



**AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

The Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority

# **Authentic Food Culture: realising the potential of the Traditional Irish Farm**

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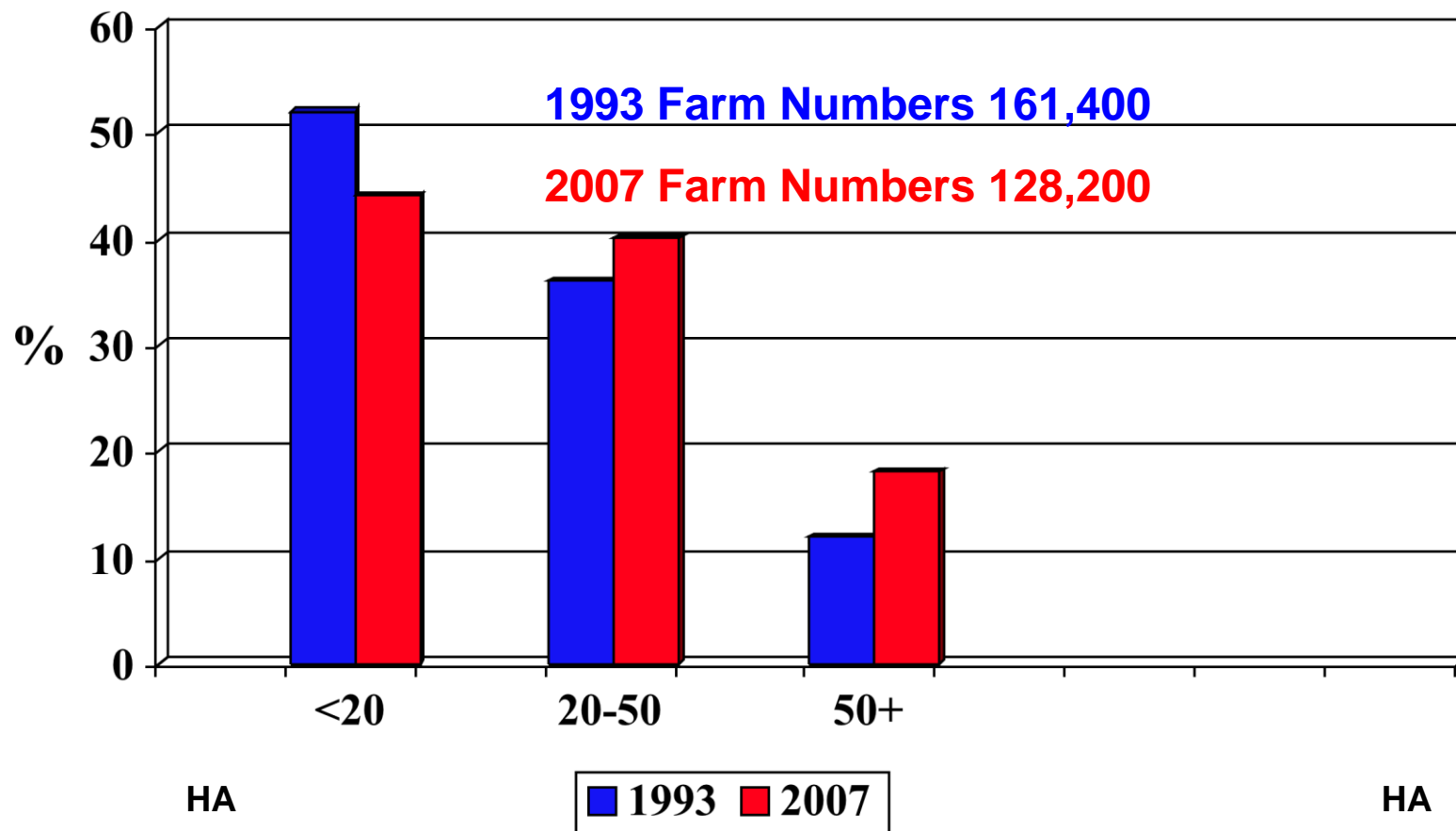
**TASTE Council Summer School**  
**Brooklodge Hotel, Macreddin, Co. Wicklow**  
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## Authentic Food Culture?

