Beef Taskforce
Minutes
Wednesday 21st July 2021
Virtual
2.30pm – 5pm

Attendees:

Name	Representing	Name	Representing
Michael Dowling	Chair	Tim Cullinan	IFA
Sinéad McPhillips	DAFM	Tomás Bourke	IFA
Maria Dunne	DAFM	Eddie Punch	ICSA
Pat McCormack	ICMSA	Edmund Graham	ICSA
Des Morrison	ICMSA	Colm O'Donnell	INHFA
Philip Carroll	MII	Joe Condon	INHFA
Cormac Healy	MII	Dermot O'Brien	IBLA (formerly BPM)
Joe Ryan	MII	Enda Fingleton	IBLA (formerly BPM)
John Keane	MACRA	Ray Doyle	ICOS
Derrie Dillon	MACRA	Padraig Brennan	Bord Bia
Aidan Murray	Teagasc		

Valerie Woods	DAFM Secretariat
Greg Murray	DAFM Secretariat

Attendance for specific items:
Joe Burke - Bord Bia

Introduction and overview of agenda by Chairman

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Market updates (June)

Bord Bia delivered a presentation on the current market situation which is available on - Gov.ie here:

Key points and Tour de Table

- **Live Exports Outlook:** the outlook for movement of live cattle to NI is positive due to current price differentials. In relation to Non-EU Markets, Ireland is competing with French animals and others for these. Indictors show that Turkey may be an increasingly active market later this year.
- **Variety of steak cuts seems to have reduced in stores:** Steak has been priced very competitively by Irish retailers to entice shoppers into stores, as it is seen as a "destination purchase". On average, a shopper who is purchasing meat spends 3 times as much as one who has no meat in their basket.
- **Live Exports to continent:** The Angus brand is very strong, more angus cross animals are now being exported (often from dairy background). Previously Belgian blues would have been among the dominant export breeds, but market demand and the resulting export profile continues to evolve.
- **Opportunities for live exports to abattoirs in Britain:** A niche market opportunity exists here, to supply some of the smaller abattoirs who may not require Red Tractor approved British beef. However, the 40-day residency requirement before export is an obstacle. Bord Bia is currently liaising with these abattoirs and will pass on findings to exporters.
- Tight Global Supply : Ireland are seeing a secondary benefit currently from the tight global supply situation and strong Chinese imports, but we need to be aiming for primary benefit.
- **Beef consumption in EU:** declining 1-2% per year across EU in the last number of years. Indications long term are that EU consumers are on average going to eat less beef: therefore, there is a need to build market share to offset the predicted contraction overall.
- **Exports to UK:** Exports to the UK were down by more than 20% earlier this year but now within 11% of last year's levels, after recovery in recent months.
- **Chinese market.** Regaining market access remains a high priority. Political and official engagement is ongoing, but the decision is in the hands of the Chinese authorities.
- **Labour availability issues:** likely to be a factor in future and may limit the industry's capability, in terms of specialist selection, trimming and packaging for high value markets.
- **2020 Exports:** 46% of Irish beef exports by-volume went to the UK, 42% to Continental Europe (France, Netherlands and Italy the biggest 3 markets) and the remaining 12% went to third country markets.
- **Boom bust model in Australia:** Australia at beginning of their recovery from drought, indications are that not much rebuilding of herds happening currently. Threat of increase in Australian beef not imminent.
- **Significant increase in US Exports: increase** Demand for beef in the US is very strong, particularly mince for burgers. The US has very favourable access to both China and South Korea.
- **Age Limits:** Age limits in different Member States were discussed and it was noted that preferences differ by country.

Review of Progress Report and Chairman's Report to the Minister

Chairman Remarks:
The Taskforce was set up to oversee the implementation of the agreements of August and September 2019. The actions, apart from those classed as ongoing, have been completed and therefore the Taskforce remit has been fulfilled.

The Chair then informed the meeting that he intends to recommend to the Minister that the Taskforce, having fulfilled its remit, should come to an end, but be replaced by a strategically focussed consultative forum for stakeholders.

Discussion:

The majority of Taskforce members agreed with the Chair's recommended course of action and many reinforced the view that a new consultative forum be established with some making the point that this would need to address the current topical issues.

There was a suggestion that a broader agricultural forum to address the key cross-sector issues of environmental & economic sustainability could potentially satisfy the requirement for a strategically focussed consultative forum.

The Suckler Brand Development Oversight Group, which was established as a result of the Taskforce, was identified as a key positive outcome of Taskforce discussions.

Other key achievements acknowledged in the Chair's report to the Minister which was circulated prior to the meeting included, the new immediate bonuses, the Bord Bia price index, the three Grant Thornton market transparency reports, information sessions with the Competition Authority and the EU Commission on the topic of transparency, as well as the pending the establishment of the Food Ombudsman/ regulator office, and the input of the Taskforce into the development of an application for PGI status for Irish Grass Fed beef.

MII clarified in answer to a question on the matter that the upgrading of mechanical grading machines was delayed last year due to COVID-19 but are hopeful it can happen this year when feasible.

A number of members took the opportunity to acknowledge the key role of the Chairman in bringing about the achievements of the Taskforce and Mr Michael Dowling in turn thanked Taskforce members including those bodies such as Bord Bia and Teagasc who assisted significantly with the market updates at each meeting and detailed studies on the grid respectively, along with the DAFM Officials for their contribution and the secretariat for their support function.

Chairman concluding remarks
The Chairman reiterated his commitment that his report to the Minister would be accompanied by a letter outlining that while the work of the Taskforce is complete, there is a need for a new forum for the beef sector for key stakeholders to discuss prevailing strategic issues

Taskforce members, with the exception of The Irish Beef & Lamb Association - IBLA, agreed with the Chairman's recommended course of action and many reinforced the view that a new consultative forum be established with some making the point that this would need to address the current topical issues.

Meeting Close