



**DRAFTING THE NATURE  
RESTORATION PLAN:  
REPORT FROM THE  
FARMING LEADERS'  
FORUM**

**Sept 2025**

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Completed by the social research charity consultancy



# Introduction

This report provides a summary of the discussions of the third meeting of the Leaders' Forum to inform the drafting of Ireland's Nature Restoration Plan. The meeting was held on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2025 with over 70 attendees attending (see Appendix for list). Farmers from across the spectrum of farming attended, from all parts of the country, with a view to ensuring that this Leaders' Forum would incorporate the direct views of farmers into the recommendations made on the drafting of Ireland's National Restoration Plan.

Following a welcome and introduction to the day Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin gave a presentation on the Nature Restoration Law, the expectations of the Independent Advisory Committee and the Leaders' Forum meetings. Attendees were invited to share their input with colleagues at their tables over four sessions throughout the day:

1. Farmer-Led Visioning: Sustainable Livelihoods and Nature Stewardship - exploring what successful farming looks like in 2050, and the supporting factors needed to achieve this vision
2. Opportunities to Achieve this Vision with a Focus on Nature Restoration - identifying current good practices and ways to promote, scale and develop nature-positive farming actions
3. Concerns and Barriers to Farming for Nature Restoration into the Future - examining challenges and potential solutions to achieving the farming vision
4. Systems Thinking - The Priority Changes - identifying structural changes needed to achieve the 2050 vision for farming and nature restoration

Sessions included panel discussions on the various themes and topics, as well as table discussions. A summary of each of the panel discussions is included in this report<sup>1</sup>. Attendees were seated at 9 separate tables, with a mix of stakeholders seated at each table. Tables were facilitated through the four separate discussions outlined above, with note-takers recording the discussions. These detailed records form the basis of this report.

This report includes points that were raised by at least two tables, with some specific outstanding issues raised by only one table included in the 'Car Park' in the Appendix. The sections within this report correspond to the four table discussions and contain composite statements developed from a synthesis of the 9 table notes. Information is provided on the table numbers that contributed content to each point. Also provided is a count to allow readers to assess the prioritisation of issues, with all commentary ordered from the most raised to the least.

To keep the report clear and avoid repetition, each theme is written out in full the first time it appears (starting in Table 1). When the same theme comes up again in later exercises, we refer back to it by

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of these discussion was initially compiled by PhD students Maya Clinton and Felix Sinnot from Dublin City University. Maya and Felix also assisted in the running of the Leaders' Forum on the day.

number and title, add the phrase 'in addition to points made in Table N', and then list any new points. If a theme is raised for the first time in a later exercise, it is written out in full there



Following the consultation event, several attendees submitted additional points and concerns via email. As the main body of this report is organized according to the four table discussion exercises conducted during the day, these subsequent submissions are included separately in the appendix under "Points Raised in Post-Consultation Submissions." Where these points relate to existing themes from the main report, the relevant theme number is referenced. This approach maintains the integrity of the original consultation structure while ensuring all participant input is captured and acknowledged.

# Farming and the Nature Restoration Law

<b>Farmer-Led Visioning: Sustainable Livelihoods and Nature Stewardship - Your Knowledge, Your Future</b>	<b>Tables</b>	<b>No.</b>
<p><b>1. Enough income for a comfortable, stable and secure life:</b> Farmers have economic security and stability coming from farming income alone. Their income is sufficient to allow farmers to support/raise/educate a family, go on holiday, build a house or pay for their own house, own land, have a life outside of farming and support the farm long-term through investment into improving the farm. In general, they should be paid well enough (one table recommended e.g. paid at least €150,000 per family) to guarantee a good quality of life and have control over their income as there is already a fear of financing in the background. Farmer's income must be protected in any changes. Goods and products farmers produce should be priced fairly.</p>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	9
<p><b>2. Farming should be made attractive to young people and new farmers:</b> Currently there are less farmers each year. To make farming a viable career option and a 'cool' industry to work in, farming should be economically viable/sustainable; there needs to be access to land, farming and machinery; education in first, second and third level education; potential for a good quality of life; and national strategies to bring in interested people.</p>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	9
<p><b>3. Farmers are valued and respected:</b> They are seen as anchors in the community and the backbone of rural Ireland, with the public recognising the role of farmers in restoration efforts and in creating food securing. This should be reflected in policy and education, supporting farmers to be proud of their work.</p>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	9
<p><b>4. Financial support for biodiversity efforts:</b> Funding is ringfenced for biodiversity and sustainable farming and is separate from existing funding. Farmers are compensated for any loss in production or time that is needed to improve nature on their farms, and if they are indirectly affected by restoration efforts. Any biodiversity solutions need to be workable for farmers both economically and structurally. Ideas for financing approaches include access to carbo/nature credits and ecosystem payments, and creating new opportunities, platforms and policies to help farmers earn from off-farm activities.</p>	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	8
<p><b>5. Nature and farming are not seen as in competition:</b> they are seen as coexisting and cooperating. This means aligning food production/food security, economic viability, culture and emission targets with nature restoration, and incorporating nature into agricultural systems. Farms should not be forced in a direction which is contrary to nature's limits, for example pressure form co-ops and intensify and produce more. Conversely, reducing production levels without a plan may hurt farmers, because it is unclear who will meet the demand if they produce less.</p>	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	8
<p><b>6. Diversifying production:</b> Farm diversification options should be supported, for a more diverse range of animals and crops. For example, having more woodlands and restored bogs on farms (which might promote agritourism) or better integration of forestry (trees and hedgerows) onto farms. This would be better for the environment, and address</p>	1, 2, 3 4, 5, 6, 7, 9	8

Ireland's current reliance on imports (e.g. war in Ukraine showed the reliance on imported grain, or reducing domestic beef only to import less sustainable alternatives).		
<b>7. Sustainable future for farming:</b> Strategies are needed to ensure that Irish farming can continue and thrive over the long term. This includes supporting family farms alongside larger operations, enabling farms to be passed down to the next generation in good or improved condition, and ensuring that farming continues to feed communities while caring for the land.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9	7
<b>8. Food security:</b> While Ireland exports 90% of its produce to feed over 50 million people, the system does not adequately support Ireland in feeding itself. Farmers should produce enough high quality and healthy food for the population (national and European). Security also comes from sufficient production of fuel, fibre and seeds.	1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9	6
<b>9. Support farmer wellbeing:</b> Farmers need more support there is a risk of farmers burning out and the country losing people to manage the land. This can be done through local collaboration (e.g., conferences for farmers, more farm advisors per area), social connection (outside of just the pub), and community-led initiatives. Access to healthcare should also be simple and easy, as farming is physically demanding and farmers need to be able to take care of themselves. Farmers should be able to efficiently work in a 40-hour week, have breaks and holidays and the ability to rest and value family life allowing for good mental health.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	6
<b>10. Incentivise and reward farmers for their biodiversity efforts:</b> mandating may also be useful, but the focus should be on the carrot rather than the stick. Incentives should be region specific, and recognise the costs and risks taken by farmers in promoting biodiversity.	1, 3, 4, 7, 9	5
<b>11. Understanding of what farmers do:</b> Farmers and the public should understand what farmers do for nature/ecosystems and as food producers, and recognise that beyond having to grow crops, farmers take on roles as stewards of nature. There should be a clear connection and communication between producers and consumers. Farmers also need to be able to articulate the positive impact they have to government and the public.	1, 3, 4, 7, 9	5
<b>12. Short supply chains and food systems:</b> Ireland should shift towards shorter supply chains and resilient local food systems, ensuring farming primarily supports local communities and food security at home. Local food should stay in local markets, with Irish grain feeding Irish livestock, and opportunities for people to grow their own food. A network of community-owned farms could strengthen regional self-sufficiency while protecting place-based farming knowledge and practices. Shorter supply chains would also give farmers a fairer share of value and reduce dependence on global markets that undermine Irish agriculture. However, there needs to be recognition that some level of import/export of different food types is inevitable due to consumer choice. Current trade arrangements, such as the Mercosur deal, threaten local standards and allow misuse of the Irish name to sell lower-quality imports.	1, 3, 4, 5, 6	5
<b>13. Predictability and clarity long-term:</b> There should be predictability/clarity for farmers regarding legislation, the nature restoration plan and government long term (20-30 year)	1, 3, 4, 6, 7	5

