Ireland's EU Council Presidency 2026: Agriculture and Fisheries Priorities

by Matthew G. O'Neill and David O'Grady

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Executive Summary and Key Findings

The Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union commenced on 1 July 2026 and will run until 31 December. During this brief six-month stint, the Irish Presidency will be tasked with taking forward a number of important agricultural and fisheries files, at an important moment for EU food and farming policy.

The Presidency's work in this area is shaped by three converging pressures: the negotiation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2027; the integration of agricultural funding into the new National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP) structure; and the need to advance a sustainable livestock strategy that reflects both environmental obligations and the economic realities facing farmers across the EU. As set out in the Council of the European Union's General Secretariat document 10983/26, there is significant focus on what a post-2027 CAP will look like and how trade will react to geopolitical dynamics.[2,23]

Key takeaways:

- The Irish Presidency has identified four core priority areas: the common framework for CAP post-2027; sustainable livestock systems; generational renewal in agriculture and fisheries; and the bioeconomy and rural development.[2,16]
- Simplification of the CAP is a central ambition. The Presidency interprets this not as a regression in policy ambition, but as making existing rules more transparent, coherent, and accessible to farmers.[2,3]
- Ireland's CAP allocation for the 2028–2034 period is provisionally set at €8.16 billion, representing over two thirds of Ireland's total NRPP allocation. Combined with national co-financing, total agricultural spending is projected at €11.4 billion.[7,8,18]
- Progress on the CAP Regulation is contingent on agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The Presidency aims to achieve a Partial General Approach on the CAP Regulation during its term, with full trilogue negotiations expected to continue under the Lithuanian Presidency.[4,6,17]
- Fisheries negotiations, which will include annual quota-setting with Norway and the United Kingdom, will place significant demands on the Council agenda between September and December 2026.[21,23]
- Generational renewal will serve as a cross-cutting theme across all legislative discussions, reflecting concern over the ageing profile of the European farming population.[2,14]

1. Context and Presidency Priorities

Ireland's 2026 Presidency comes at a critical juncture in the development of EU wide agricultural policy.[2,23] The measures agreed during this period will set the framework for EU agricultural and fisheries policy for the following seven years. Against a backdrop of geopolitical instability, rising input costs, and intensifying environmental obligations, the Irish Presidency has structured its work around a number of core thematic priorities. Ireland's main themes for this Presidency include; competitiveness, values, and security.[2] The themes highlight the intention for strengthening European unity and continuing the Union's supportive engagement in ongoing global crises.

In terms of agricultural policy, the overarching framework for Ireland's Presidency can be summarised as follows: a common framework for the future of EU agriculture; the role of sustainable livestock in European food systems; support for generational renewal; and the development of the bioeconomy.[2,10,16,20] These themes will feature across formal Agriculture and Fisheries Council meetings as well as informal ministerial discussions taking place in Ireland.

A number of Agriculture and Fisheries Council meetings have been scheduled to take place from July 2026 to mid-December 2026. The meetings will take place primarily in Brussels, with one meeting taking place in Luxembourg. The agenda, as set out in document 10983/26, outlines the timeline for these meetings.[23] Please see the timeline below:

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL MEETINGS

JULY 13	• Livestock strategy and protein plan • Agricultural Trade Issues • Women in Agriculture • Adopted: targeted measures to support farmers facing high fertiliser costs[1]
SEPTEMBER 28-29	• Post 2027 CAP proposals • EU-UK Annual Consultations on 2027 fishing opportunities • EU-Norway, EU-Norway-UK consultations for 2027
OCTOBER 26-27	• Post 2027 CAP proposals • Agricultural Trade Issues • Council Regulation fixing for 2027 the fishing opportunities applicable in the Baltic Sea • Annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas
NOVEMBER 23	• Post 2027 CAP proposals • Market situation following the invasion of Ukraine • 2026 annual progress report on simplification • Implementation, and enforcement (animal health and welfare, plants, and plant health, food and feed safety) • Council regulation fixing for 2027 and for certain stocks for 2028 fishing opportunities in the Atlantic and the North Sea, Council Regulation fixing for 2027 the fishing opportunities in the Mediterranean and the Black Seas • Communication on the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture and the external dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy

2. Simplification as a Policy Principle

Simplification of EU agricultural legislation is a recurring Presidency objective, but the Irish Presidency has sought to define it with greater precision.[2,3] For Ireland, simplification does not mean a withdrawal of regulatory ambition. Rather, it means making the system easier to administer and more comprehensible to those who operate within it.