- ◆ What are the main sociological characteristics of contemporary artisan food culture in Ireland?
- ◆ How do farmers relate to/engage in artisan food culture in Ireland?
- ◆ How can we improve the engagement of indigenous farmers and thereby enter the associated high value-added markets? Lessons from US *Middle Agriculture* – a sociologically compatible model?

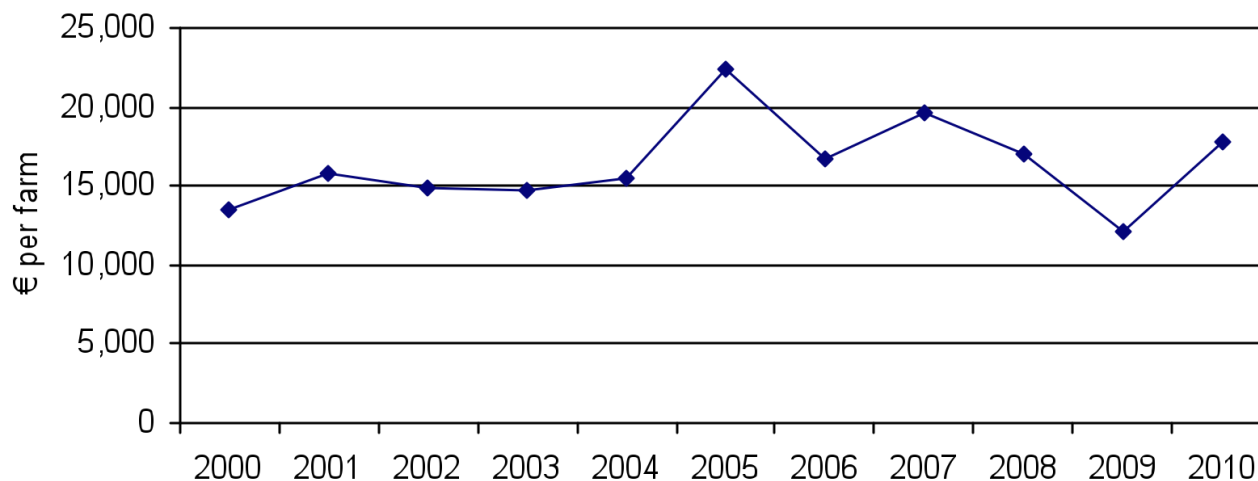
## Context: Farms in Ireland

# % of Farm by Size 1993 and 2007



## Family Farm Income 2000 to 2010: average of all farms

*25% of farms had a farm income of less than €3,500 in 2010*

