

# Supporting the Development of Irish Family Farm Producers

September 2022



# AGENDA

- **Introduction**
- **Family Farm Producers**
- **International Practice**
- **Ireland – Public + Private Supports**
- **Barriers to Success**
- **Recommendations**

# Introduction



# The Job to be Done

**Examine how other countries have been successful in developing premium markets\* for family farm produce.**

- Learn from international best practice.
- Understand both private and public supports, formal and informal.
- Compare Ireland with best practice.

**In scope: routes to market used by family farm producers**  
**Out of scope: co-ops and processors**

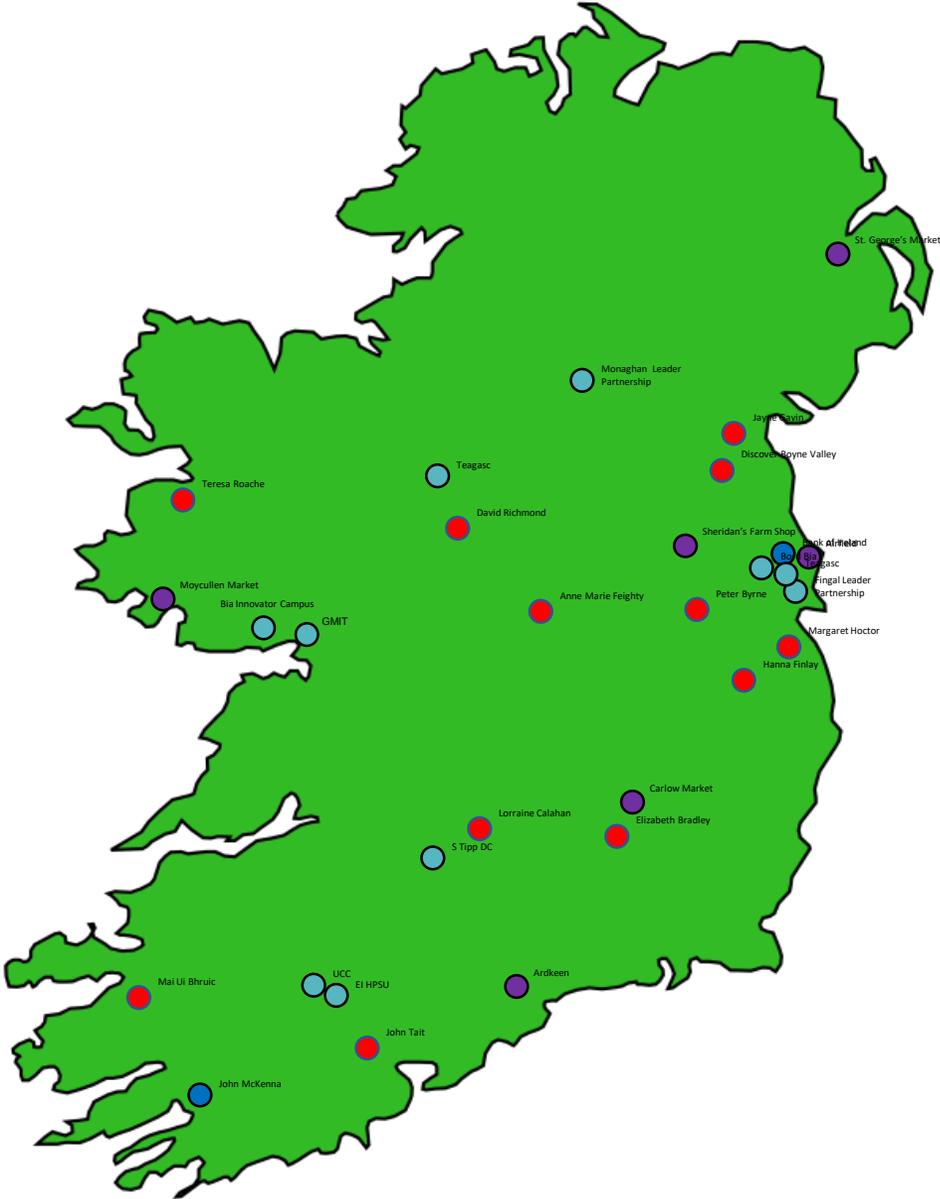
**BORD BIA**   
**Thinking**  
**House**

# Research Partners

**h k + a**  
clarity. focus.

# Interviews

- