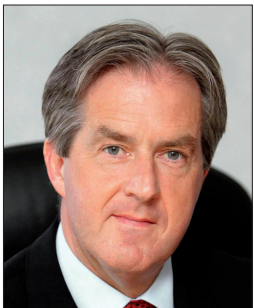


Agriculture leads the way

By AIDAN COTTER

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, BORD BIA



AIDAN COTTER was appointed Chief Executive of Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, in July 2004 and brings to the position a wealth of knowledge and experience in food marketing. Mr Cotter previously served in Bord Bia as Director of Operations for a number of years, and earlier gained extensive experience in the marketplace as the organisation's European Director, based in its London office, and prior to that in Dusseldorf. He holds an MBA from Cranfield School of Management in the UK and has Masters degrees in Economic Science and Agricultural Economics from University College, Dublin.

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Bord Bia is charged with the responsibility of promoting and developing the Irish food, drink and horticulture industries. Given that collectively, between farming, fishing and processing, the agri-industry employs some 150,000 people and has an annual output of over €24 billion, accounting for 65 per cent of indigenous manufacturing, the importance of the organisation is clear.

Bord Bia was established in 1994 to promote and market the natural produce of Ireland internationally and domestically. The UK accounts for about 40 per cent of our export market, with the EU accounting for 30 per cent and the remaining 30 per cent goes beyond EU borders. With half a million tonnes per annum, we are the largest net exporter of beef in the Northern hemisphere.

The strategy of Bord Bia has been clearly mapped out in a number of documents; its own strategic priorities document, the "Pathways for Growth" document that was produced in collaboration with Harvard Business School and "Food Harvest 2020", a comprehensive report from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. "Food Harvest 2020" was based on a forensic analysis by a consultative group of 30 experts that produced 209 recommendations.

The Irish Agri-food industry accounts for 16 per cent of total industrial sector output, generating export revenues of €8 billion. Our goal is to work with the industry to grow exports to €12 billion over the next ten years.

We intend to expand the industry's horizons under the banner of "Smart Green Growth". Capitalising on Ireland's association with all things green affords the industry the opportunity to align 'Brand Ireland' with

the ethos of green produce and production methods. The industry development plans therefore calls for a range of new implementations in the agri-industry that will lend credence to this forthcoming brand identity. According to the Food Harvest 2020 plan, "this 'green' image must be refined and substantiated by scientific evidence and communicated effectively over the coming decade if Ireland's commitment to sustainability and the implementation of world-class environmental practices is to become a platform for export growth."

Given the population demographics globally, the facts as they stand dictate that the world must produce 70 per cent more food over the next four decades. By 2030, the world food supply has to grow by 42 per cent. Increasingly, there are questions about the world's capacity to meet these needs. Combine these factors with the compounding issues of water scarcity, bio-security and climate change, and we see a complex picture come into view. As a small agricultural island, we have to look at the opportunities here to meet this increased demand, doing so in an environmentally sustainable way.

Ireland's green credentials are just one of the many factors which have underpinned the development of Ireland's strong position as a key import supplier to the UK market with a history of trade dating back to the 16th century. In addition the two markets share similar food cultures, comparable production and quality standards, a tradition of family owned farms and extensive farming systems, close physical proximity and of course a common language. The Irish food and drink industry values its position in the British market and is protective of the reputation for quality products, innovation and service on which it has developed enduring relationships with customers across all trade channels and all around the country. The trade relationship between the two markets is reinforced by a mutual interdependency reflected in the fact that just as Britain is Ireland's leading export market for food and drink, Ireland in turn is the key destination for British food and drink exports.

The visit of Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh to Ireland affords a unique and welcome opportunity to celebrate the closeness of the two countries and the strength of the commercial ties that bind them. We wish them an enjoyable stay and hope that they will have many opportunities to enjoy Irish food and drink to the full.