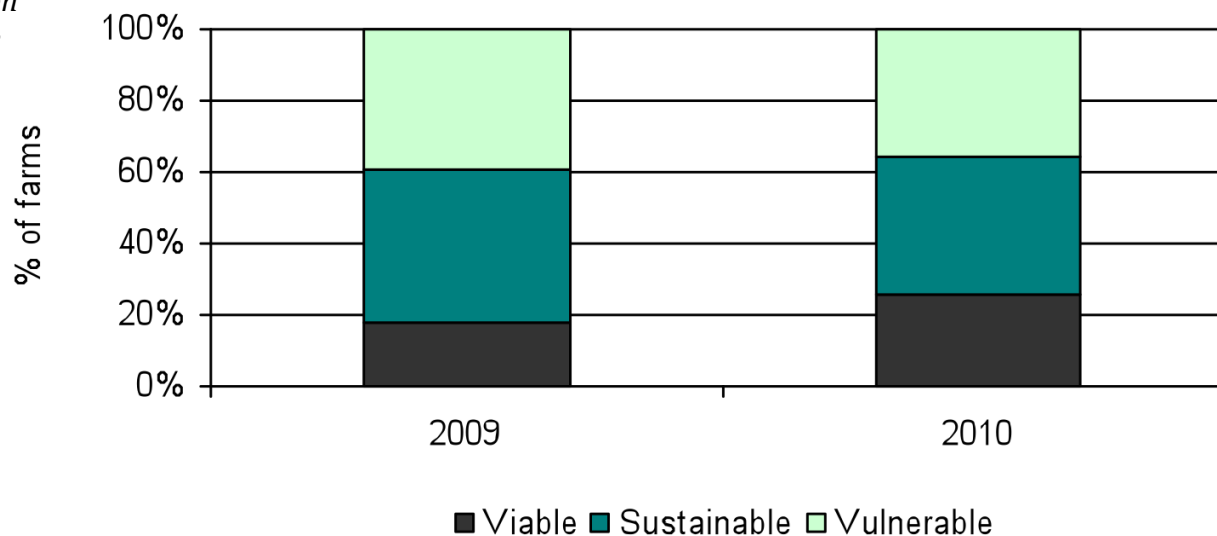


*13% of farms had an income of greater than €40,000 in 2010*

Average income in 2010; 17,771

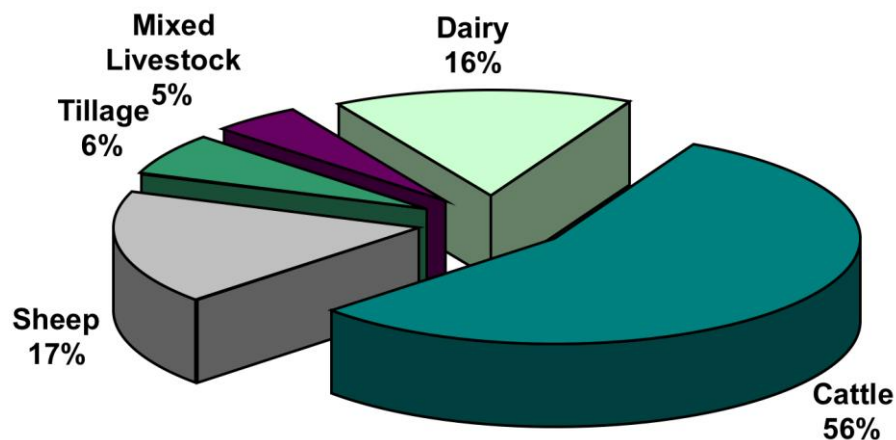
# Classification of the Farm Population 2009 and 2010: all farms

*Sustainable farms  
are dependent on  
off-farm income*



## Distribution of farm population by system: all farms

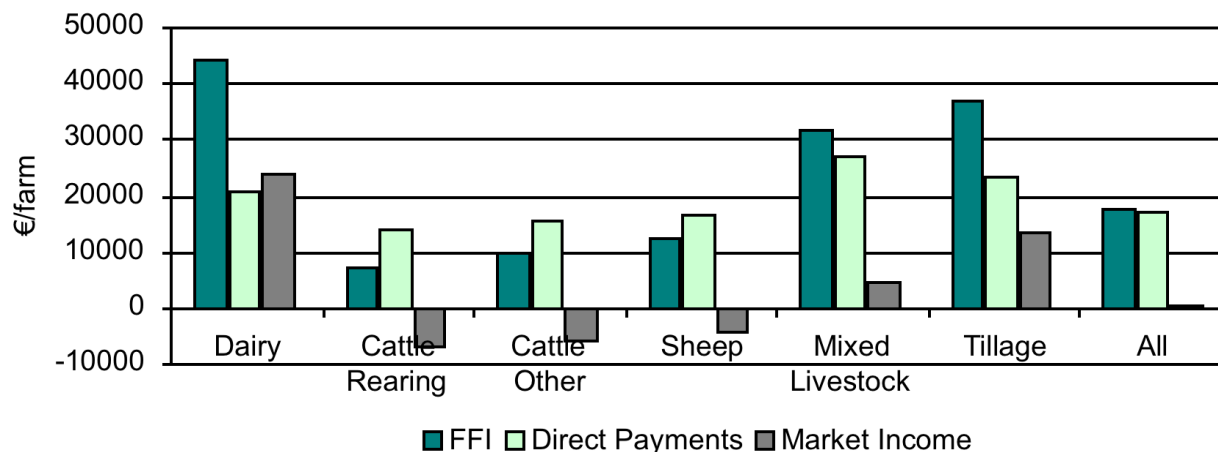
*Only 10 % of cattle rearing farms are economically viable*