ecosystem planning to ensure peace of mind and security. This is to replace current ever changing 5-year policy cycles and to avoid flip-flopping. Clarity also refers to level of detail, as there is a risk that policy suggestions get too high level that they become too abstract to implement		
<b>14. Soil health restored:</b> Below-ground biodiversity is made visible and critical. Healthy soil will also negate the need for additional agricultural products, allowing unsustainable practices to be phased out.	3, 4, 7, 9	4
<b>15. Water availability and management:</b> efforts should be flexible, addressing existing water shortages, supporting wetland restoration without compromising adjacent farmland viability (e.g. co-designing drainage with farmers), and should improve water quality.	4, 5, 7, 9	4
<b>16. Policies for common land:</b> Governance structures are needed for high nature value areas such as commonage land, where current systems are absent (models such as Elinor Ostrom's Governing the Commons offer useful guidance). A government agency or bounty system for predator control could address challenges left by the decline of traditional hunting.	3, 5, 6, 8	4
<b>17. More training and education:</b> There is a need for knowledge transfer and education across the entire sector. Training and education should cover: grant schemes, ecological literacy, what farmers are being asked to do for the environment and why (E.g., why are indicator species more vital to nature than non-indicator species?). One suggestion is to implement the Green Cert online training for farmers.	2, 3, 4, 9	4
<b>18. Communities and farms should be linked:</b> e.g. farmer involvement in clubs and community events, showcasing farms and produce. This should support local economy, support rural repopulation and lead to thriving villages and rural towns.	1, 3, 7, 9	4
<b>19. Nature is restored until it is doing well:</b> Ireland becomes a global leader in meeting biodiversity targets, with over 90% of habitats and species in favourable condition, and habitats connectivity improved.	3, 4, 8	3
<b>20. Biodiverse hedgerows:</b> these should be retained, supported by policy changes and used to help restore nature and soil fertility near farms. There are new types of enterprises that deliver the necessary nature contract services for farmers.	2, 5, 9	3
<b>21. Better communication to give farmers a voice:</b> Currently farmers feel like there isn't a place for them in EU policy making, they are isolated from policy makers and advisors. For example, recommendations from innovative projects are not being taken up by government (example Burren LIFE project being forced into ACRES), or farmers feeling left behind in development models that focus on urban centres.	3, 4, 9	3
<b>22. Farming is overregulated; bureaucratic systems are too complex:</b> this discourages family farms. Paperwork should be reduced as applications and trainings are onerous. There is too much laptop work, red tape, department checks and requests for changes.	3, 5, 9	3
<b>23. Research driven risk taking:</b> farmers need to see new practices before they take risks to push innovation, with proven methodologies based on science. There is a need for more demo farms (Teagasc and UCD have good example of this).	1, 3, 9	3

<b>24. Generational, indigenous and lived knowledge:</b> Farmer knowledge, traditional practices and generational insights can inform better science, so farmers should become experts in their own land and work directly with scientists.	3, 4, 6	3
<b>25. Trust:</b> we need to create a climate of trust as some farmers don't trust the Irish government, and vis-versa. Some farmers see the NRL as a land grab.	2, 3, 6	3
<b>26. Standards and monitoring should continue to improve:</b> Clear measurements of what is expected is needed. Current examples of things not working include the Scores being averaged throughout country (from ACRES) which makes it look like the country is doing well on biodiversity while some areas are not improving.	3, 6	2
<b>27. Farming advisors:</b> Farmers need access to advisors who understand and align with their farming philosophy. Advisors must not only help implement schemes but also clearly explain their ecological purpose, ensuring farmers see the connection between practices and outcomes. There is a need for specialist habitat and nature advisors to provide guidance on biodiversity and ecological management.	3, 4	2
<b>28. Women in farming:</b> The future of farming should include greater diversity across genders, with more women encouraged and supported to join the industry.	7, 9	2
<b>29. Risk of monopolies:</b> There are growing concerns about corporate monopolies in agriculture, which can drive ecological harm through monocultures and the erosion of local knowledge. Biodiversity practices also risk being monopolised by those with large capital, making land too expensive for ordinary citizens to buy and steward, and undermining fair access to farming and conservation.	3, 4	2

# Opportunities to Achieve a Vision of Farming for Nature Restoration

This session commenced with a panel discussion around the opportunities or innovations that could be deployed, scaled or developed to achieve a vision of farming for Nature Restoration. The panel included three farmers: David Kerr, Dairy Farmer (in derogation) and Farming for Nature Ambassador; Clive Bright, Beef Farmer; and Louise Treacy, Grain Growers Association. The discussion was chaired by Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin and the panel explored changes in perceptions among farmers in relation to nature restoration. The panellists gave insights into intensive dairy farming systems that operate under the nitrates derogation and why they can and should be part of the solution. They reinforced the need to ensure the measures undertaken are financially, socially and ecologically sustainable to take root at scale. An example of a potential measure was given, whereby farmers allow hedgerows to flourish by moving fencing back into the field to minimise grazing along the perimeter of the hedge. The need to take a 'whole-farm approach' to the integration of measures for nature was highlighted, along with the need for a fundamental rethinking of farming models. Aligning with natural cycles and operating close to nature had increased profits for one panellist, a beef farmer, for whom the presence of birds and insects served as indicators for a healthy and productive system. There is, however, a critical gap around ecological literacy and knowledge which must be addressed to support farmers in making nature-informed management decisions on their land. While ecological education is still seen as niche in agricultural courses today, young farmers are willing and motivated to engage with sustainability. Maximising this opportunity for the next generation means addressing the pre-existing structural and viability challenges, specifically access to land, finance and long-term supports that provide stability. The panel acknowledged the potential for circular farming systems to retain value locally, such as growing grain for their own livestock feed, something one panellist could speak to on their own farm. The panellists also explored ideas around agri-tourism and models that enable autonomy from large private or corporate actors.