Key concerns raised by farmers across Member States include the absence of joined-up thinking across EU programmes, the existence of multiple funding schemes with unclear eligibility criteria, and insufficient transparency regarding payment conditions. The Presidency's approach to simplification prioritises a digital-first approach to audits and inspections, greater coherence across schemes, and clearer communication of what farmers must do to receive payments.[2,15] This is a thread that will run through all legislative discussions and policy initiatives undertaken during the term.

The EU Commission launched a major "stress test" of the Birds and Habitats Directives in May 2026, building on the results of a previous review conducted in 2016. The review feeds into a wider EU focus on competitiveness and aims to simplify administrative burdens in environmental legislation.[24] The core objectives of the review look at the following topics:

- Application of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, with a focus on the appropriate assessment for procedure for Natura 2000 sites.[24]
- Policy coherence, stakeholder participation, funding support and governance.[24]
- Species protection and derogations, and procedures, for adapting the annexes to scientific and technical progress.[24]

The review will have both economic and social implications with the intention to reduce the administrative and financial costs that burden stakeholders. The stress test is positioned as part of a wider Environmental Simplification package which aims to advance and improve overall efficiency of environmental assessments.[3]

3. The CAP Post-2027: Issues, Options, and Implications

3.1 The new funding architecture

From 2028, the CAP and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) will sit within the new National and Regional Partnership Plan structure, replacing the previous system of separate funds.[7,18] Under this arrangement, the CAP and CFP will have pre-allocated funding envelopes for each Member State. Ireland's provisional NRPP allocation stands at €12.2 billion, of which €8.6 billion is designated for the CAP and €54 million for the CFP.[7,8,18] The CAP allocation alone represents approximately 67% of Ireland's total NRPP envelope, underlining the centrality of agricultural funding to Ireland's broader EU funding.

Ireland's present CAP allocation stands at €10.7 billion for the current CAP 2023–2027 period (often referred to as the 2021-2027 budget cycle due to the transitional years). The proposed allocation for 2028–2034 is €8.16 billion, with total agricultural spending (including national co-financing) projected at €11.4 billion.[8,18,19] While this represents a marginal nominal increase, inflationary pressures and the expansion of policy objectives mean that funding constraints will remain a defining feature of the coming period.

As an export-oriented agricultural beneficiary, Ireland receives similarly substantial CAP payments in comparison to other EU Member States such as France, Poland, and Spain. The difference between Ireland and these countries lies heavily in population, vulnerability to market shocks, and most importantly the specialism of the agricultural business model in Ireland. Comparing the domestic Irish market to comparative EU Member States highlights the importance of the Irish Presidency's focus on competitiveness in the EU market.[2,15,20] It is important to highlight the specialism of Ireland's agricultural model which focuses heavily on dairy and beef exports. The model plays an essential role in sustaining agricultural farming families in rural Ireland, combatting the growing social issue of generational renewal.

3.2 The Presidency's legislative objectives

The Irish Presidency's primary legislative objective on the CAP is to achieve a Partial General Approach on the agricultural elements of the CAP Regulation, that is, to reach political agreement among Member States on all provisions within the competence of Agricultural and Fisheries Council.[6,25] Provisions linked to the Multiannual Financial Framework will remain in brackets pending resolution of the wider budget negotiations.

A notable development under the preceding Cypriot Presidency was the achievement, at the General Affairs Council on 16 June, of a Partial General Approach on the NRPP.[7,17] This means that the elements of the NRPP under General Affairs Council competence have been agreed, with brackets remaining only for provisions tied to the MFF. The Irish Presidency intends to mirror this progress on the CAP file. The newly agreed architecture will legally require Member States to draft individual Regional partnership plans.[7]

A key structural change under the new architecture concerns the definition of an 'active farmer'. Under the Danish Presidency, negotiations resulted in this definition, along with the definitions of agricultural activity and eligible hectares, being placed within the CAP Regulation rather than the NRPP. This is considered a significant outcome by Ireland and other Member States who argued that such definitions should remain under the competence of agricultural ministers rather than finance and expenditure ministers.