*Drystock farms comprise 73% of the farming population*



# Family Farm Income, Direct Payments and Market Income by Farm



*Average FFI is slightly greater than direct payments in 2010.*

*Market Output is insufficient to cover production costs on drystock systems*

# Future

- A proportion of Irish farms are economically viable
- Need to improve viability of majority? *The decline of farming can lead to rural decline*
- Challenge: to increase scale, or to add value

## Farming Decline leads to Rural Decline?

Farming decline a contributing factor – evidence from the US:

*“This is not just about “saving” the family farm. It is about the social, economic, and environmental costs to American society. With the loss of each family farm, a rural community loses approximately \$720,000 in related economic activity. Ecologists now affirm that the only way we can manage farmland in an ecologically sound manner is by having the farmer living on his/her land long enough and intimately enough to have learned how to manage it properly. With the loss of ecological land health we see the loss of soil quality, wildlife, and recreational areas. And with the loss of rural populations, the loss of public services - education, health-care, transportation - inevitably follow”*

## Routes towards viability:

- There are two ways to be competitive in a global economy:
  1. being the lowest cost supplier of an undifferentiated commodity
  2. providing the market with a unique and superior value in terms of product quality, special features or after-sales service.

Michael Porter *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*, cited in Kirschenmann (2008)

# Route 1: Undifferentiated Commodities

- Challenges:
  - Upscale farms
  - Reduce costs, increase efficiency and productivity
  - Ongoing success – a proportion of Irish farms
- Some farmers showing resistance:
  - Maintaining land for social and cultural reasons  
( $<1\%$  ag. land sales annually, Hennessy (2006))
  - How do small and mid-sized farmers relate to scale-oriented blueprints, technologies?

## Route 2: Superior Value Product

- Create products that are differentiated with superior features/characteristics
- Characteristics (policy & market):
  - Smart, Green, Growth
  - Innovative, high value-added
  - Environment & public goods
  - Ethic: *transparency, traceability, safety, 'trust'*
  - Aesthetic: *'fashion food', discriminating gastronomy*

# Compatible with Public Policy?

Ireland's Growth strategy:

- Harvest 2020;
- 'Pathways for Growth'
- Ireland's Smart Economy
- 'Sustainably Competitive Agriculture'

# Harvest 2020

*“A shift from commodities-based supply to one that is increasingly brand centred and consumer focused” (p.3)*



# Pathways for Growth

*“Ireland is small not “multinational”...“Its competitors for the “green” market cannot deliver on that promise”*

# ‘Sustainably Competitive Agriculture’

*“...the sustainably competitive model seeks to establish both a technical and a marketing advantage for agriculture, by (responding to) consumer willingness to pay a premium price for a product that is demonstrably superior from multiple perspectives (quality, safety, health and environment” (p. 5)*

## Smart Economy 2009-2014

*“...high value-added parts of the food industry depend on Ireland’s ‘green image’ for competitive advantage”*

# Challenge

- How are farmers positioned to engage in the second route towards competitiveness?
- *Advantages:*
  - Many Irish farms are small/mid-sized and non-intensive
  - Sophisticated production/safety standards – work of Teagasc
  - High numbers participating in agri-environmental schemes (59,000 in REPS)
  - High animal welfare, grass-based production systems (Boyle et al, 2008)

