



EDA DAIRY FOCUS

IRISH EU PRESIDENCY

JULY 2026



Uniting dairy excellence & ambition



Ireland is holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the eighth time, placing it at the centre of EU decision-making during a period shaped by ongoing geopolitical tensions.

Under the EU Strategic Agenda 2024–2029, Ireland will steer the Council’s work around three main pillars: Values, Security and Competitiveness.

These are the values that closely reflect the story of the Irish dairy sector, a global leader in sustainability, safety and resilience.

Dating back approximately 6,000 years, Ireland’s dairy industry exemplifies innovation built on tradition. Its pasture-based system connects long-standing agricultural traditions with cutting-edge processing technology, advanced research and continuous innovation.

Combined with Ireland’s favourable geography, terrain and climate, this creates optimal conditions for animal health, biodiversity and low-impact farming, making the sector one of the pillars of Europe’s *lacto-sphère*.

In the words of Minister Martin Heydon at the opening of our Whey conference in Dublin in 2024: “We are a small island in the west of Europe with a population of five million people, but we produce enough food to feed 30 million people. We are renowned globally as producers of extremely high-quality and safe food”.

Ireland’s role as a major European dairy producer places the Irish Presidency in a strong position to lead EU discussions and negotiations on the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), including the Single Common Market Organisation, and the framework for Unfair Trading Practices (UTP). The Presidency has already shown great initiative in preparing the livestock strategy that will be published when the Irish presidency kicks off on the 1st July 2026.

The Irish government knows the importance of the dairy sector to Ireland’s economy, rural communities and agricultural identity and we expect the Irish Presidency to engage closely with the EU’s trade agenda, particularly as the EU Commission continues to emphasise agri-food diplomacy and partnerships aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of our European agri-food excellence.

More specifically, the Presidency is expected to advance the EU-Mexico agreement and EU-U.S. trade deal that was reached in May 2026, while navigating the provisional application of the Mercosur agreement to secure valuable dairy export opportunities.

At the same time, strengthening the Single Market remains central to the EU’s competitiveness agenda. This includes efforts to improve resilience, reduce remaining barriers and enhance integration and efficiency within the dairy sector and broader agri-food value chains.

The global strength of Irish dairy is reflected in the success of one of Europe’s most iconic butter brands, which generates over \$1 billion in annual U.S. retail sales alone and whose international recognition reflects the quality and appeal of Ireland’s dairy sector.

We know the Irish Presidency is ready to support the European dairy sector and we are looking forward to a constructive, results-oriented dialogue over the coming months.

Vive l’Europe et vive le lait,

Bainne go brágh!



Albert de Groot

EDA President

Alexander Anton

EDA secretary general

The Priorities of the Irish EU Presidency

Martin Heydon

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine



Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU comes at a time of intense change across Europe. Pressures on competitiveness, food security, environmental sustainability and geopolitical stability are all front of mind.

Within this shifting landscape, Ireland's Presidency will demonstrate that the position of agriculture and fisheries cannot be taken for granted. Agriculture and fisheries play a central role in ensuring Europe's food security, supporting economic competitiveness, and sustaining rural and coastal communities, while contributing to the Union's climate and environmental objectives.

The Agriculture and Fisheries Council during Ireland's Presidency will seek to support farming and fishing families, and to sustain rural and coastal communities, by working to protect their incomes and strengthen their competitiveness, while also striking the right balance between the three pillars of sustainability - economic, social and environmental.

A common framework for competitive and sustainable agriculture

A key priority for Ireland at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council will be to advance as far as possible the negotiations on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy post-2027.

European society depends on the continuous provision of food from agricultural and food systems that operate with the utmost reliability, and with high levels of food safety, quality and variety.

This is achieved in no small part through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), our Union's oldest common policy. Enshrined in the treaties, the CAP has been one of the foundations of the European project, and remains essential to food security, farm incomes, rural resilience and the sustainable management of land across the Union.

The CAP reforms must, therefore, preserve the policy's ability to contribute to food security, secure farm incomes, and support rural resilience with predictability and fairness. The future CAP must also be workable in practice and simpler for farmers and other CAP beneficiaries to engage with, by reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and supporting effective implementation on the ground, for example through locally led, collaborative approaches that support rural communities.



