



HEMP FEDERATION IRELAND

June 24th 2020

An open address to the Irish Government; the Green Party, its leadership and members; our elected representatives; the Irish media; the Environmental Pillar, environmental scientists; environmental organisations and climate activists, on behalf of Ireland's hemp industry pioneers.

The proposed fibre-based development of the Irish hemp industry, in the Programme for Government, amounts to economic nonsense and environmental sabotage. Ireland's hemp industry is only economically viable if our farmers have continued access to the full use potentials of the crop. The transfer of the food value of the crop to the pharmaceutical and corporate food sectors, will completely destroy the core environmental value of our industry. Most importantly, (in the post 2050 context of global food security), control of this food should not be in the hands of corporations. It should be in the hands of small to medium farmers; that is where it currently is and that is where it must remain.

Our industry, in its entirety, must be enabled to continue to develop, as it has for more than 25 years, as a locally situated, SME based, agri-food and fibre sector. It is the sum of the crop's total potentials combined, and locally mediated within a fully integrated development paradigm, that constitutes the most exceptional of climate transition pathways. This is also the route to the fullest possible realisation of Ireland's actual economic opportunity in the context of global and EU markets. All state legislative, regulatory and financial policy instruments should be aligning to protect the potentials of this industry.

Since 2018, the Irish government has changed almost every rule and regulation governing hemp. The regulatory and legislative framework around our industry is now in total chaos. Interventions have been irrational, extreme and destructive in nature. They show little appreciation of the current state of scientific knowledge, and have severely damaged our farms, our businesses, and our livelihoods. The combined effect of state interventions has now produced a policy dynamic which is aligned to transfer the crop out of the hands of farmers. Unless this situation is immediately addressed the only hemp entering our food chain will have been synthetically grown in laboratories - Business as Usual will soon be wearing the new green CAP and PHARM to Fork will be the New Green Deal for Irish agriculture.

Throughout this entire process, the views of the industry stakeholder body have never been considered. Ireland has one of the oldest complete hemp industry supply chains in the

European Union and Irish industry pioneers are among Europe's leading industry authorities. Given that the modern hemp industry is grounded in scientific and technological advancement, and given that no government agency, including Teagasc, has conducted any research on hemp for more than 20 years, the exclusion of our expertise is so far outside the normal democratic process, that a serious state of exception appears to exist in relation to the governance of this industry.

Countless requests from Hemp Federation Ireland to be included in decision making processes have been ignored. At the same time, people with no knowledge of our industry were put forward to represent our views and interests. Last week, the leadership of the Green Party, without consulting us, agreed to the Programme for Government proposal for a fibre-based development of our industry. That same week, the plan was enthusiastically discussed in the media by people with no connection to the industry - our experts were not included in the conversation. The **only** people who could possibly stand to benefit from such a plan are pharmaceutical and corporate food interests.

We cannot understand who is informing government policy in relation to our industry but the industry remains very poorly understood across all Irish state Departments and agencies. While many of them would like to be informed, government bodies have been given no opportunity to understand how this sector operates, how it should be developed, how it should be regulated or where it fits in the context of rapidly expanding global and European markets. Despite huge Irish consumer demand for our food products, the government refuses to speak to industry experts and state agencies, particularly those under the auspices of the Department of Health, appear compelled to avoid all knowledge of scientifically based, rational and appropriate market regulation.

The Irish Hemp Industry Forum, is an industry-led initiative to establish a reliable platform for accurate knowledge-sharing in the interests of informed policymaking. There is enthusiasm for this Forum across state bodies and there is broad recognition that it is urgently required. Draft Terms of Reference have been agreed in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, yet to date, the Department of Health and key agencies within its control have refused to participate, as have other key government Departments. This Forum, with the support and participation of all relevant state actors, now needs to be convened without delay.

Therefore:

- Hemp Federation Ireland calls on the Irish government, particularly the Department of Health, and its agencies, to review their observance of democratic protocols; observe the requirements of informed policymaking; recognise the democratic value of stakeholder involvement in decision making processes, and; engage with the Irish Hemp Industry Forum.

- Hemp Federation Ireland calls on the Green Party leadership and its members to take whatever action is necessary to withdraw Green Party support for the Programme for Government fibre-based development of this industry.
- Hemp Federation Ireland calls on the Irish media, our elected representatives, the Environmental Pillar, environmental scientists, and the wider community of environmental organisations and climate activists, to understand what is happening to our industry and help us to defend against its final destruction.

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