## However, low engagement..

### Farms with Diversified Enterprises in Ireland and England

	Ireland	England
Number of Farms	128,200	57,100
With Diversification	4.1%	51%
With Farm Tourism	.94%	5%
With Sport/Rec. Ent.	.39%	11%
With Processing	.4%	7%
With Other Divers.	.78%	8%
With Buildings Let	N/A	36%
With Contracting	1.95%	N/A

Source: Meredith (2011)

# Rural Development Policy: LEADER

- Main EC policy: rural economic diversification, adding value
- EC LEADER Programme – what is the key objective & ethos?  
*“replacing material and labour value with design value”* (Ray, 2000)

# Farmers: many not participating

- Farmers have marginal, if any, involvement in LEADER (Van der Ploeg, 2003; Esposito-Fava & Lajarge, 2009; Osti, 2000)
- Farmers 'slow' to engage (Conway, 1991; Teagasc, 2005)

# Why? A sociological explanation

Focus on:

- Occupational Estrangement
- Cultural/Design Estrangement



# Irish Artisan Food Culture – sociological origins **REDP**

- Not pioneered by Irish indigenous farmers, but a rich diversity of actors – international as well as Irish
- Pioneers of artisan food culture are “from a diversity of backgrounds outside of agriculture” (Tovey, 2006);
- “New Age Travellers from Britain; American, German, Swiss, English, and Irish ex-urbanites, women who had married into farming or fishing families and returned Irish emigrants” (Tovey, 2006)
- Incomers or migrants returning to Ireland, who have managed to acquire a small parcel of land from which they want to construct an ‘alternative’ livelihood’ (Tovey, 2006)

# The Nature of Farming

- Farming: a socio-cultural practice and a way of life – not just a technical, professional, or income-generating activity (Vanclay, 2006)
- Farmers' Occupational Preferences strongly rooted in agriculture – “farmers want to farm”
  - Prestige associated with production activities, not with processing, branding, retail activities.
  - Attachment to tradition & farming identity: inherited farming traditions
  - Issue of gender: traditional farming males may be disinclined towards processing and retail activities – traditional roles of females undertaking these activities in Ireland

# Local Food Markets / “Farmers’ Markets”

- Not influenced solely by local production methods or indigenous food production culture - 17% of food products imported (Griffin, 2009)
- Strongly influenced by a consumer perspective on food (Tovey, 2006)
- Vendors strongly influenced by a motivation to sell products directly to consumers, to communicate directly with consumers
- Vendors influenced by a particular food ethic – a particular political/environmental/social perspective
- To what extent do indigenous farmers share this motivation and ethic?

# The *Design* of Speciality Food

- Distinctive values – different to discourses of commodity production, which often focus on issues such as world food security
- The consumer perspective is a strong driver of the design of speciality foods
  - “*Upmarket*”; “*Fashion Food*” (Dilley, 2009)
  - “*With a premium price tag - its consumption signifies one’s good sense and discrimination*” (Dilley, 2009)

# Authenticity?

- Aspects of Irish differentiated/artisan food industry can be distanced from indigenous production (Macken-Walsh, 2009; 2010)
- Consumerism: Individuals/social groups seeking to be alternative yet can be conformist (Taylor, 2000)
- 'Eurocentric' food production
- Examples of common products at markets:
  - Olives, sun-dried tomatoes?
  - Cheese production in Ireland: virtual discontinuation of cheese-making by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (McCarthy, 1992)
- Typical of post-modern social phenomena in developed world

# Conventional, Authentic Irish Farm Food: potential?

REDP

- High food miles associated with imported organic and artisan products gaining scrutiny from environmentally and socially conscious consumers
- Local food preferred by consumers (Bord Bia)
- “Ireland is universally associated with the color green and its land evokes natural” Pathways for Growth, 2010 – labeling of free-range meat?
- Irish beef/lamb available but differentiation between REPS/AEOS and non-REPS/AEOS often unavailable
- Regional branding often unavailable
- Breed varieties often unavailable