3.3 Key outstanding issues

A number of contentious issues remain to be resolved in Council discussions. These include:

- The level of flexibility afforded to Member States in implementing environmental conditionality provisions, which varies significantly in its implications across Member States with different farming structures and land use patterns.[6,17]
- The balance between mandatory earmarking and Member State discretion in the allocation of funds, particularly for environmental and climate schemes, which remains contested between Member States favouring greater subsidiarity and those seeking stronger common standards.[6,17]
- The pension provisions for farmers, which affect Member States differently and remain under active discussion.
- The Common Market Organisation (CMO) Regulation, which is a separate but related file governing market stability measures and the agricultural reserve.

The Presidency's role in navigating these issues is to identify landing zones, positions that all Member States can accept, even where they do not reflect each party's preferred outcome. Substantive policy debates on the future of the CAP are expected at the September, October, and November Agriculture and Fisheries Councils, with the green architecture of the CAP and generational renewal proposals expected to feature prominently.[6,17,24]

Generational renewal remains a priority of Ireland's Department of Agriculture, citing that that partnership schemes explored in the past were imperfect and ignored the value older farmers contribute to the farm. Martin Heydon, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, has recently highlighted the importance of sustaining "part-time" farms and protecting the viability of farming in Ireland, as the demand for food production in Ireland increases, so must the budget for supports. Competitiveness, as well as predictability in EU Agricultural policy remains a priority of the Irish Government to entice new entrants and promote the acceptance of farm succession.[26]

3.4 The ring-fenced minimum: a floor or a ceiling?

The current and ongoing debate about the post-2027 negotiations have moved past the size of the CAP itself, but what is the current statues of the amount that will be guaranteed to it. The Commission Proposal set out a CAP proposal which would absorb into it the National and Regional Partnership Fund with an envelope with some of the €865 billion.[4,7,8,17]

4. Sustainable Livestock Systems

The Irish Presidency views sustainable livestock as central to the future of EU agriculture. This priority is reflected in Ireland's decision to frame its Informal Meeting of Agriculture Ministers — to be held in Ireland during the Presidency, around livestock farming, with a particular focus on Ireland's grass-based production systems and the data and genotyping work undertaken in relation to the national herd.

A livestock strategy and associated workstream have been in development for some time at EU level. Ireland has advanced these developments during its Presidency, by publishing the Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan in July 2026.[5,9,16] The Presidency's position is that EU livestock farmers are world leaders in terms of production standards, animal welfare, and environmental efficiency relative to global comparators, and that this should be acknowledged and supported within the policy framework.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) evaluates global livestock supply chains emissions across six primary animal species using the Global Livestock Environmental Assessment Model (GLEAM) framework.[11] Similarly, the FAO is emphasising "emissions intensity" as an indicator for increases in animal greenhouse gas emissions. The FAO's comparative data identifies that as animal productivity increases; emissions intensity decreases exponentially. Equally, the European Commission has committed to further developing their long-term vision for livestock in the EU. The Commission's livestock strategy supports farmers by building on sustainable practices, increasing animal health and welfare, improving resource efficiency and ultimately create solutions to climate related problems.[3,11] It had been recommended for the Commission to focus on three key areas when developing their livestock strategy; Sustainability and Resilience, Animal Welfare, and Competitiveness.[3,11]

The European Commission's Vision for Agriculture and Food will continue to shape the trajectory of EU's Vision 2040 target.[3] Ireland's chosen theme of competitiveness echoes the priorities of the European Commission's Vision for Agriculture and Food by deepening the sector's position in global markets. The EU's agri-food sector currently represents about 30 million jobs, but with continued efforts toward Vision 2040, the European Commission can help ensure that farming remains a financially viable, incentivising ecosystem that offers opportunities to younger populations and those in rural areas. The Vision will review unfair trading practices in the Common Market Organisation Regulation as well as pivotally shaping a fairer and simpler Common Agricultural Policy.[3,5] Equally, strategies for bioeconomy and generational renewal remain central to the Commission's objective of building an attractive and sustainable agri-food sector.