Farmer-Led Visioning: Sustainable Livelihoods and Nature Stewardship	Tables	No.
<p><b>30. Generational, indigenous and lived knowledge</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promote two-way learning where farmers share on-the-ground agricultural and ecological knowledge while receiving scientific guidance.</li> <li>● Facilitate dialogue between farmers, advisory groups, and others</li> <li>● Important to pass down generational knowledge &amp; preserve cultural wisdom.</li> <li>● Younger farmers should learn practices from older generations — such as practices that relied less on chemicals and maintained healthier environments</li> <li>● A new shepherding system could allow intergenerational learning, with a younger farmer shepherding other older farmers sheep.</li> <li>● Programmes that connect younger and older farmers (such as apprenticeship schemes, or partnerships where an older farmer works with a younger farmer as</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	8

ownership of the farm transfers over time) could support knowledge transfer, combining traditional wisdom with new tools and techniques.		
<p><b>10. Incentivise and reward farmers for their biodiversity efforts</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers will follow the money if incentivised. Reward for: high-quality peatlands, reducing chemical use and following good practices, organic farming, local champions (in paid roles), and learning/self-assessment.</li> <li>• Introduce grace periods (e.g. one-off warnings) before penalties are imposed.</li> <li>• Properly fund and verified to provide fair payments based on quality results.</li> <li>• Provide profitability assessments and information services to help farmers understand the return on investment from specific initiatives.</li> </ul>	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	7
<p><b>17. More training and education</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance school ecological education to improve literacy and awareness of ecosystem services.</li> <li>• Provide on-farm training and farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities.</li> <li>• Create platforms such as farm-specific conferences for sharing restoration strategies and good farming practices. Offer talks from the Department and Teagasc, including topics like organic farming and nature restoration.</li> <li>• Apprenticeship schemes to support on-the ground knowledge</li> <li>• Release state land to untrained farmers for training</li> <li>• More in depth training, with knowledge transfer, instead of the knowledge dumping that comes from planners just chatting with you for 30 minutes</li> <li>• Tech - led training for young formers</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9	7
<p><b>30. Local approaches and supports:</b> schemes and support should be locally led, as many successful initiatives have relied on local leaders, champions, and locally adapted targets that respond to specific environments. A stronger regional or cluster-based approach, rather than broad all-Ireland schemes like ACRES, would make measures more relevant and improve participation as it reduces risks for farmer involved. Local officers should provide tailored advice, like LEOs, while education should focus on place-based models. Good ideas are often locally led, rooted in local culture, and highly motivating for farmers and communities alike. A good starting point are CP (Collaboration Project) Teams.</p>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9	7
<p><b>31. Funding needs to be long-term:</b> Farming is a long-term practice, so short-term incentives and funding schemes are often ineffective. Plans and interventions need horizons of 10–25 years, and in some discussions up to 35 years, to support succession planning and long-term engagement in nature restoration. Language should move from “scheme” to “investment.” Existing initiatives, such as European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) and LIFE programmes, show promise but require longer-duration support.</p>	1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9	6
<p><b>4. Financial supports for biodiversity efforts</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase eco-payments within co-ops, ensuring remuneration is sufficient for measures such as setting aside fields for biodiversity (e.g. corncrakes).</li> <li>• Compensation should also cover designated land.</li> </ul>	1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9	6

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Funding schemes should account for inflation and consider tapering models</li> <li>● Explore multinational funding opportunities for all farming systems.</li> <li>● Ensure secure EU funding for alternative income opportunities.</li> <li>● Partner with large tech companies (e.g. Microsoft in County Wicklow) to support farmers through carbon credit and ecosystem service schemes.</li> <li>● Ensure national schemes (e.g. ACRES under DAFM) and the Nature Restoration Plan are adequately funded to deliver broad habitat improvements.</li> <li>● EU penalties on Ireland risk reducing production value, so Europe should offset farmers' costs for participating in eco-schemes to ensure long-term viability for both farms and the country.</li> <li>● Currently, funding is diluted as it goes to organisations for advice, to co-ops and other administrative organisations, rather than into the farming community</li> </ul>		
<p><b>21. Better communication to give farmers a voice</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Address situations where farmers' voices are drowned out or intimidated.</li> <li>● Ensure farmers have representative input in decision-making, including engagement in the design of policies and schemes.</li> <li>● Share information regularly with farmers in a clear, accessible format, including practical guidelines and updates on initiatives like EIPs.</li> <li>● Introduce an information service which informs farmers of benefits to them</li> <li>● Previously, many EIPs have done great work, but their recommendations have not been taken on board.</li> </ul>	1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8	6
<p><b>26. Standards and monitoring should continue to improve</b> <i>In addition to points in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish baseline data on the current state of Irish agriculture</li> <li>● Quantify the value of farming for nature and society beyond food production.</li> <li>● Promote locally managed monitoring teams and farmer-led self-monitoring with appropriate, nationally developed, training and tools linked to citizen science</li> <li>● Recognise the already high standard of regulation on nature, which is often a higher standard than other nations and competitors.</li> <li>● See carbon labelling as an opportunity to be explored</li> <li>● Create a certification for nature friendly land/resource use, PGI is an example at a European level.</li> <li>● Scorecard based schemes: Potential tool for engagement, but must include time for follow-up, context, and farmer dialogue</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9	6
<p><b>32. Learn from the past and from current good practice:</b> It's important to examine what has worked and sharing this knowledge so that others can follow. Good practice should be highlighted and supported. Examples mentioned include: Burren EIP, Bride Valley EIP, Burren LIFE, Refarm scheme, Wild Atlantic LIFE, Natura communities, European Innovation Partnership schemes, Arla in Denmark, the 'Horse's Mouth' mentorship programme, National Organic Training Skillnet (NOTS), the 'Water for Life' advisory committee, multi-species swards, and science-based breeding techniques for more efficient animals,</p>	1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8	6

MAHAIR Project which could expand to businesses, as well as international references such as the FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub.		
<p><b>11. Understanding of what farmers do</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public outreach and communication strategies should be developed.</li> <li>• Ecosystem and environmental education should be provided through the media to help the public appreciate the process and the outcomes of farming,</li> <li>• Consumers should be encouraged to choose organic and buy local</li> <li>• Develop a smartphone app to log and document biodiversity sightings (e.g. birds, plants) with incentives for participation</li> <li>• Public discourse should acknowledge the trade-off between ecological costs and cheap food.</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8	6
<p><b>22. Farming is overregulated, with too complicated and bureaucratic policies</b></p> <p><i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce “tick-box” processes to encourage genuine engagement.</li> <li>• Simplify regulations in meat production and agriculture, improving transparency to help farmers manage their work efficiently.</li> <li>• streamline farmers payments and reduce funding application barriers</li> <li>• Policy demands are overcomplicated by having competing policies that promote and advise different and sometimes opposing actions</li> <li>• Current bureaucratic approaches mean that for every scheme new administration structures must be set up, costing money. For example, 27% of CAP budget goes to administration, this is too high.</li> </ul>	1, 3, 4, 5, 9	5
<p><b>33. Results-based payment schemes:</b> Greater use should be made of results-based approaches that reward measurable outcomes for nature and ecosystem services. The shift from prescription-based to results-based models is positive, further implementation of schemes that directly link payments to ecological results should be encouraged.</p>	1, 2, 4, 7, 9	5
<p><b>34. Initiative ideas nature for restoration and biodiversity enhancement:</b> A range of initiatives should be supported, suggestions include reintroduction of species such as the white-tailed eagle in Kerry; better forest design with mixed, resilient forests; promotion and expansion of continuous forestry, and development of Irish-grown timber and local sawmilling. Opportunities in small-scale wool production and Irish tillage were highlighted for their cultural, sustainability, and economic benefits. Improving literacy and education around forestry, supporting non-conventional and biological farming practices on conventional farms, and promoting agroforestry systems are also important areas for development. Collaboration between the State and farmers to create conservation grazing on state-owned land. Adjusting grazing levels, predator management schemes, cut silage/meadows later to protect wildlife.</p>	1, 2, 4, 8, 9	5
<p><b>35. Flexibility:</b> There should be greater flexibility in the design and implementation of schemes, schemes need to suit farms, rather than farms having to suit schemes. Supports should be area-based, with a pot of money per farm that can be directed towards the most relevant ecosystem benefits for that land. Farming systems must continually adapt to</p>	1, 2, 3, 4, 9	5

