



Aonad Comhordúcháin na Straitéise Náisiúnta um Thailte Móna,
Cúrsaí Tailte Móna agus Ainmniú Talún,
An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra,
An Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta,
Margadh na Feirme,
Baile Átha Cliath 7
D07 N7 CV

24^ú Eanáir 2020

Public Consultation - Review of the use of Peat in the Horticultural Industry

A Chara,

The Horticulture Industry Forum (HIF) was formed in 2014 as a stakeholder group to address the critical issues facing the industry. The HIF currently has representatives from seven sectors, Vegetables, Mushrooms, Soft Fruit, Top Fruit, Potatoes, Amenity Horticulture and Protected Crops. DAFM, Teagasc, Bord Bia and the IFA are associate members of the Forum.

As an associate member of HIF, Teagasc has set out in detail, in its own submission to this public consultation, the key issues and challenges that are faced by the horticulture industry to achieve the successful transition required. HIF fully supports the information and analysis that is contained in the Teagasc submission, which was submitted on January 17th last.

HIF welcomes this public consultation on the use of peat in the Horticulture Industry. HIF understands and agrees with the need to move away from the use of peat. However, peat has been the basis for most of the growing media used across the industry for several decades and the extent of the challenge to find alternatives to peat that are effective, sustainable and affordable must not be underestimated. To quote from the Teagasc submission *"We believe that other bio-resources and renewable raw materials have great potential to be used as growing media constituents or as complete substrates, but the complexity of the challenge on a crop by crop basis, either for growing or propagation should not be underestimated in terms of meeting required characteristics"*. Extensive trialling will be required to develop and test peat replacements. Significant additional resources will need to be made available, principally through Teagasc, to facilitate the required work. In addition, to the R & D challenge and the time that will be necessary to facilitate a successful transition, by all sectors of the industry, to Peat free production; producers will also have to consider whether the identified alternatives are economically viable and whether retailers are prepared to pay the required margins to ensure crops are profitable.

As the industry will continue to need peat during the transition, HIF would support clarity around licensing and planning permission for harvesting peat to be used in growing media.

HIF would like to highlight the scale of the horticulture industry. DAFM sources estimate that the Horticulture Industry was worth €437m (farmgate value) in 2018, which is the 4th highest sector in terms of gross agricultural commodity output value – only Dairy, Beef and Pigs are larger. Horticulture has a significantly higher output value than that of the 2018 estimate for either Sheep €253m or Cereals €288m.

Horticulture Food represented €361m and Amenity (Non-Food) Horticulture €76m respectively of the €437m total. Within Horticulture Food output, Mushrooms accounted for €117m with Potatoes €80m, Field Vegetables €76m, Protected Fruit €42m, Protected Vegetables €32m, Outdoor Fruit €11m and Honey €4m. In relation to Amenity output, Nursery Stock represented €36m, Protected Crops €19m, Christmas Trees €9m, Cut Foliage Outdoor Flowers & Bulbs €9m and Turf Grass €1m.

The Bord Bia “Labour Review of Horticulture in Ireland 2016” estimated that 6,600 were employed full time in primary production activity with a further 11,000 employed in value added and downstream businesses (not including the wholesale trade). The Review calculated that in terms of wages earned, the total employment value of the horticulture industry delivered to the Irish economy in 2016 was €479m. Much of this value sustains rural economies

To conclude, HIF is committed to playing its part in managing a transition to a Peat free future for the horticulture industry. HIF emphasises that this transition will require significant additional resources and sufficient time to research and verify alternatives, and then to manage the transition. HIF supports the establishment of a working group to advise on how best to overcome the barriers to reducing peat use in professional horticulture crop production. HIF is keen to engage in Stakeholder discussions on how this challenge can be addressed going forward.

Is mise le meas,


Chairman of the Horticulture Industry Forum

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