



# European Parliament Election 2024

**ICOS MANIFESTO**

*“Strength in European  
Co-Operatives”*

**May 2024**

# INTRODUCTION

**Irish Co-operatives remain an indispensable feature at the heart of Ireland's rural economy. Co-ops underpin the success of Irish farming and food production contributing enormously to the vibrancy of rural areas, towns, and communities.**

**The Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS) is the umbrella body for the co-operative movement in Ireland – including dairy processing co-operatives and livestock marts – whose associated businesses have a combined turnover in the region of €16 billion, with some 175,000 individual members, employing 12,000 people in Ireland, and a further 24,000 people overseas. In total, there are some 1,000 co-ops in Ireland, and the largest 100 organisations employ approximately 40,000 people.**

## The Strength of the Co-operative

According to European Commission estimates, there are 250,000 co-operative organisations across the EU with 163 million members supporting 5.4 million jobs. On 9 million farms, 17 million farm owners and farm workers commit 365 days a year to ensure a safe, traceable, secure supply of food to the EU's 450 million citizens. A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united to meet common economic, social, and cultural goals. They achieve their objectives through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

Co-operatives have several defining characteristics:

- ▶ an open and voluntary association
- ▶ a democratic structure with each member having one vote.
- ▶ an equitable and fair distribution of economic results according to the volume of operations made through the co-operative.

Co-operatives are enterprises that serve the needs of their members who contribute to their capital. Looking to the future, agriculture, and food production with the support of co-operatives will be the key strategic driver to a more efficient, climate friendly, food secure EU delivering:

- ▶ Food security and autonomy.
- ▶ Carbon farming.
- ▶ Environmental sustainability.
- ▶ Renewal energy and bio-based industry innovation.
- ▶ Job security in rural areas.
- ▶ Third country food exports.
- ▶ Cultural heritage.
- ▶ Preserve landscapes and biodiversity.
- ▶ Guarantee healthy and safe food production.
- ▶ Ag-tech research and development.
- ▶ Implementation of world leading animal welfare practice.

## EU Targets

Co-operatives, and other organisations, will be required to demonstrate and report on their sustainability credentials in the lifetime of the next Parliament. Co-operatives are in relative terms modestly resourced. Implementation rules and frameworks (for example on the corporate sustainability reporting directive and the corporate sustainability due diligence directive) should be designed so that compliance is achievable throughout the agri-food supply chain.

As the European Commission commits to making Europe the first carbon neutral continent by 2050, farmers and co-operatives will continue to deliver to a sustainable future whilst complying with the highest global standards in terms of animal welfare, food safety and environmental protection. In 2024, the landscape to maintain the highest standards is made more complex due to a variety of challenges which are increasingly stymying the fundamental confidence of farmers, growers, and co-operatives in Ireland and across the European Union. They include:

- ▶ stricter compliance rules and regulations.
- ▶ high input costs.
- ▶ a devalued Common Agricultural Policy.
- ▶ severe weather events.
- ▶ a volatile marketplace.
- ▶ unfair trading practices.

- ▶ mandatory environmental measures with no financial supports.
- ▶ ongoing illegal invasion of Ukraine.
- ▶ chronic labour shortages.
- ▶ 1,000 farm closures per day across the EU.
- ▶ succession planning.

Most of the issues which impact on farmers and co-operatives emanate from the legislative process in the EU. Farmers and co-operatives are impacted arguably more than any other industry by EU Commission legislation.

## ICOS in Brussels

Since Ireland's entry into the then EEC in 1973, ICOS has had a strong presence with an office in the heart of the EU quarter in Brussels. As members of the EU farmers and agri co-operatives umbrella body COPA and COGECA, ICOS works hand in hand with other co-operative representative organisations from across Europe for the betterment and continuing development of the co-operative movement.

In Dublin and Brussels, we work closely with other COGECA members and like-minded EU organisations to represent the voice of co-operatives and their members. Our staff sit on various committees, working parties and civil dialogue groups communicating with EU officials, the various Directorate Generals (Agri, Envi, Clima, Sante), MEPs, Commission officials and fellow co-operative representatives on the pertinent issues which affect our members.

