900 |
| 1991 | 3,300 | 170,100 |
| 2002 | 2,700 | 141,527 |

Source: CSO Census of Agriculture 2000

There is very little difference in the age profile of county farmers compared with the rest of Ireland, see table 10.4. Of the 2,700 farms in Kildare in 2002, 54% cited farming as their sole occupation, 13% stated farming was a major occupation and 33% cited farming as a subsidiary occupation.

Table 10.4 Number of family farms classified by Age Cohort of holder

| | < 35 | Age 35 - 44 | Age 45 -54 | Age 55 - 64 | Age ≥ 65 |
|----------|------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|
| Kildare | 12% | 23% | 25% | 21% | 20% |
| Leinster | 14% | 22% | 25% | 19% | 19% |
| Ireland | 13% | 22% | 26% | 20% | 20% |

(Farms run by commercial concerns or institutions are excluded from this table)

Source: CSO, Census of Agriculture, 2000

10.1.1 Goal

To facilitate the maintenance and expansion of an environmentally friendly and competitive agricultural sector in Kildare.

10.1.2 Objectives

- (1) To promote a vibrant, environmentally sustainable and well managed agricultural, horticultural, forestry sector and bloodstock / equine industry, which contributes to a dynamic and successful rural economy.
- (2) To encourage rising competitiveness of farm enterprises while ensuring that farm output is produced in an environmentally friendly manner.
- (3) To encourage the diversification of farm production and the establishment of rural enterprise.

10.1.3 Agricultural Activity

Although rural economic bases are diversifying and rural areas are no longer synonymous with agriculture, it remains an important contributor to the economic and social viability of rural areas. Agriculture is a key source of employment and is critical to the well being of the rural economy and to maintaining population in rural areas.

10.1.4 Diversification

The Council recognises the need for farm diversification to enable farming to remain a viable part of the county's economy. It will facilitate and support farmers in the change from full to part-time farming. Part-time employment opportunities, which enable farmers to continue to maintain a viable farm, will be encouraged.

Farming has been diversifying into areas such as horticulture, forestry and agri-tourism. The Council will support the development of agriculturally related industries, which are environmentally sustainable and considered a suitable use, subject to the protection of amenities (including rivers, lakes and canals) and the protection of certain activities, such as those associated with the Bloodstock Industry.

10.1.5 Agriculture and the Environment

While the Council recognises the significance of the county's agricultural sector, it also acknowledges that modern agricultural practices place pressure on the environment and can have a negative impact in terms of water pollution and biodiversity. The Council will encourage farming practices and production methods that have regard for conservation, landscape protection, the protection of wildlife habitats, endangered species of flora and fauna and water quality.

10.1.6 Rural Development

The Council recognises the changing nature of rural communities within the county. Increased part-time farming requires increased opportunities for part-time employment, diversification and employment sources for members of farm families. In addition, increasing numbers of new residents, continued lack of access to services and growing levels of social exclusion of particular groups are evidence of these changes. Kildare County Council is committed to promoting balanced and inclusive rural communities and, as such, will positively engage with agencies responsible for rural development in the county. In addition, the provisions of the social strategy set out in Chapter 4 will be applied appropriately to both rural and urban communities in the county.

10.1.7 Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Council;

- AG 1** To support agricultural development and encourage the continuation of agriculture as a contributory means of maintaining population in the rural area.
- AG 2** To facilitate farm diversification and encourage the sustainable development of alternative rural enterprises and the conversion of redundant farm buildings of vernacular importance for appropriate owner-run enterprises, as a way of supporting a viable rural community subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
- AG 3** To encourage the development of environmentally sustainable agricultural practices, to ensure that development does not impinge on the visual amenity of the countryside and that watercourses, wildlife habitats and areas of ecological importance are protected from the threat of pollution.
- AG 4** To ensure that all agricultural activities adhere to any legislation on water quality, such as the Phosphorous Regulations, Water Framework Directive and Nitrate Directive.
- AG 5** To require buildings and structures in visually sensitive areas:
- to be sited as unobtrusively as possible;
 - to be clustered to form a distinct and unified feature in the landscape;
 - to utilise suitable materials and colours;
 - to utilise native species in screen planting in order to integrate development into the landscape; and
 - to have regard to chapters 18 and 19 of this plan.
- AG 6** To protect designated natural and archaeological sites and protected structures as listed in volume 2 of the County Development Plan.