changing conditions, and schemes should recognise this reality rather than rely on unrealistic historical ideals. Flexibility would also allow space to innovate and adapt practices over time, including adjustments to measures such as slurry spreading dates or hedge-cutting windows.		
<p><b>14. Soil health restoration</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support best practice grassland and soil management practices</li> <li>• Provide free soil, water, and nutrient testing, including on-farm microbiological labs (small and simple, fully funded).</li> <li>• Expand minimum-tillage or zero-tillage methods and encourage regenerative farming practices, including biological approaches on conventional farms (e.g., polar sprays, seed dressing, seed mixes).</li> <li>• Increase government support for regenerative farming initiatives.</li> </ul>	3, 5, 8, 9	4
<p><b>20. Biodiverse hedgerows</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more oversight on hedge cutting &amp; develop management rules.</li> <li>• Introduce scoring systems to reward farms with high-quality hedgerows.</li> <li>• Expand hedgerow schemes and support farmers to grow a variety of plants.</li> <li>• Include hedgerows in EPA records to track and monitor their condition.</li> </ul>	1, 3, 5, 8	4
<p><b>13. Predictability and clarity long-term</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a simple and consistent system within the agriculture department to help farmers engage and resolve issues despite staff turnover.</li> <li>• Develop a 25-year plan to 2050 with land use policy for long-term planning.</li> <li>• Additionality is needed – helping farmers incrementally improve practices.</li> <li>• Timescales need to change so policies/schemes can build on each other</li> </ul>	3, 5, 6, 8	4
<p><b>5. Nature and farming are not seen as in competition</b> <i>In addition to Table 1 points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reframe the narrative: nature restoration is not a sacrifice, but an investment in long-term farm health and viability.</li> </ul>	1, 4, 9	3
<p><b>15. Water availability and management</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement water protection measures and address changing weather patterns that reduce soil water retention.</li> <li>• Encourage farmers to create ponds and maintain small wet areas to support biodiversity, including initiatives like the “Million Ponds” project.</li> <li>• Scale initiatives like Farming for Water (EIP)</li> <li>• Promote catchment-level approaches where farmers can prevent water pollution, particularly where Nitrates Derogations are not required.</li> <li>• Recognise and expand work on floodplains to manage floods / water quality.</li> <li>• Support upland farming to improve water, reduce fire risk and invasive plants</li> </ul>	3, 5, 8	3
<p><b>36. Tax-free payments and tax relief:</b> Agri-environment payment schemes should be tax-free, which was seen as a potential game-changer. Tax relief and discounts could also be offered when farmers reinvest in natural resources, supporting conservation and sustainability efforts.</p>	3, 4, 5	3
<p><b>1. Enough income for a comfortable, stable and secure life</b> <i>In addition to Table 1:</i></p>	3, 5, 6	3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pension planning for farmers.</li> <li>● Organic farmers often do not receive fair prices for their produce, especially when selling through large retailers — this needs to be addressed.</li> <li>● Farmers want to be able to buy Irish food in shops at a fair price, without worrying about affordability.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>37. Farmer autonomy:</b> Independence and autonomy should be respected, with bespoke options for farming practices that incorporate sustainable practices and biodiversity. Farmers should be enabled to take the lead in developing and applying approaches that work for their own land.</p>	1, 3, 6	3
<p><b>9. Support farmer wellbeing</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scheme design should have a positive impact on farmer wellbeing.</li> </ul>	1, 5	2
<p><b>2. Farming should be made attractive to young people and new farmers</b> + Table 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Young farmers should have priority access to funding for nature schemes.</li> </ul>	4, 8	2
<p><b>3. Farmers are valued and respected</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Farmers see themselves as land guardians or “champions of the land”. Negative views - “Many farmers just think about money” need to be discouraged.</li> </ul>	3, 4	2
<p><b>6. Diversifying production</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduce diverse livestock options, such as bees in High Nature Value areas.</li> </ul>	3, 5	2
<p><b>12. Short supply chains and food systems</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop markets for additional organic production to prevent local leakage.</li> <li>● Address uncertainty caused by export-focused meat production.</li> <li>● Promote locally produced food in schools, hotels, and restaurants</li> </ul>	5, 9	2
<p><b>23. Research driven risk taking</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct research in consultation with ecosystem experts to support innovation.</li> </ul>	1, 9	2
<p><b>27. Farming advisors</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improve advisor-to-farmer ratios to enable meaningful support</li> <li>● Expand advisory workforce provide ongoing training, and capacity building.</li> <li>● Shift education onto farms through one-on-one visits and walk-and-talk sessions.</li> <li>● Encourage continuity long-term relationships for advisors &amp; farmers to build trust.</li> <li>● Reduce over-reliance on inspections, allowing advisors time to explain results and guide improvements.</li> </ul>	4, 7	2
<p><b>18. Communities and farms should be linked</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expand social farming initiatives that allow farmers to care for the environment while serving their community.</li> <li>● Connect NGOs &amp; schools to farms to foster active community participation</li> <li>● Explore ecotourism opportunities, such as seasonal farm activities, to strengthen local engagement.</li> <li>● Appoint trainers or educators to connect farmers and the community</li> </ul>	1, 5	2
<p><b>7. Sustainable future for farming</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Farming has strong intergenerational connectivity, which is widely recognised and celebrated within the sector.</li> </ul>	4, 9	2

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schemes should be designed to benefit farms beyond the funding period, building resilience rather than dependence.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>28. Women in farming</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support women in agriculture, recognising their innovative and environmentally friendly practices (e.g., Talamh Beo Women's Group).</li> <li>• Acknowledge and address the issue of unseen labour in farming, drawing parallels with women's work in the home.</li> </ul>	3	1

# Challenges and Solutions: Farming for Nature

## Restoration into the Future

This session began with a panel discussion around the concerns and barriers that exist to farming for nature restoration. The panel included: Colm Gavin, a hill farmer from Connemara; John Hardy, a dairy farmer; and Fabian Jacob, an organic dairy farmer. The discussion was chaired by Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin and panellists discussed a range of concerns around the future of farming, including the decline in rural social capital, the lack of trust in what farmers can do and an underestimation of their ability to steward the land. It was argued that change should be compatible with a sense of productivity and pride in one's work, with farmers supported to assess and score their own farms in relation to nature and water quality. The conversation highlighted strong concerns around the declining numbers of young people entering farming and emphasised the need for a clearer, more accessible path into the sector that addresses the challenges of financial insecurity and access to land. It was suggested that alternative routes into farming that embrace flexibility and inclusivity should be developed, especially given that many farmers are part-time. Fostering stronger connections between like-minded young and older farmers could improve access for the next generation and give older farmers confidence that their farms will be continued by someone who shares their values. Concerns around the Nature Restoration Law's rewetting targets were also raised alongside the importance of recognising that some areas may remain productive and that many farmers wish to continue farming them. It was highlighted that at the heart of the issue is the need to maintain production and farmer autonomy. It was noted that, for the Nature Restoration Law to gain broad support among farmers, any associated payments must be separate from CAP in order to remain truly voluntary.

