The €150m low-cost loan scheme has been exhausted, with the recent announcement that Ulster Bank’s funding allocation has been fully utilised. The scheme was launched to allow farmers and agri-business SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) to borrow up to €150,000 at a special low rate of 2.95% to address the difficult market conditions that they have faced recently.

From March 7, new applications for loans under the scheme are being provisionally accepted and will be placed on a waiting list, in the event of any residual funding becoming available, according to Ulster Bank. Ulster Bank has taken a similar stance to Bank of Ireland, in that it will continue to accept new applicants to the scheme on a provisional basis, whereas AIB has decided to stop accepting applications.
Sporgon Note

Please be aware of the changes to the use of Sporgon in the **UK only from 01/02/17**. From 01/02/2017 only new label sporgon can be purchased and the new label specifies 1g/m² as the permitted dose with a 10 day harvest interval. Sporgon purchased before 01/02/2017 will have the old label and the old rules and must be used up before 31/1/2018. UK farms must use up all old label product by 21st Jan 2018.

This change is **only in the UK and not in Ireland**. My concern would be with the suppliers of Sporgon to Growers in the Republic, As most of the suppliers are from the UK. This means that the Sporgon suppliers could potentially be supplying new label Sporgon to growers in the republic which in turn would mean the new label would need to be adhered to it.

Could all growers check their Sporgon labels and the PCS number to ensure you are applying the correct rate as stated on the label as this would be a non-conformance in an audit situation and contact your supplier to ensure you get the ROI label. The ROI label is also under review and maybe subject to similar change in the future.

---

**Technical workshop with Walsh Mushrooms/Custom Compost and Growers**

Teagasc and Walsh Mushrooms/Custom Compost organised a technical workshop
for growers in Athlone on the 21st of March. There was an excellent turn out to the event from growers, farm staff and representatives from Walsh Mushrooms group. Brendan Burns from Sylvan Spawn company chaired the event. On the day there were presentations made by Mike Flannigan (Custom Compost) on Growing principles, Donal Gernon (Teagasc) on Harvesting practices and farm structures and Jimmy Gallagher (Walsh Mushrooms) on Mushroom Quality. The event was a great opportunity for collaboration between the compost supplier, the growers and the packhouse. I would like to thank everyone who attended and helped organise the event and I believe there was something for everyone to be gained from it.

Mushroom Industry make submission to 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 closed. Teagasc facilitated a meeting for the mushroom stakeholders on the 24th of February in Ashtown to identify the key elements that would be most beneficial to the mushroom sector, and that need to be advanced to the department of environment on behalf of the sector. This scheme has the potential to be advantageous for the mushroom sector and it was important that the mushroom sector had their say in the design of the scheme. The consultation set out a series of questions on the detailed design of the scheme and sought public feedback and suggestions on rules. Some of the key points on the consultation paper which were relevant to the mushroom industry include:

- Grandfathering (Growers who have already biomass installed on their site).
- Feedstock to use as a source of biomass.
- How payments should be structured.
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. It is hoped that the RHI scheme will become **available at the end of 2017**, subject to Government and State Aid clearance. All Mushroom stakeholders submissions were made before the closing date which was the 3\textsuperscript{rd} of March.

---

**Fly Control**

It’s that time of year when fly populations start to increase as conditions become more favourable. The first piece of advice I would give growers is to **MONITOR** fly population by using sticky traps. This involves growers/disease control personnel routinely counting fly numbers on these traps every week and taking appropriate action once the fly threshold is breached. In order to monitor correctly, the fly trap should be placed in the same location in every tunnel, should be counted on the same day every week and be recorded.
If you have a problem with flies, I recommend growers to take the following steps:

- **Prevent flies getting into the tunnel** as much as possible – Close doors immediately after filling/casing, focus on sealing the tunnels (no light should be visible in a dark tunnel) and apply a new filter to the air handling unit before a tunnel is filled.

- Apply **Nematodes** throughout the year. On the last watering after filling apply 2 million nematodes per m² with 1 litre of water - recommended rate Phase 3. For Phase 2 growers, Apply nematodes on the first/second day of watering. Bar pressure is site specific. Growers with severe fly problem can also apply nematodes after first flush. However I would recommend the second application of nematodes to be applied before picking the 1st flush if possible as fly populations have already being established by the time the first flush is picked off. This is a risk as pins can be marked.
• Fog **Pyrethrum** after filling and after breaking a tunnel. The safe rate of usage for pyrethrum 5EC when fogging is calculated at a rate of 0.05 ml per m² of bed area in a house, however this rate can be increased to 0.10ml per m² of bed area in a house during infestations. It is recommend to use between 2 and 4 Litres of water per 1000/m³ of room volume.

• Apply **Ficam W** only when necessary. You can only apply Ficam when the growing room is empty as it could contaminate compost/casing or mushrooms. Only apply ficam around the walls, lights, vents and edges of the door to get best control. Usage rate: 1 sachet + 50-100grams of sugar in 5 litres of water.

• Effective **cookout** – At the end of a cycle it is good practice to get an effective cookout to kill flies off before emptying a tunnel. I recommend getting air temperature to above 60ºC for over 4 hours to kill all pests and pathogens.
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.

Donal Gemon - Mushroom Specialised Adviser - Teagasc, Ashtown Food Research Centre - Dunsinea Lane - Ashtown - Dublin 15 - D15 KN3K.
Mob.087 2258647 - Email donal.gemon@teagasc.ie