# Challenge

- To make 'local' and authentic Irish food accessible to local and international markets
- To engage indigenous farmers as a central part of the value chain

# Creatively combining new capitals...

- Farmers are expert in agriculture: inherited knowledge, tradition, and sophisticated production methods
- Irish farms are a repository of branding capital
- But, farmers can have limited expertise in:
  - Service provision (retailing)
  - Branding
  - Marketing
  - Advertising
  - Processing
  - Distribution



# Confronting the Challenge: potential of a 'middle agriculture'

## The product

- Differentiated, superior value
- Complementary to Ireland's existing Commodity & Artisan food industries – a *middle* ground
- Arguably already in production on the vast majority of Irish Family Farms

## Middle Agriculture Products

- Not necessarily an organic product or processed food product
- Not an intensively produced product (relatively)
- Branding strategy: *'Family-run Farm in Rural Ireland'*
- An indigenous product – conventional in Ireland
- Enriched by cultural, social, ecological significance – branding/marketing strategy
- *Consistency: quality, safety (Sustainably Competitive Agriculture)*

## Valorisation using EXISTING Capitals...

- REPS/AEOS (current grading only pays for meat yield) and grass-based systems
- Marketing social, cultural and environmental branding capital
- Family farm branding capital – food story
- Cultural significance: knowledge of the land, territory – “*terroir*”
- *What are Ireland’s authentic regional foods? Regina Sexton (UCC) - Not necessarily processed foods*

## Middle Agriculture Vision

*“Imagine a large number of small and midsized family farmers, linked together in a marketing network, producing food products for regional food sheds, using sound conservation practices, providing their animals with the opportunity to perform all their natural functions, preserving the identity of such food products by processing them in locally-owned processing facilities, and making them available in the marketplace with opportunities for consumers to access the entire story of the products life cycle using existing food service delivery systems”*

# ‘Middle Agriculture’ model

US based: USDA, Wisconsin, Penn. State

- Governance
  - Farmers ‘must not only move up the value chain but take a greater ownership of the value chain’ – farmers’ market responsiveness
- ‘Federated cooperative structure’:
  - Critical mass to achieve scale and to contract necessary industry expertise: marketing, branding, processing, distribution...

## A cooperative solution?

*“Older cooperative associations were formed in an era when mobilisations were organised predominantly for power and getting a fair share. Many are rooted in the first half of the twentieth century when words like “ecology” and “sustainability” were barely in the language”  
(Gray & Stevenson, 2008)*

# Cooperatives

- New cooperatives:
  - Governance & social justice
  - ‘Grounded in concerns of identity, safety, a sense of permanence’: importance of branding to consumer confidence
- How are they operationalised?
  - Participatory techniques (ownership, authenticity)
  - Facilitated by sociologists

(Gray and Stevenson, 2008)