Theme	Tables	No.
<p><b>4. Financial supports for biodiversity efforts</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include part-time and hobby farmers in funding schemes</li> <li>● Ensure that CAP payments and alternatives are aligned with environmental goals, allowing land under nature restoration to remain eligible, integrating incentives and penalties to balance support and compliance, and avoiding conflicting or competitive schemes.</li> <li>● Address issues with stacking schemes (e.g., ACRES vs. organic payments) to ensure fair funding and proper additionality.</li> <li>● Explore how to value ecosystem services including water quality and soil protection.</li> <li>● Nature restoration is time consuming for farmers (i.e. dealing with noxious weeds without herbicides) and it is hard to get people to help with this and the expertise needed. Fund technology/equipment to address this.</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	9

<p><b>25. Trust</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that legal contracts are reciprocal: if farmers meet obligations, the state must also fulfil its commitments.</li> <li>• Address tensions within and between farming communities, including generational differences in attitudes toward nature restoration.</li> <li>• Build transparency and credibility through roundtable events</li> <li>• Mitigate fear and defensiveness among farmers by using supportive language and involving change managers.</li> <li>• Improve relationships between farmers and authorities (e.g., NPWS), learn from past experiences and following through on promises and payments.</li> </ul>	<p>1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</p>	<p>8</p>
<p><b>21. Better communication to give farmers a voice</b> <i>In addition to points in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish formal mechanisms for follow-up after consultations, ensuring farmer input is transparently acknowledged and integrated into final policy drafts.</li> <li>• Shift toward farmer-led consultations to address perceived bias</li> <li>• Target key agencies (Teagasc, NPWS, Bord Bia) to ensure messaging reaches influential stakeholders.</li> <li>• Improve appeal processes for policy decisions; involve farmer representatives in designing terms &amp; conditions for schemes.</li> <li>• Provide information and communications at a manageable pace, respecting farmers' capacity to engage.</li> <li>• Facilitate co-design of restoration schemes with local ecological experts and farmers to reduce errors and barriers.</li> <li>• Encourage positive discourse when permissions are denied, offering guidance on alternative actions.</li> <li>• Enhance data sharing between departments to simplify applications and improve transparency.</li> </ul>	<p>1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9</p>	<p>7</p>
<p><b>22. Farming is overregulated, with too complicated and bureaucratic policies</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a coordinated framework across departments to reduce complexity and help farmers navigate bureaucracy.</li> <li>• Reduce overlap between schemes and objectives; ensure centralised databases and inter-department cooperation.</li> <li>• Schedule scheme deadlines &amp; requirements to better fit farmers' workloads.</li> <li>• Focus staff time on advisory support rather than excessive measurement and scoring of schemes (e.g., ACRES or NRP scorecards).</li> </ul>	<p>1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9</p>	<p>7</p>
<p><b>27. Farming advisors</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardise advisory services, including accreditation or chartered systems, to ensure consistent, high-quality guidance.</li> <li>• Broaden the remit of advisors to cover all schemes and ecological measures, ensuring farmers do not miss opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p>1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8</p>	<p>7</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure advisors provide farm-specific advice rather than standardised advice</li> <li>● Prioritise advisor support for nature restoration and agri-ecology, with paid, accessible positions nationwide.</li> <li>● Promote bottom-up advisory approaches, learning from examples like Burren LIFE, where advisors co-design biodiversity plans with farmers.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>11. Understanding of what farmers do</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase consumer awareness of where food comes from and the realities of farming; highlight that cheap food is not sustainable: "it's not 60 cents for a bag of carrots, its 5 euros"</li> <li>● Clarify the definition of nature restoration at the individual farm level.</li> <li>● Address the disconnect of younger generations from farms; use media and education (e.g., shows like Clarkson's Farm) to improve public understanding</li> <li>● Encourage farmers to educate the public and take ownership of communication.</li> <li>● Improve public communication on farms, e.g., signage showing contributions to wildlife habitat or nature restoration.</li> <li>● Support farmers in promoting their produce which supports nature restoration.</li> <li>● Run branding and public engagement events</li> </ul>	1, 2, 7, 8, 9	5
<p><b>13. Predictability and clarity long-term</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Address legal risks to nature restoration laws to reduce uncertainty for farmers.</li> <li>● Provide clarity on scheme duration and mandate responsibility (e.g., Department of Agriculture, NPWS, Department of Environment) to reduce confusion.</li> <li>● Ensure continuity across multiple schemes, IT systems, applications, and personnel to simplify management for farmers.</li> <li>● Promote long-term planning over reactive politics</li> </ul>	1, 2, 6, 7, 8	5
<p><b>17. More training and education</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide pre-enrolment training for farmers before signing up for biodiversity or restoration schemes, explaining the reasons behind recommended practices.</li> <li>● Offer grants and courses in digital and ecological literacy to build farmers' capability in response to climate and sector changes.</li> <li>● Expand knowledge transfer schemes beyond advisor-led programmes</li> <li>● Broaden qualifications for agri-advisors to include environmental science</li> <li>● Organise discussion groups and demonstration farm visits to illustrate the benefits of nature restoration and alleviate concerns.</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 5, 7	5
<p><b>31. Funding needs to be long-term</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Allow farmers time to adapt and make sustainable plans.</li> <li>● Avoid abrupt or premature scheme endings that leave farmers without income.</li> <li>● Use public exchequer funding to support long-term provision of public goods.</li> <li>● Address the risk of initially getting paid to reach targets, but schemes then becoming mandatory, turning an income source into a potential cost.</li> <li>● Ensure consistent payments for the 25-year Nature Restoration Plan.</li> </ul>	1, 2, 4, 5, 6	5

