

Brief Public & Private Sector

Regenerating Systemic Risk A Case Study on Ireland

A Case Study on Ireland
and the Impact Potential of
Regenerative Agriculture

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Regenerating Systemic Risk: An Irish Case Study

Public and Private Decision Maker Brief

Overview

The foundations of the current Irish agricultural system are cracking. It is supported by volatile imports and commodity markets, from fertiliser and feed to fresh produce, while degrading the water, soils and ecosystems it depends on. As the sector grows less viable, these pressures feed into rising animal and human health costs and a dwindling flow of new entrants, leaving Ireland with weaker food security, fewer farmers and thinner farm incomes. New entrants are no longer attracted to the sector due to unstable incomes, and existing farmers struggle to pass on their farm.

The Current Climate of Irish Agriculture
Farmers have spent more than €20 billion on feed, fuel, fertiliser, and plant protection products since 2020, with the broader population purchasing €9.6 billion worth of fresh produce. Over 80% of Ireland's fresh produce is imported, Spending on bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) sits at €600 million, with annual costs steadily increasing since 2020, despite rising herd incidence. Alongside animal health risk sits the climbing rate of diet-related public health spending, primarily for inflammatory bowel diseases (IFDs) and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like cancer and cardiovascular disease. Moreover, there are fewer waterways in Ireland in satisfactory condition than there were just 3 years ago, following a steady decline over the last 15 years, of which agricultural management is largely responsible. The nitrate directive derogation has been extended yet again to 2028,

continuing to enable a system that systematically pollutes Ireland's waterways. Emissions from agriculture are also a key barrier to Ireland achieving its 2030 goals, with an estimated cost of €8-€26 billion in carbon offsets (likely through the international carbon credit market). Finally, the generational renewal of the agricultural sector is in decline, with only 4% of farmers aged under 35, and 2 out of 5 farmers without a succession plan.

Collectively, these systemic risks are placing the future of Irish agriculture in jeopardy. EARA's Irish farmers are living the consequences of this reality, and have come together to offer a solution to fit into a broader playbook of initiatives. Regenerating forms of agriculture offer transversal and cascading benefits to the agricultural sector and those that rely on it by prioritising soil, plant, animal, and human health, reducing the dependence on volatile inputs, and improving the overall social, economic, and environmental performance of a farm. At scale, this enables the continuation of the agricultural sector, but at a much lower cost-base, all while increasing the quality of the agricultural produce and the health of those who are sustained by it. There is no one-way to install a regenerative system, and multiple pathways exist depending on a farm's given production type and climate and socioeconomic context.

A Regenerative Pathway to Resilience and Competitivity

This can be achieved at the national level in just 6-years, with the minimum enabling funding required at €3.7 to €9.5 billion. These estimates are drawn from EARA's network of pioneering farmers who provide a range of €150-€500 per hectare, depending on the different contexts and paces at which farmers will adopt regenerative management. They are also calculated from a set of documented case-studies within the report, that illustrate the diversity of approaches possible in the regenerative journey. Each case study details a dairy farm, to demonstrate how the journey is unique even when production type remains the same. Tom Stack, an Irish dairy

farmer, has eliminated all imported cattle feed and fertiliser, and reduced veterinary costs by up to 80% since before the transition. In August, his farm returned zero reactors for bTB, despite increasing herd incidence in his neighbours. Other examples from Portugal and Germany show that regeneration does not come at the cost of productivity, but at its long-term benefit, improving margins and milk production, while delivering key ecosystem benefits to the farm and the surrounding community.

Against cumulative input spending, a six-year transition can reduce imported inputs by roughly €9.1 billion, that is 44% relative to business-as-usual, with this number increasing each year as systems continuously improve. A stronger current account reduces pressure on foreign exchange reserves, lowers the need for external borrowing, and supports the State's capacity to service external obligations without paying them with reductions in services to the Irish nation. We equally provide an industry-specific example for Irish dairy, showing how a progressive premium for regenerative management would cut direct input costs by an average of 31.2%, or €337 million a year for only 10.4% less volume, and a gross output change of just -0.40%.

Ireland is self-sufficient in just three of seven food groups, despite ranking among the highest in the world for potential food security. Partially renationalising horticultural production would ensure the long-term food security of the Irish population while improving public health and regional economies. Integrating horticultural production is possible for arable and dairy farms, while providing a separate income stream for the farmer.