- AG 7 To seek to encourage the conservation and promotion of bio-diversity in farming activities.
- AG 8 To support agricultural activities which encourage bio-diversity as identified in the Local Biodiversity Plan and the National Biodiversity Plan.
- AG 9 To support the recommendations of *“The Report of the Inter-Departmental task force on the future management and development of the Curragh of Kildare”* with regard to overuse of the Curragh.
- AG: 10 To endorse the Teagasc County Kildare Business Plan which outlines the Teagasc advisory programmes.
- AG: 11 To co-operate with rural development agencies such as Teagasc, KELT, OAK Partnership and Action South Kildare in the development of initiatives which:
- facilitate and support farm families and other small holders in the change from full to part-time farming;
 - create vibrant, inclusive rural communities by promoting the social inclusion of new residents, older people and rural women; and
 - improve access and services in rural areas, in particular, rural transport and other similar initiatives operational in the county.
- AG 12 To carry out a study on the sustainable and suitable re-use of farm buildings in the county subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the county.

10.1.8 Horticulture

The nursery sector is a growing industry in Ireland and has been expanding at up to 5% per annum. The anticipated growth in the amenity market indicates that growth in the nursery stock industry will continue.

Nursery Stock is an important industry in County Kildare. There are currently 29 nurseries in the county with estimated sales in excess of €10 million per annum. This represents 24% of the Nursery Stock Industry in Ireland. There are 17 garden centres in the county and over 30 landscape contractors. (Teagasc, 2004 Teagasc Co. Kildare County Business Plan, 2004).

10.1.9 Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Council;

- H 1 To support the horticulture and nursery stock industry as a means of diversifying agriculture and contributing to maintaining population in the rural area.

- H 2 To facilitate the development of the horticultural industry by encouraging the conversion/ reuse of redundant farm buildings for appropriate horticultural enterprises, subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

10.2 (B) Equine Industry: Background

Background

The Kildare Equine Industry has a world-class reputation. It is also hugely important to the economy of the county, directly employing approximately 5,500 people with a further 10,000 people in associated industries and services.

The bloodstock industry is a significant land user in the county. Kildare has a large concentration of high quality stud farms. The Irish Field Directory 2005 lists 153 stud farms in County Kildare. Kildare Farming 2000 stated that 27% of all horses in training and 16% of all thoroughbred stallions in the country are based in Kildare.

There are three premier grade one racetracks in the county namely, Punchestown, Naas and the Curragh. These are nationally important centres for horse racing and provide valuable employment, tourism revenue and promotional outlets for the county as a whole.

There are a number of other associated enterprises, dependent on the bloodstock industry, that have been established in the county, and which provide employment and wealth creation. These enterprises include, bloodstock insurance agencies, bloodstock sales, bloodstock transport companies and the national bloodstock passport agency Wetherby's.

There are also a growing number of sport horse industries in County Kildare. At present, in County Kildare there are 16 AIRE approved equestrian centres, some of which are known internationally.

An increasing number of establishments in the county are concentrating specifically on breeding, training and competing sport horses. There is great interest in Irish bred sport horses both nationally and internationally.

Other ancillary facilities relating to the equine industry in the county include such places as: The RACE Centre in Kildare Town and The Equine Hospital at Troytown and equine centres such as Kill International Equestrian Centre.

10.2.1 Goal

In recognising the importance of the bloodstock industry in the county, both in land use and in terms of the direct and indirect employment generated by it, the Council will continue to support and encourage the development of a vibrant bloodstock industry, which plays a major role in the rural economy.

10.2.2 Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Council:

- EQ 1 To cooperate with the relevant statutory and voluntary bodies to facilitate the establishment of a National Equestrian Centre in the county.
- EQ 2 To encourage the expansion of the bloodstock industry by protecting the environment and amenity value of rural areas, from encroachment by urban sprawl and incompatible development.
- EQ 3 To encourage the development of equine tourism packages that can be integrated with other rural tourism initiatives.
- EQ 4 To support the bloodstock industry through facilitating equine business expansion of the equine core, appropriate to the size of business at suitable locations.
- EQ 5 To protect the Curragh, Punchestown and Naas racecourses from any development that would interfere with their amenity qualities while, at the same time, promoting the enhancement of facilities for racegoers.
- EQ 6 To cooperate with Naas Town Council in the protection of Naas Racecourse.
- EQ 7 To support & recognise the development of all aspects of the Irish sport horse industry in the county, including breeding, competing and training.