<p><b>12. Short supply chains and food systems</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure imported agri-food products meet equivalent sustainability standards to domestic production through labelling and certification.</li> <li>• Address the influence of global markets, trade wars, and recessions on local farming resilience.</li> <li>• Mitigate the impact of rising input costs; explore circular farming approaches and opportunities for farms to produce their own inputs.</li> <li>• Recognise food inflation risks, which may reduce domestic food production.</li> </ul>	3, 4, 6, 7	4
<p><b>5. Nature and farming are not seen as in competition</b> <i>In addition to points in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find the right balance between local food production &amp; tree planting initiatives.</li> <li>• Consider farmers' mindsets and cultural relationships to wildness and nature when designing policies and practices.</li> <li>• Address the commercialisation of nature, e.g., seed for multispecies swards costing significantly more than typically used seed</li> </ul>	4, 5, 6, 7	4
<p><b>38. Risk of political and interest group interference:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase transparency around agri-political lobbying through mandatory declaration of interests needed to ensure farmers' interests are protected.</li> <li>• The risk that small and part-time farmers may be pushed out of farming due to changes in schemes needs to be addressed.</li> </ul>	1, 2, 4, 8	4
<p><b>26. Standards and monitoring should continue to improve</b> <i>In addition to Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use farm-to-farm analysis to avoid unintended consequences from directives.</li> <li>• Develop systems to measure, report, and verify carbon valuations</li> <li>• Recognise that some factors affecting compliance may be beyond a farmer's control and adjust assessments accordingly.</li> </ul>	1, 3, 4	3
<p><b>2. Farming should be made attractive to young people and new farmers</b> + <i>Tables 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support intergenerational land transfer schemes (e.g., pairing older farmers with younger ones for succession and ownership).</li> <li>• Develop labour-focused schemes to address shortages of farm workers.</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3	3
<p><b>10. Incentivise and reward farmers for their biodiversity efforts</b> + <i>Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create incentives to encourage forestry, addressing current barriers to planting.</li> </ul>	1, 6, 9	3
<p><b>16. Policies to create, review or reconsider</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eradicate or update restrictive or conflicting policies that hinder positive action.</li> <li>• Align climate and carbon policies with nature restoration / biodiversity goals</li> <li>• Address indirect impacts of climate change on farming through coordinated, flexible policy measures.</li> </ul>	1, 6, 7	3
<p><b>24. Generational, indigenous and lived knowledge</b> <i>In addition to Table 1 &amp; 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• View farmers as experts in assessing forage quality and food security on their land.</li> </ul>	3, 4, 8	3
<p><b>30. Local approaches and supports</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more locally based nature advice and information to support farmers</li> </ul>	1, 2, 4	3
<p><b>34. Additional initiatives for nature restoration and biodiversity enhancement</b> + <i>Table 2:</i></p>	2, 6, 9	3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address barriers to native tree planting and agroforestry</li> <li>• Recognise forests and woodland on farms in carbon accounting, including past and current sequestration.</li> <li>• Consider multiple and competing land-use demands (e.g., solar, wind, nitrates, waterways, housing) and promote a consolidated vision for land management.</li> <li>• Avoid “pursuit of perfection” approaches that hinder farmers' ability to manage forestry effectively.</li> </ul>		
<b>36. Tax-free payments and tax relief</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer tax deductions or incentives for farmers engaging in sustainable practices, similar to models used in countries like Switzerland.</li> <li>• Create a system for farmers to share machinery, that is supported by subsidies.</li> </ul>	2, 3, 9	3
<b>1. Enough income for a comfortable, stable and secure life</b> <i>In addition to Tables 1 &amp; 2</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure departments complete payments promptly so farmers have security.</li> <li>• Address risks to farmers' bank credit scores when grants are delayed, as late payments can negatively impact their ability to access loans.</li> <li>• Address high price volatility to help farmers plan</li> </ul>	1, 3	2
<b>15. Water availability and management</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise that water levels may drop for reasons beyond a farmer's control, which can affect eligibility for derogations.</li> </ul>	1, 5	2
<b>20. Biodiverse hedgerows</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify and communicate correct hedgerow cutting periods to avoid mistakes.</li> </ul>	4, 9	2
<b>39. IT systems and digital tools:</b> Farmers face challenges managing multiple IT requirements. Systems should be efficient and reliable to avoid unnecessary delays or confusion. Digital tools, such as apps for form submissions and photo uploads, should be accessible for all, including older generations.	1, 9	2
<b>6. Diversifying production</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support farmers in accessing or creating new markets to enable diversification</li> </ul>	1	1
<b>9. Support farmer wellbeing</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1 &amp; 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce stress and fear linked to constant inspections</li> </ul>	8	1
<b>18. Communities and farms should be linked</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise volunteer Meitheal's for Nature, where local community groups help farmers during busy periods (e.g., hay making) &amp; build community connections</li> </ul>	2	1
<b>23. Research driven risk taking</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish robust data collection and efficient knowledge-sharing systems between government, landowners, and the public to support informed innovation.</li> </ul>	8	1
<b>28. Women in farming</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 1 &amp; 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address barriers women face in accessing loans and grant schemes (e.g., TAMS) to enable full participation in farming.</li> </ul>	3	1
<b>32. Learn from the past and from current good practice</b> <i>In addition to points in Table 2:</i>	2	1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid overly restrictive implementation of environmental legislation that can hinder farmers, learning from past examples like the Habitats Directive.</li> <li>• Address the risk of interest groups using legislation in ways that create fear or prevent productive land use (e.g., flooding relief halted at Lough Funsinagh).</li> </ul>		
<p><b>37. Farmer autonomy</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure nature restoration remains voluntary and not mandatory.</li> </ul>	2	1

## Systems Thinking – The Priority Changes

This final session began with a panel discussion chaired by Caitriona Morrissey from the Farmer's Journal. Panellists included: Gearoid Maher, dairy farmer and Farming for Nature ambassador; Derek McLoughlin, Wild Atlantic LIFE Project; Jimmy O'Keefe, Dublin City University. The panel explored a range of structural challenges relating to the delivery of nature restoration on farms. It was noted that while Ireland already has a wealth of case studies and project experience to inform an effective, well-structured national plan that builds trust and creates demand for participation, more work needs to be done to mitigate breakdowns in communication between farmers and agri-environmental schemes and avoid unnecessary frictions. The importance of clear, upfront guidance was stressed, noting that farmers need to fully understand what's expected of them before a scheme begins, in order to ensure long-term viability. It was argued that timely and consistent payments are essential, alongside greater flexibility in the administration of schemes to ensure positive outcomes on the ground. Farmers bring hugely valuable local and site-specific knowledge of what works on their farm, and this must form the foundation for any successful nature restoration approach. The importance of building networks of local farmers who can demonstrate positive, on-the-ground nature-based practices was also outlined. The panel also discussed the need for targets that account for the full range of benefits that agricultural land provides – nature, climate, water and food production – should be integrated to deliver a holistic, systems-based approach. This presents an opportunity to rebuild trust with the farming community by planning ahead and designing consistent, long-term payment schemes that go beyond fragmented pilot programmes and reinforce the importance of active farming that contributes to nature restoration goals in parallel.

Farmer-Led Visioning: Sustainable Livelihoods and Nature Stewardship	Tables	No.
<p><b>22. Farming is overregulated, with too complicated and bureaucratic policies</b></p> <p><i>In addition to points made in Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a leaner approach by stripping out unnecessary duplication (e.g., multiple inspections by EPA, nitrates, water, CC, Bord Bia, and Dept.)</li> <li>• Establish one well-resourced, trusted agency to oversee and streamline processes for the agricultural sector.</li> <li>• Provide easy access to funding through a clear menu of items farmers can pick from and claim funding through.</li> <li>• Use the Nature Restoration Law as a unifying framework to address poor policy alignment.</li> </ul>	<p>1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</p>	<p>8</p>
<p><b>30. Local approaches and supports</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish localised expertise / admin, supports and consultation (similar to LEOs but for farming) to allow for greater tailoring of supports.</li> <li>• Implement local autonomy for deadlines based on agreed schema that cannot be politicised, with local leaders justifying deadlines.</li> <li>• Direct communications to local offices rather than centralized locations.</li> </ul>	<p>1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9</p>	<p>7</p>

<p><b>4. Financial supports for biodiversity efforts</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign each farm a specific "pot" of income for nature restoration, allowing farms to decide with their advisor how to best achieve restoration using these resources on a tailored, case-by-case basis.</li> <li>• Compensate for any property/land devaluation resulting from NRP</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9	6
<p><b>17. More training and education</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the curriculum for agricultural education to promote eco-literacy.</li> <li>• Add ecological education to the Green Cert course curriculum.</li> <li>• Conduct an overall review of agricultural education in Ireland to promote eco-literacy, include ecological lecturers.</li> </ul>	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9	6
<p><b>21. Better communication to give farmers a voice</b> <i>In addition to Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address the disconnect between decision-making in Dublin and what's happening on the ground.</li> <li>• Involve different types of farmers when making policy decisions to ensure policies are inclusive.</li> <li>• Improve interdepartmental communication.</li> <li>• Include farmers on consultation committees from the start</li> <li>• Apply the principle "Nothing about us without us" in policy-making processes.</li> <li>• Inform farmers and landowners if their land will be affected by NRP</li> <li>• Prioritise human interaction in decision-making and planning ensuring room for in-person engagement to help internalise consequences of decisions.</li> </ul>	1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	6
<p><b>25. Trust</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust farmers to do the right thing rather than having inspectors focus on finding failures instead of successes.</li> <li>• Rebuild trust that has been previously eroded through aligned policies, better communication, and transparency between farmers and policymakers, especially during crises like fodder shortages or bog rewetting.</li> <li>• Nominate a trusted data dissemination authority (e.g., for water quality) to build trust and reduce misinformation.</li> <li>• Ensure open and transparent processes.</li> </ul>	2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9	6
<p><b>10. Incentivise and reward farmers for their biodiversity efforts</b> ++ <i>Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow the Danish ARLA model where farmers taking environmental action receive higher prices for their produce.</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 4, 8	5
<p><b>26. Standards and monitoring should continue to improve</b> ++ <i>Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly define what "locally led and sustainably produced" means for milk, meat, and grains with simple guidelines for all farmers.</li> <li>• Classify farmers by the size of their farms for appropriate standards.</li> <li>• Focus on improving farmer relationships with inspections.</li> </ul>	1, 3, 4, 5, 9	5