Financial Architecture

It is possible to enable the transition, but it requires the collective support of both private and public actors. Through performance-based incentives that map the ecological, economic, and social performance of Irish farms, our recommendations to public bodies and institutions are to:

- Create enabling conditions across ministries for a national regenerative transition
- Focus on transversal solutions that solve the root cause of problems rather than patchwork regulations and programmes to provide „quick fixes“
- Launch regenerative herd immunity pilot programmes to tackle bTB
- Integrate transition support schemes through education, advisory support and on-farm investment during ACRES 2027 programming before 2028 CAP cuts
- Ensure implementation of Article 10 transition plan for post-2027 CAP period, integrated with advisory and education
- Expand generational renewal support packages beyond initial installment grant
- Support local food security and sovereignty through public procurement around food and nutrition

Doing so would address the cause of these systemic risks, reinvigorate the agricultural sector, strengthen food and national security, ease the growing burden of disease and water costs, and open a realistic path into farming for a new generation.

Private sector actors are a key enabler of the transition through targeted financial instruments, and can support by:

For banks, lower and more stable farm costs mean reduced default risk and a steadier, de-risked lending book. For insurers and reinsurers, building resilience brings fewer and smaller climate, disease and yield claims and lower long-term exposure. For cooperatives, offtakers and processors, it secures a resilient supply base and a high-value, quality-led market position. For retailers, it offers a differentiated, provenance-led domestic supply with less exposure to import and price shocks.

Banks	Insurers & reinsurers	Cooperatives, offtakers & processors	Retailers
• Preferential rates and terms for regenerative farms • Finance for new entrants and local processing	• Price soil and water function into premiums • Underwrite the 4 to 6 year transition with shared premium cost	• Multi-year contracts and regeneration premiums • Reward lower inputs and better farm health	• Forward contracts for Irish crops and produce • Back local processing and diversification

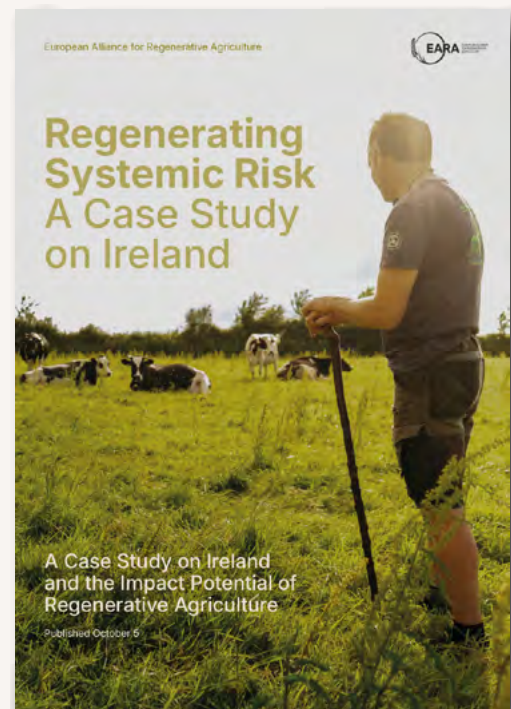
Blended Financing through Place-Based Transition Consortia

The regenerative transition should not be carried by farmers alone, nor should it be financed by just the public or private sector. Private-public blended financing offers a pathway in which neither party is solely responsible for the transition. Place-based transition consortia invites collective action from those who gain from a regenerative agricultural sector, banks, insurers, water utilities, offtakers, carbon and health actors, public bodies and farmers, to jointly underwrite operational risk across the four-to-six-year transition. Each is a place-based, farmer-governed risk-sharing agreement that finances transition within a defined landscape, underpinned by independent monitoring, reporting and verification. Financing is stacked, with benefiting parties fully covering the high-risk early years and farmers contributing more as margins improve, leaving them little or no exposure during the critical window.

Doing so requires a unified MRV that tracks core, measurable outcomes such as Soil Organic Carbon, Bulk Density and Soil Cover, drawing on integrated data from soil tests, satellite mapping and farm records. A shared MRV backbone minimises duplication, lowers costs and unlocks future access to carbon and premium markets. Successful, lasting transition must be co-created on the ground, in direct partnership with local farmers and experienced regenerative agronomists who understand the specific soils, grasslands, crops and conditions of the Irish landscape.

To access the full report visit and read up on the impact potentials of regenerating forms of agriculture for a strong, resilient Ireland visit our website under the link.

→ [Read the report](#)



Acknowledgments

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About the European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture

The European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture is the independent, farmer-led coordination, advocacy and collective action organisation of the movement of regenerative agriculture at the European level. EARA is striving to enable the transformation of our agrifood ecosystems through accountable ecological, economic and social regeneration.

More information can be found on our website at www.eara.farm

EARA is independently funded through mission-aligned, politically independent philanthropic partners and maintains no corporate or industry ties, ensuring our work remains farmer-led and free from commercial interests. We never accept funding that could have an influence on EARA's strategy or decision-making. All our funders decisively support EARA's farmer-led decision-making.