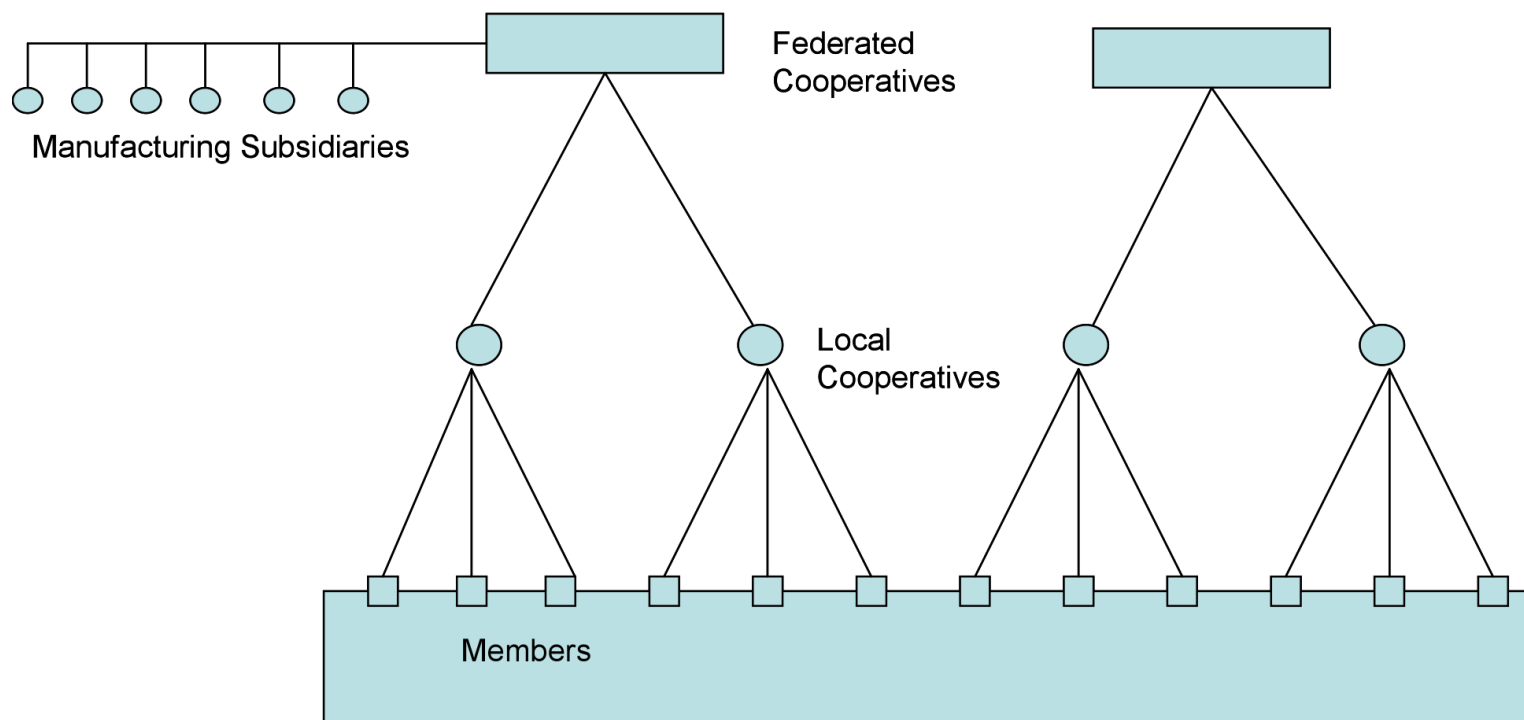
# Cooperative forms

- Local: 10-15 members, locally managed
- Centralised: up to thousands of members, centrally coordinated and managed – undifferentiated to PLCs.
- Federated: constituted of local cooperatives which remain independently managed

# Federated Cooperatives:

- A common seal to endorse food products/brands of local coops, highlighting middle ag. values
- A third-party certification methodology bringing consistency and guarantees
- Regional/national coordination of activities and flows of product
- Professional broad-scale marketing and advertising
- Research, education and other professional supports

**Diagram B**  
**Federated Cooperatives**



# Going forward: a targeted working group

Multi-policy/multi-disciplinary/multi-user:

- Teagasc (Research, Education, Advisory, Corporate Services)
- Bord Bia
- TASTE Council
- ICOS
- IFA & range of Farmer Organisations
- Academics & Policy Analysts
- Institutes of Technology/ Universities
- Supermarkets, retailers
- Food Historians
- Farmers

**Thank you**

## High Nature Value Farmland: NHC, July 2010

### Marketing

- Pro-active marketing of produce from HNV farmland is needed to make farming in these areas financially viable.
- The use of conservation-grade branding, reflecting the biodiversity benefits and food quality of these farming systems. Such benefits must be verifiable and clear to the consumer.
- Advertising campaigns to raise consumer awareness of conservation-grade produce,
- The formation of producer groups to ensure consistent supply of quality produce,