The livestock strategy is conceived as a framework applicable across all production systems rather than as a prescriptive model[1]. It should, in the Presidency's view, create the conditions for sustainable and resilient livestock production across the EU, responding to consumer demand and ensuring that farming operations are not placed at a competitive disadvantage relative to third-country producers.

The Informal Agriculture Ministers meeting will showcase Ireland's genotyping programme for the national herd, work on grass-based emissions reduction, multi-species sward management, and the Origin Green quality assurance scheme operated by Bord Bia. The Presidency will also seek to progress the animal welfare during transport file, which has been under discussion for several years.

5. Fisheries

As a second-half-of-year Presidency, Ireland's Agriculture and Fisheries Council agenda will be significantly shaped by the annual fisheries negotiations that take place between September and December. These include the setting of Total Allowable Catches and quota allocations for Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean stocks, as well as negotiations with Norway and the United Kingdom on shared fish stocks. Since the UK's departure from the EU, fishing in the North Sea has been bound by trilateral negotiations. The 2026 quotas for the North Sea were agreed trilaterally, with 343,000 tonnes worth €609 million for EU fleets.[22] The Irish Presidency faces the challenge of facilitating the discussions regarding the 2027 quota round. The negotiations are majorly important to protect and help build sustainable incomes for coastal families who are dependent on fisheries income.

1 This will include intensive systems for pigs and poultry as well as pasture-based ruminant systems.

Securing a timely and stable outcome from these negotiations is a primary operational objective of the Presidency, as failure to conclude by the end of the calendar year would leave EU fishing fleets without legal authorisation to operate. The December Agriculture and Fisheries Council is traditionally the mechanism through which these negotiations are concluded, with ministers required to reach agreement before dispersing. Stakeholder groups are concerned that the role of the European Presidency and concluding on an EU-wide agreement will affect national quotas. There will be an informal meeting of the fisheries ministers in Cork from 28 to 29 July 2026.[13] The meeting will provide an important opportunity for ministers to engage on key fisheries issues ahead of the December negotiations. This will help to build consensus and support an outcome that safeguards Ireland's fisheries interests.

Beyond the annual cycle, the Irish Presidency intends to use the Informal Fisheries Ministers meeting to set the tone for a longer-term debate on the future of the sector.[13] The evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy is expected to inform discussion on how to develop EU fisheries policy sustainably, and the Presidency aims to ensure that fisheries receive appropriate priority in the Council's work programme rather than being treated as secondary to agricultural policy.[12,21] Reflecting on over a decade's worth of "mixed results", the CFP has found that sustainable fishing has increased from 50% to 63%.[21] This positive increase represents stimulated growth despite persistent economic shocks. Ireland 's Presidency offers an opportunity to shape the direction of future CFP's by focusing on the fishery's annual quota negotiations for 2027, protecting its own national interests whilst still maintaining qualities of an honest broker. In this regard, Ireland protects its long-term interests and hands the presidency to Lithuania with a clean mandate.

6. Generational Renewal and Rural Development

Generational renewal will feature as a cross-cutting theme across all Council debates during the Irish Presidency. The average age of EU farmers is rising, and the associated challenges — including succession planning, access to land, and the attractiveness of farming as an enterprise — are common to most Member States. The Presidency's approach is not to hold standalone debates on generational renewal, but to embed it as a consideration within discussions on the CAP, livestock policy, and fisheries.[2]

Making farming economically viable and socially sustainable for new entrants is seen as inseparable from the Presidency's broader objectives of economic, environmental, and social sustainability. This includes encouraging participation by women in farm enterprises and addressing structural barriers to entry in both agriculture and fishing.

Rural development more broadly will also feature in the Presidency's work programme, though largely in the context of the NRPP rather than as a standalone legislative priority. Similar to CAP implications, LEADER and community-led local development (CLDD) remain obligatory for all Member States under the NRPP. The European Commission has emphasised that "successful tools like LEADER will continue to play a key role in supporting the development of rural areas" in line with the 10% rural target.[8] This target outlines that at least 10% of the resources of each NRPP will be directed towards supporting a consistent agenda of measures addressing needs and challenges faced in rural areas.