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eliminate duplication where soil samples are taken by multiple bodies (Dairygold, derogation, nitrates, Bord Bia, cross compliance) - integrate into one system and avoid making farmers pay twice for different tests.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>31. Funding needs to be long-term</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structure nature restoration policy to be long-term so farmers can access loans based on predictable income streams.</li> <li>Abolish tranches and replace with a rolling system for more consistent funding</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3, 6, 8	5
<p><b>5. Nature and farming are not seen as in competition</b> <i>In addition to Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritise farming interests over big business/big pharma when developing nature policies.</li> <li>Value nature beyond economic metrics, recognizing the intrinsic and educational value of biodiversity and ecosystem health.</li> </ul>	2, 4, 6, 8	4
<p><b>11. Understanding of what farmers do</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use farms as places of education for the public. Address the disconnect where citizens don't recognize the biodiversity in the countryside.</li> <li>Implement scoring systems that use eco-output to connect with consumers.</li> </ul>	1, 2, 7, 9	4
<p><b>27. Farming advisors</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deploy skilled people (currently known as Weavers) to help explain rules and schemes to farmers through regular ground-level interactions and who can address farmers' fears of doing something incorrect or lacking proper permissions due to knowledge gaps.</li> </ul>	2, 5, 6, 7	4
<p><b>1. Enough income for a comfortable, stable and secure life</b> <i>In addition to Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure payments are made correctly and accurately, not just promptly.</li> </ul>	3, 6, 9	3
<p><b>2. Farming should be made attractive to young people / new farmers</b> ++ <i>Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with youth to understand their needs and barriers to entering farming.</li> <li>Facilitate access to low-cost loans for young aspiring farmers to make farming a viable career option.</li> <li>Recognise that younger generations show greater openness to change and may be more receptive to new approaches like nature restoration measures.</li> </ul>	1, 4, 5	3
<p><b>33. Results-based payment schemes</b></p> <p><i>In addition to points made in Tables 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extend results-based payments to intensive farming, including payment margins and derogations.</li> <li>Consider alternatives of some actions-based rather than results-based schemes</li> </ul>	1, 4, 6	3
<p><b>35. Flexibility</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide flexibility on deadlines to avoid substandard results (e.g., Dutch hedgerows with risk of importing disease) and allow room to adapt.</li> <li>Create linkages between options for land use, giving farmers freedom to select standalone options for schemes to promote trust and adaptability</li> </ul>	4, 6, 9	3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design systems that consider ecological cycles (e.g., methane emissions in cattle are non-linear and part of life cycles) rather than assuming linear outputs.</li> <li>• Account for changing environmental conditions, extreme weather events, and new scientific information being released.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>37. Farmer autonomy</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support community-based leadership with external help provided only when requested, emphasizing bottom-up leadership approaches.</li> <li>• Recognise that allowing farmers complete choice in their land use may result in actions that harm one species, requiring balanced consideration.</li> </ul>	3, 6, 9	3
<p><b>39. IT systems and digital tools</b> <i>In addition to points made in Table 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address IT issues that are creating serious barriers in schemes like ACRES.</li> </ul>	3, 4, 9	3
<p><b>40. Collaboration:</b> is needed to achieve both farming and environmental goals; examples include: in larger catchment zones with fewer people, promoting cooperation rather than competition among farmers; farmers and environmental authorities, such as NPWS, working together to support production and nature outcomes; co-operative planning to set area targets and identify collective actions.</p>	3, 5, 9	3
<p><b>9. Support farmer wellbeing</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider wellbeing impacts in all new schemes and incentives. Respect farmers' time when designing programs and requirements.</li> </ul>	1, 4	<u>2</u>
<p><b>23. Research driven risk taking</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 1, 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct social and economic impact assessments to support research-driven approaches.</li> <li>• Recognise that asking farmers to change their practices is a significant request that requires proper support.</li> </ul>	6, 9	2
<p><b>32. Learn from the past and from current good practice</b> <i>In addition to Tables 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review past schemes from the last 15 years to identify what worked and what did not, studying projects like the Hen Harrier and BRIDE project for lessons</li> <li>• Learn from the water quality programme model, which is led by local county councils rather than the Department, with collaboration between Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) and co-ops.</li> <li>• Study the Farming for Water initiative within the EIP programme as an example of a more effective, decentralised model.</li> </ul>	4, 5	2
<p><b>34. Additional initiatives for nature restoration &amp; biodiversity enhancement</b> <i>+Tables 2, 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow flexibility in forestry land use, enabling land that was once used for forestry to be used for other practices instead of being confined to forestry.</li> <li>• Recognise that high nature value areas are often maintained by cattle grazing, and that replacing cattle with sheep in schemes like ACRES has led to biodiversity degradation.</li> </ul>	4, 7	2
<p><b>36. Tax-free payments and tax relief</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 2 &amp; 3:</i></p>	5, 9	2

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow farmers to save taxes by investing in nature-friendly practices instead of only buying new machines or boosting production.</li> <li>• Implement a levy on nature or food at supermarkets to generate funding through the national taxation system to target schemes.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>16. Policies to create, review or reconsider</b> <i>In addition to points made in Tables 2 &amp; 3:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure learnings from pilot projects are embedded into national policy to enable successful scaling, as many previous pilots fail to scale effectively.</li> </ul>	4	1

# Appendix

## Points Raised in Post-Consultation Submissions

This section contains additional points submitted by attendees after the consultation event on 9th July 2025. As the main report is organised by the four table discussion exercises conducted during the day, these subsequent email submissions are included separately here. Where these points relate to existing themes from the main report, the relevant theme number is referenced. Points marked with "0" represent new themes not previously raised during the table discussions.

<b>Points raised:</b>	Table
<b>25. Trust</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address specific distrust of NPWS leading Nature Restoration Law development due to past mismanagement of designated lands.</li> <li>• Farm families have sustained lands through centuries while NPWS approach has created hardship.</li> </ul>	9
<b>2. Farming should be made attractive to young people and new farmers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address the 80% youth emigration rate from Gaeltacht areas like Corca Dhuibhne due to environmental restrictions.</li> <li>• Tackle housing shortages in rural areas that prevent young people from staying in farming communities.</li> <li>• Remove regulatory barriers that prevent young farmers from developing their land and businesses.</li> </ul>	9
<b>18. Communities and farms should be linked</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing farming activity risks community depopulation as seen in the Scottish Highlands. Nature restoration must support rather than undermine the farming communities that have sustained these landscapes.</li> </ul>	2
<b>34. Additional initiatives for nature restoration and biodiversity enhancement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen recognition that High Nature Value (HNV) farming ecosystems deliver habitats of critical importance through sustainable farming practices.</li> <li>• Acknowledge that existing farming systems on many hills already provide valuable environmental outcomes.</li> </ul>	2
<b>1. Enough income for a comfortable, stable and secure life</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasise that farmers represent one of the lowest socioeconomic groups with income below average industrial wage.</li> <li>• NRL costs must not fall on farmers but on European citizens who benefit from nature restoration.</li> </ul>	9
<b>8. Food security</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise Ireland's role feeding 40 million people daily with one of the world's lowest carbon footprints.</li> </ul>	9