Recognising the contribution of Livestock to European Agriculture

Livestock farming is vital to the EU's economy and to global food security. The EU produces the highest-quality animal products, to the highest animal welfare standards, and with some of the lowest carbon footprints in the world. Livestock systems support rural employment, sustain local economies, contribute to high-quality food production, and help maintain landscapes and farming traditions across many regions.

The Irish Presidency will work to ensure that the EU remains a leader in this sector and that it can continue to provide food to a growing global population. Council discussions will consider how livestock farming can contribute to economic and social objectives, while responding to environmental and climate-related challenges.

The success of the EU's transition to a sustainable livestock sector rests on ensuring that younger farmers can recognise it as a sector that is attractive and economically viable. Similarly, sustainable livestock systems should support the role of women in farming. Animal welfare in livestock systems will remain central to these discussions, reflecting societal expectations and the need to maintain high standards across the Union.

Supporting generational renewal and participation in agriculture

Generational renewal is essential to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of European agriculture. Europe needs farming to remain an attractive and viable career for young people and new entrants. This requires fair incomes, access to supports, investment, innovation, knowledge transfer, advisory services and confidence in the future direction of EU policy.

The Irish Presidency will consider how policy frameworks and measures can encourage new entrants and facilitate succession in farming across the Union. During what is the International Year of the Woman Farmer, there will also be a focus on the role of women in agriculture, and on how the visibility and participation of women in rural and coastal communities can be enhanced, in recognition of their vital contribution to the economic and social fabric of Europe.

Fair, open and resilient agri-food markets

Well-functioning agricultural markets and balanced trade relations are central to the resilience and sustainability of Europe's agri-food and fisheries sectors. During Ireland's Presidency, the Agriculture and Fisheries Council will continue to consider market developments, including price trends, input costs and pressures affecting sensitive sectors.

Simplification as a driver of competitiveness

The Irish Presidency will place a strong emphasis on making EU policy simpler and more workable for farmers and for national authorities. Farmers and food businesses need rules that are clear, proportionate and capable of being implemented effectively on the ground. Simplification is not only an administrative objective, but also central to competitiveness.

Delivering for farmers, fishers, and rural and coastal communities

Through a focus on these priorities, Ireland's EU Presidency will work to support farming and fishing families, sustain rural and coastal communities, and strike the right balance between economic, social and environmental sustainability.

The Irish Dairy Sector

A Blueprint for European Competitiveness, Quality, and Value



There is an old Irish saying, '*Ní neart go cur le chéile*' (There is no strength without unity). It is a fitting motto for our industry as Ireland assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in July 2026, and as our shared dairy sector stands at a profound strategic crossroads. Under the EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, the Irish Presidency will steer the Council's work around Values, Security, and Competitiveness—principles that perfectly reflect the story, resilience, and ambition of Irish and EU dairy.

Escaping the Volume Trap

For the last decade, our industry in Ireland thrived on a straightforward thesis: more cows, more milk, more exports. The results were phenomenal, building Ireland's largest native industry into a €17,6 billion all island economic engine that delivers real, tangible activity to every single parish across the island. We processed a record 8,8 billion litres of milk last year, surging to a historic €7,3 billion in export value, shipping over 1,6 million tonnes of world-class product to 140 global markets. Behind these massive figures are 80.000 jobs and roughly 17.000 family farms.

But let me be very clear: the era of volume-led

growth in Ireland and across the EU is over. We are facing tightening environmental constraints. As I frequently tell our colleagues in the EDA, "cows and grass don't sprint". Supply responds slowly, and if the industry cannot produce more milk, we must extract more value from every single drop we produce.

From By-Product to Advanced Nutrition

Moving from volume to value means we are no longer just a dairy industry in Europe; we are an advanced nutrition industry. A generation ago, whey was considered a by-product that had to be managed rather than monetised. Today, it stands as a cornerstone of the European dairy industry, where we are stripping milk into high-value bioactive components.

We are turning former waste into advanced protein isolates and hydrolysates that command premium global prices in performance nutrition, clinical applications, and Food for Special Medical Purposes (FSMP). We are competing globally not on bulk commodity pricing, but on technical specification, traceability, and scientific credibility.

