Agri Cashflow Support Loan Scheme

The low-cost loan scheme, also known as the Agri Cashflow Support Loan Scheme, will open by the end of January according to the Minister for Agriculture, Michael Creed.

The lenders who will operate the scheme have yet to be announced yet however it is believed that AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank will all be included.

The scheme, which was announced in Budget 2017, will allow growers to borrow funds at an interest rate of 2.95%, while growers can access unsecured loans up to a maximum of €150,000.

The purposes for which the loans may be used include:

- Working capital requirements.
- As a more sustainable alternative to short-term credit facilities.
- As an alternative to merchant credit.

The loans under the scheme cannot be used for any of the following:

- Refinance of existing term loans.
- The refinance of undertakings in financial difficulties (as opposed to cashflow difficulties; this is defined in EU guidelines.)
- New investments.

However, by improving the cashflow position of their business through use of this facility, many farmers will be in a better position to negotiate and restructure existing loan commitments.

The loans will be available to all horticulture producers. To satisfy the requirements of the EU aid package, applicants will also need to satisfy certain eligibility criteria.
Teagasc Ashtown Mushroom Unit Development

Teagasc are soon to get underway with the construction of a small mushroom unit which will be used to carry out various trials and research which will benefit the industry. Work will start on the site next week with the aim to have the unit completed by April.

The unit will consist of:

- 4 growing rooms
- Compost handling room
- Casing handling room
- Workstation for recording data
- Office

This is a positive step for Teagasc as it allows mushroom research to be carried out on a Teagasc mushroom unit focusing on various different aspects of mushroom growing such as compost utilisation, mushroom diseases and moulds, mushroom casing, etc.
Teagasc –Penn State University collaboration talks

Dr Helen Grogan, Mushroom Researcher in the Horticultural Development Department, was invited to speak at the 2016 Pennsylvania State University (PSU) Mushroom Short Course, a Continual Professional Development event that is held every year for the North American mushroom industry. She gave a keynote presentation on the ‘Epidemiology and Control of the compost green mould pathogen - *Trichoderma aggressivum*’ which helped explain why Bulk Phase 3 mushroom production has struggled to succeed in Pennsylvania. Helen is also a joint Principal Investigator on an application with PSU’s Dr. John Pecchia on a USDA-NIFA grant proposal for research on improved mushroom substrate utilization.

*Dr John Pecchia (PSU) and Helen Grogan (Teagasc) at the PSU Nittany Lions football game prior to the PSU 2016 Mushroom Short Course*
Final consultation on Irish Renewable Heat Incentive scheme

The final consultation of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme to encourage industrial and commercial heat users, in the Republic of Ireland, to switch to greener technologies is now underway. The consultation sets out a series of questions on the detailed design of the scheme and seeks public feedback and suggestions on rules, which include:

- Timing of support.
- How payments should be structured.
- How to deal with different unit sizes.
- What sustainability and efficiency criteria to adopt.

Stakeholder responses to the consultation paper will be reviewed and considered by the Department prior to a final decision on the structure and design of the scheme early in 2017.

It is hoped that the RHI scheme will become **available at the end of 2017**, subject to Government and State Aid clearance.

This could be an attractive scheme for mushroom growers who already have biomass boilers installed on their mushroom unit and for those who intend investing in biomass boilers in the future.
Disease Treating: Cobweb (Dactilium)

Cobweb remains potentially capable of causing significant crop losses if not controlled. If the disease does appear, preventing the spread of pathogen spores has been shown to be a highly effective control measure. Early and comprehensive identification of Cobweb patches is essential so that they can be treated before watering takes place. Watering over untreated areas of infection will result in a massive spore load being spread throughout the crop. Here are the best steps to take when treating cobweb:

1. Do not touch the infected mushroom. (if the disease gets touched at any time remove gloves immediately).
2. The patches of disease must first be gently covered with damp tissue, to prevent the spores becoming airborne.
3. The tissue should then be covered with fine grained salt. The salt application should first seal the edges of the tissue to prevent the escape of spores.

4. Once the edges are sealed, more salt should be applied to completely cover the tissue and underlying patch of Cobweb.

**Note:**
- Protect casing from dust contamination once it has been delivered and during storage and application.
- Intensify crop examination once Cobweb has been identified.
- Never water untreated crops.
- To prevent spores becoming air borne cover all areas of disease with damp tissue before applying salt and apply salt carefully working from the out-side edge inwards.
- Turn off the air conditioning during operations likely to disturb spores (e.g. watering and tissue-salting).
- Cook out diseased crops in situ.
• Reduce crops to two flushes if control proves difficult

Contact

Please get in touch if you would like further information, if you have any issues you would like to discuss or topics you would like to hear more about.

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