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Argue for increased production given Ireland's environmental efficiency compared to global alternatives.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>33. Results-based payment schemes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure results-based systems never result in zero payments to participating farmers.</li> <li>Address technical contradictions where species-rich grassland requirements conflict with greenhouse gas emission targets.</li> </ul>	9
<p><b>4. Financial supports for biodiversity efforts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply scientific compensation formulas (€185/tonne grass/Ha) for production curtailment.</li> <li>Ensure index-linked payments to maintain real value over programme duration.</li> <li>Recognise the high labour intensity of managing low-input permanent pasture systems.</li> </ul>	9
<p><b>0. Cultural and Linguistic Heritage Preservation:</b> Address the specific impact of the Nature Restoration Law on Irish-speaking communities and Gaeltacht areas. Environmental regulations are contributing to over 80% youth emigration from areas like Corca Dhuibhne. Nature restoration planning must consider the preservation of cultural and linguistic heritage alongside environmental goals. Gaeltacht farming families have preserved both land and language through centuries of challenges.</p>	9
<p><b>0. Historical Demographic Context and Community Survival:</b> Learn from the Scottish Highland Clearances (1750-1860) where habitat restoration priorities led to community depopulation. Comparable Irish areas maintain 4x higher population density than Scottish Highlands (886,538 vs 238,060 people). Farming activity has been the critical factor enabling community survival through historical crises including famines. The Nature Restoration Law must not repeat the Scottish experience of prioritising land use change over community sustainability.</p>	2
<p><b>0. Planning and Development Barriers on Designated Land:</b> Address the difficulties Gaeltacht farmers face obtaining planning permission on designated land. Environmental restrictions are preventing farm development and contributing to rural housing shortages. Lack of development opportunities is forcing young farmers to emigrate. Environmental protection must be balanced with the need for sustainable rural development.</p>	9
<p><b>0. Consultation Process and Facilitation Issues:</b> Address situations where Department officials dominate table discussions and prevent meaningful farmer input. Consultation time must focus on Nature Restoration Law development rather than defending existing scheme administration. Facilitation approaches that stifle innovative thinking and brainstorming must be prevented. Poor process affects multiple participants and undermines consultation effectiveness.</p>	9
<p><b>0. Scientific-Based Payment Calculations:</b> Establish €1000/Ha payment rates for species-rich grassland based on equivalent rental market rates. Apply Teagasc's €185/tonne grass/Ha compensation formula for any production losses due to NRL requirements. All NRL payments must be index-linked to prevent erosion of value over the 25-year program. Structure funding with increasing budgets to match escalating targets over decades.</p>	9

<p><b>0. Citizen Payment Responsibility:</b> European citizens who want and will benefit from nature restoration should fund it through taxation. Implement new taxation mechanisms equivalent to carbon tax specifically for nature restoration funding. Address the gap between what citizens say they value and their unwillingness to pay premium prices for high nature value produce. Farmers (lowest socioeconomic group) must not bear the financial burden of delivering public goods.</p>	9
<p><b>0. Hidden Acres Utilization Strategy:</b> Utilize "hidden acres" (underutilized farmland producing 4 tonnes/ha when capable of 8 tonnes/ha) for NRL requirements. Maintain current agricultural production levels while finding land for nature restoration from underperforming areas. Recognize Ireland's global leadership in low-carbon beef and dairy production as reason to increase, not decrease, output. Target NRL land identification toward farms with significant yield gaps rather than productive systems.</p>	9
<p><b>0. Zero Payment Prohibition:</b> Eliminate results-based payment systems that can result in zero payments to farmers (as occurred in ACRES). Zero payment outcomes are counterproductive to building farmer trust and participation. Payment systems must guarantee minimum compensation regardless of results-based scoring. Address the reputational damage caused by zero payment experiences in previous schemes.</p>	9

## Specific Points Raised by One Table

This is a list of specific points raised by tables that have not been addressed within other sections of the report.

### FARMING AND THE NATURE RESTORATION LAW

- Agricultural subsidies should support more marginal and extensive farms where land is less valued, as abandonment of such land poses a real environmental threat (Table 1)
- Ireland should transition from a framework of food security to food sovereignty, focusing on nutrient-dense, chemical-free, culturally aligned food production (Table 3)
- Sustainability in Ireland should not come at the cost of shifting environmental burdens to other countries (Table 4)
- Agricultural systems should become more energy efficient in the future (Table 4)

### OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION WITH A FOCUS ON NATURE RESTORATION

- Gene editing should be used more widely, supported by public campaigns (Table 1)
- Access to land and programs that complement new agroecological farming methods should be improved (Table 3)
- More Protected Geographical Indicators should be introduced, such as Connemara Lamb, to support international marketing of farmers' produce (Table 2)
- The 13 principles of agroecology should be implemented (Table 3)
- Numbers of organic farmers should be increased and supports for organic farming improved (Table 2)

- Individuals who will run European Innovation Partnership schemes should be identified, including farmers, advisory groups, and Department of Agriculture staff (Table 7)

#### **CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: FARMING FOR NATURE RESTORATION INTO THE FUTURE**

- The Department of Agriculture lacks sufficient ambition and does not provide adequate resources (Table 1)
- Abandoned and unmanaged land poses significant environmental problems (Table 1)
- A living document should facilitate ongoing land use review (Table 6)
- Ireland's national Nature Restoration Plan should accept and recommend that Ireland's farmed habitats qualify as agri-ecosystems and remain as agricultural areas (Table 8)

## Attendees (self-described roles)

- ACRES Breifne Corporation Region
- ACRES Leinster
- ACRES Munster South Connacht
- Agricultural Consultants Association (ACA)
- ATU Graduate in Outdoor Education
- Biodiversity Officers \* 2: Cavan; Mayo
- Breeding Waders EIP
- Bride Valley Tillage Farmer
- Burrenbeo Trust
- Cattle Mart Youth Representative
- Climate Action Louisburgh Locality clg
- Dairy Farmer
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine \* 2
- Department of an Taoiseach
- Development Officer
- Ecologist with National Biodiversity Data Centre
- Ecologist with National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- Educator and farmer
- Farmer \* 4 (incl. from Mayo & from Burren LIFE project)
- Farmer's Journal
- Farmers' Wife (Roscommon)
- Farming for Nature Ambassador \* 2
- Gurteen College
- Hen Harrier programme ltd.
- Hometree \* 2
- Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association \* 5 (ICSA) (incl. representation from Carlow)
- Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA) \* 4 (incl. representation from Cavan)
- Irish Farmer's Association (IFA) \* 13 (incl. representation of sheep farming & organic farming)
- Irish Grain Growers Group \* 2
- Irish Natura and Hill Farmers' Association \* 3
- Macra na Feirme \* 6 (incl. representation from Athlone; Cavan; Donegal)
- Organic Farmer
- Organic Farming Association
- Pro Silva Ireland
- Representation from Academic Institutes \* 3: *Dublin City University, Technological University of the Shannon.*
- Talamh Beo
- Teagasc \* 3
- The Heritage Council
- Tochar Wetlands Scheme (Midlands), National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- Trinity College Dublin
- Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE Project \* 2
- Women in Agriculture Stakeholder Group (WASG)