We work to promote the co-operative ethos, which is rooted in:

- ▶ Sustainability.
- ▶ Supporting & enriching rural communities.
- ▶ Giving power and a voice to small producers.
- ▶ Empowering people to develop co-operative models.
- ▶ Fighting for fair prices.
- ▶ Promoting gender equality and generational renewal.
- ▶ Training and upskilling our co-operative members.

COPA and COGECA are the united voice of farmers and agri co-operatives in the EU.

It is vital therefore that MEPs are aware of the concerns of Irish farmers and co-operatives.

Unfortunately, during the past 5 years, that has not been forthcoming from politicians and legislators in Brussels, leaving EU food producers frustrated and unsure about the future. If the EU Green Deal is to continue along the path of meeting its various targets, it is imperative that the new European Parliament and EU Commission work with farmers and co-operatives and not against them.

Together they ensure that EU agriculture is sustainable, innovative and competitive, guaranteeing food security to half a billion people throughout Europe.

Our MEPs play an important role in debating, amending and nurturing key pieces of legislation along the exhaustive legislative process from public consultation to plenary voting. We encourage our MEPs to work with us in helping shape policy which impacts so profoundly on farmers and co-operatives across the EU. We encourage our newly elected MEPs, in particular our rural representatives to choose the CommAgri and CommEnvi committees where they can have a stronger impact in reflecting the views and concerns of our members.

We invite our MEPs to work closely with us on this through regular engagement and two-way information sharing on the key issues and files which they will be legislating on during the new European Parliament mandate.

**The next European Parliament will be the most important in a generation for Irish and European food producers. The challenges in terms of maintaining food security and mitigating climate change will fall at the feet of our members more than any other sector of society. So, we are asking our 14 elected MEPs to take this into account when making decisions that will have a profound impact on the sensitive and delicate European food supply chain between now and 2030.**

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# ICOS MANIFESTO 2024 DEMANDS:



The ICOS manifesto, ahead of the 2024 European Elections, calls for a sensible and sensitive approach on key issues:

## 1 CAP Simplification

- a. Protecting a robust, workable, and well-funded CAP.
- b. Cutting red tape and bureaucracy.

## 2 Animal Welfare Regulations

- a. Being cognisant of Ireland's special status as an island with a strong reliance of live exports in the single market.
- b. Supporting animal welfare legislation that is practical and continuing to promote the ICOS charter on calf welfare.

## 3 Nitrates Directive

- a. Engagement with and acknowledgement from EU of the role co-operatives and other agencies are playing in driving improvement in water quality as part of decision-making processes in relation to derogation review. Regularly review developments in Best Available Technologies on Nutrient Management.
- b. A recognition of the social and economic success of the Irish dairy sector in derogation areas and the strict environmental rules that derogation farmers abide by. Support the nitrates derogation at 220kg/N/ha.

## 4 Promotion of Co-operatives

- a. Using the opportunity of "2025 UN Year of the Co-operative" to highlight at EU level the strategic and unique role co-ops can play in meeting the sustainability demands under the EU Green Deal.
- b. Supporting training programmes aimed at equipping the co-operative directors and board members of the future.

## 5 Polarisation of debate

- a. Ensuring that all institutions in the EU include farmers and co-operatives in the consultation process relating to files which have a direct impact on farms, farmer livelihoods and food security.
- b. Maintaining the spirit of strategic dialogue between all stakeholders across the environmental & agricultural sectors in the lifetime of the next European Parliament.

## 6 Generational renewal

- a. Prioritising the chronic shortage of young farmers across the EU as an emergency.
- b. A comprehensive EU strategy for generational renewal in the agricultural sector including a "socio-economic young farmers check" in all upcoming agricultural, climate and environmental legislation.

## 7 Climate action

- a. Ensuring a balance between food production and environmental protection that does not compromise the twin track goal of minimising the impact of food production on biodiversity, water, soil, and air quality whilst ensuring a secure supply of food.
- b. A fair and just transition for farmers forced to move out of primary food production due to severe weather events, drought, lack of successor or other climatic events.

## 8 Developing the bioeconomy including renewable energy

- a. Co-ops can drive decarbonisation across multiple value chains, using natural, renewable resources in a sustainable way, including renewable energy.
- b. Commitment to a definitive bioeconomy roadmap for co-operatives and farmer suppliers.