

On behalf of all my colleagues in AFCP welcome to our 9th Annual Forum .

Throughout my life and career, I have experienced the AgriFood Industry face many **challenges and uncertainties** for all the **actors, be they producers- processors- retailers**. Currently the obvious **uncertainty is Brexit**, the **challenge is to adapt** to the new market environment which will result. Maybe Brexit is the necessary stimulus; many believe the Industry needs –

to regain our share of the UK food market – to seek opportunities to export more of our products to old and new markets.

If the AgriFood Industry is to grasp these opportunities it must ensure the Industry develops a **Vision** of what it wants to achieve.

I believe it is the role of our Industry to develop the Vision - there is no time to lose in developing the Vision, if it is to be ready for whatever the outcome of Brexit is .

I contend proactivity should be our watchword- after the event reactivity, all too common in the past- will be too late if the opportunity is not to be missed.

In my view better to go to Government with developed optional solutions, than await, potentially imposed sub-optimal solutions for our industry.

In my view the Vision will require actors across the whole AgriFood chain to collaborate to develop **quality, sustainably produced products with real added value for the consumer. Genuine** UK Branded Products which create a customer demand and preference **both at home**, in competition with imported products - **overseas** to compete with local suppliers and other exporters into those markets.

I believe Government's Role, should be to provide an **enabling environment** for the Vision to be successfully delivered, **negotiating access to markets, encouraging all of the following, investment by appropriate fiscal policies, together with the sponsorship of market, science and technological research.**

Whilst I fully accept there are good examples within the AgriFood Industry, of collaboration and initiative - a huge improvement is required if the Industry is to be competitive and profitable for all the actors, and also to become a still greater contributor to the UK's P&L account.

The Irish have successfully developed such collaboration, with the formation of Bord Bia.

Our Forum today - "**Upskilling agriculture and food supply – where should charities focus?**" is the 9th overall and the latest in a series started in 2013 examining recruitment, training, career development and retention. Today's Forum is the logical progression, recognizing that the Industry needs to have training and career development processes in place to provide continuous 'Upskilling' for personnel at all levels. Future market environments will be challenging, managers and staff will have detailed readily available data on which to base business

decisions, weather, soils, crop traits, and most importantly instant market information. I would also contend, to succeed businesses must develop greater collaborative skills, willing to share pain and gain if we are to continue to profitably develop a competitive Industry. Fundamental to all of this will be the technical skills required to operate field, livestock management, robotics and processing equipment etc. All of these management tools are an aid to future business, they will however, bring not only complexity but also continuous accelerating change.

In introducing today's Forum, I am looking forward to speakers presenting and developing ideas for the way ahead.