During the informal meeting held in Cork on July 28 and 29, Minister Martin Heydon and Minister Timmy Dooley emphasised the promotion of generational renewal in fisheries and aquaculture.[13,14] They highlighted that there would be a growing focus placed on making the sector more viable with the intention to create pathways for young people. Additionally, they reiterated the importance of International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026) and signified the Government's intention to encourage women into considering a career in the seafood sector. Minister Heydon explained that while numbers in employment in the European aquacultures sector have remained stable, there has been insufficient growth across Member States.[14]

7. Bioeconomy, Innovation, and Trade

The Irish Presidency will host the Global Bioeconomy Summit on 20 and 21 October 2026, a joint initiative between the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Climate, Energy and Environment in partnership with the International Bioeconomy Forum. The Presidency views the bioeconomy as an opportunity to generate economic resilience for farmers and rural communities while simultaneously delivering environmental benefits through circular and bio-based production models.

On trade, Ireland is a consistent advocate for open, rules-based trading systems and is a net exporter of agricultural produce. The Presidency will, however, seek to reflect the diverse positions of Member States with regards to EU trade policy in an evolving geopolitical context, including concerns about the level playing field between EU producers and third-country competitors. Standing items on market stability will feature in the relevant Council formations. This should include resilience measures, the agricultural crisis reserve, and input cost pressures.

The EU's Mercosur Partnership agreement provoked serious contention among agricultural stakeholders earlier this year. While the agreement has been accepted by the Mercosur countries, it has not yet been fully ratified by the EU and is currently positioned as an interim Trade Agreement (iTA). Ireland's existing trade relationship with Mercosur countries represents €3.9 billion, with trade accounting for 1 in 3 jobs in Ireland. The deal offers significant opportunities for the 97% of Irish exporters that are considered "small companies" by eliminating existing tariffs, reducing administrative burdens when certifying products for local sale, offering better chance to bid for public contracts, and easier access to online information between trading Mercosur countries. While there has been consideration that the Mercosur deal yields initial risk of market disruption, it will have an exponential impact on wider sectors such as finance, postal and courier services, telecommunications, transport, digital trade, and the environment.

8. Implications and Outlook

The Irish Presidency faces a complex and interlocking set of legislative challenges in the agricultural and fisheries domain. Progress on the CAP Regulation is contingent on the resolution of budget negotiations that extend beyond the Agriculture and Fisheries Council's competence. The integration of CAP funding into the NRPP structure introduces a degree of annual budgetary uncertainty that previous CAP arrangements did not entail, with implications for long-term investment decisions by farming enterprises.

As Ireland assumes its Presidency, the restructuring of budget allocation in the form of the NRPP threatens to delay the CAP timeline. There is growing concern that the timeline for the post-2027 CAP budget will be affected by the risk of Member States not reaching unanimous agreement in time for 2027. The European Commission has proposed a budget of €1.76 trillion, whilst the European Parliament has proposed a €1.93 trillion mandate.[4,17] Negotiations began during the Cyprus Presidency and there is growing pressure for MEPs to agree upon a long-term budget (2028-2034).[19] The European Parliament's position on the CAP is not expected to be finalised before early 2027, meaning that trilogue negotiations are unlikely to be completed during the Irish Presidency. The ambition is to have a Council Partial General Approach in place by November 2026, providing a mandate for the incoming Lithuanian Presidency to begin formal negotiations with the Parliament.

Substantive questions remain regarding the balance between common standards and Member State flexibility, the adequacy of funding relative to the expanded scope of policy objectives, and the appropriate treatment of different livestock production systems within the sustainable livestock strategy. How the Presidency navigates these questions will shape not only the outcome of the current negotiations, but the trajectory of EU agriculture and fisheries policy for the period to 2034.

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IIEA
Sharing Ideas
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The Institute of International and European Affairs,

8 North Great Georges Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

T: +353-1-8746756 F: +353-1-8786880

E: reception@iiea.com W: www. iiea.com

IIEA
Sharing Ideas
Shaping Policy

The Institute of International and European Affairs.
8 North Great Georges Street,
Dublin 1, Ireland, D01 R5Y3

Email: reception@iiea.com
Call: +353 (0)1 874 6756
www.iiea.com