

## Outlook 2025 Conference

Tuesday, 3 December

*Opening address by Teagasc Director Professor Frank O' Mara*

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this year's Outlook Conference. As we gather here today, we have an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and achievements of the past year, while looking forward to the opportunities ahead in the agriculture sector. We all know that sustainability has 3 pillars, environmental, social and economic. Today is a very important event on the Teagasc calendar, as we focus on the economic pillar of sustainability, and my economist colleagues will present their estimates for farm incomes in the year, and give their projections for 2025

2024 has been a year which demonstrated the resilience of Irish agriculture. It came on the back of a very difficult year in 2023, where incomes for most sectors declined, with particularly steep declines for dairy and tillage farm incomes and with poor weather in the second half of the year. 2024 presented us with a range of challenges, in particular weather conditions that tested the patience and adaptability of every farmer, alongside output and input price developments that helped to boost incomes this year.

The Outlook conference is about deepening our understanding what has happened in 2024 and looking ahead to 2025.

Over the course of the morning, we will hear presentations that shed light on how Irish agriculture has fared this year, including an exploration of the factors behind the recovery in farm incomes from the historic lows of 2023.

As we look ahead to 2025 and beyond, this conference is also an opportunity to align our efforts. Whether it's through sustainable farming practices, innovation in agri-tech, or robust policy frameworks, our shared goal remains clear: to ensure a thriving agricultural sector that contributes to the economic, environmental, and social wellbeing of Ireland.

At our National Dairy conference last week, controlling production costs to improve incomes and reducing the environmental impact were key themes. One example of where our technology research programme has implications for farm level economics and the environment is clover. Teagasc has invested very heavily in clover over the past 15 years as we see that clover is going to be extremely important in increasing the sustainability of ruminant agriculture in Ireland, as well as allowing savings in chemical fertiliser costs. We now have research on-going on eight research farms across dairy, beef and sheep systems at Moorepark, Clonakilty, Ballyhaise, Curtins, Solohead, Johnstown Castle, Grange and Athenry, focused on herbage production, animal performance, health and product quality, the environment, and in keeping with today's conference, on economics of production. Some of these studies have even looked at zero chemical nitrogen application. It is important that we push the boat out in research, and we are conscious that some

people would encourage us to base our advice to farmers on such studies, but in devising advice for farmers, we have to be cognisant of the totality of our research across all our sites. While there are many benefits to clover such as reduced costs, better animal performance, lower carbon footprints and lower purchased nitrogen balance, when giving advice to farmers we also have to be aware of the implications of very high clover levels for risk of reducing forage self-sufficiency in a poor year for clover as we had this year, and the risk of animal deaths from bloat. Now that we have such a large bank of research data, we want to ensure we are getting the most from these data, and that our advice is consistent with the research. Therefore we are commissioning an external peer review of our work on clover and multi species swards. This will help to ensure we maximise the potential from our research programme and help to identify gaps where further research is required.

Coming back to today's event, I would encourage all of you to actively participate in the discussions, ask questions, and share your perspectives. It is through this exchange of ideas that we can collectively address the challenges and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead.

Thank you for taking the time to attend today and I look forward to the insights and discussion we have in store for you.