Sustainability and the Competitiveness Engine

From an Irish perspective, none of this technological advancement matters without our ultimate unique selling point: the Irish grass-based family farm production system. Our cows graze outdoors for nearly 300 days a year, giving our dairy a unique fatty acid profile and one of the lowest carbon footprints on the planet. We work closely with our colleagues across the EDA to continuously improve European dairy credentials across environmental, social, and economic sustainability metrics.

As the Irish Presidency engages closely with the EU's trade agenda and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms, we must remember that policy is a core business input, with the work of the EDA at the centre of this. Our sector is battling unprecedented energy inflation, with energy now accounting for a staggering 23% of total processing costs in Ireland and across fellow EU dairy processors.

Competitiveness must be viewed as a prerequisite for sustainability; we cannot have a "green" sector that is economically "red". Crucially, as the EU pushes forward with trade agreements, we must champion the European dairy competitiveness agenda within the EDA so our processors are not undercut by regions operating with lower environmental overheads.

Generational Renewal

Finally, we cannot sustain our billion-euro industry, the jewel in the crown of the European Agri economy, without talent, on the farm and in the factory. We are aggressively working with the EDA to rebrand dairy processing and farming into a high-skill, tech-driven, and "Green Tech" career capable of attracting digital natives.

By leaning into our grass-fed heritage, committing to verifiable environmental progress, and investing relentlessly in specialised nutrition, we are securing the future of Irish and EU dairy for generations to come.

We can raise a pint of milk to that—*Sláinte!*



Conor Mulvihill

Director, Dairy Industry Ireland

**What is true for France,
is true for Europe**

“France owes much to Ireland. There is the example that you have always given, that your people so courageous, so noble, so generous have always given, and whose heroes are in all our memories”

Charles de Gaulle

Facts & Figures



5,4 million inhabitants



3,64 million sheep

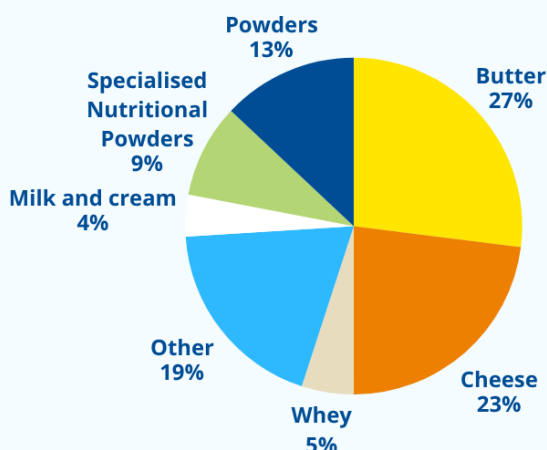


1,59 million dairy cows

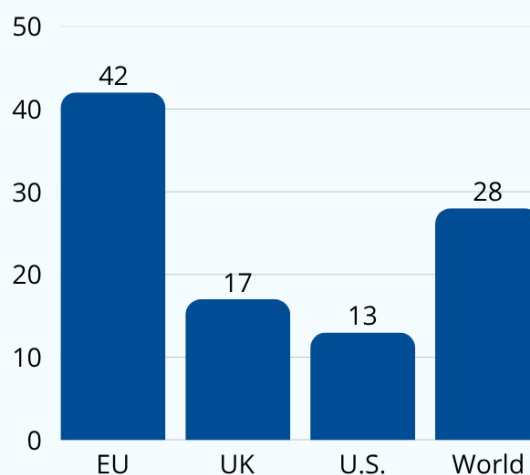
Economic value of the dairy sector: **€17,6 billion**

Value of dairy exports: **€7,3 billion**

Dairy exports by product share in 2025



Dairy export destinations by share in 2025



Milk yield per cow
6.000 litres per year



8,8 billion litres of raw
milk production



80.000 jobs across
the dairy sector



Butter exports
exceeded €2 billion in
2025

Sources: Bord Bia, Central Statistics Office (CSO) Ireland, DII, Eurostat



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EDA Annual Convention



Bratislava | 14. - 16. October

Register at: eda2026.eu

EDA Dairy Policy Conference

7 April 2027, Brussels

eda

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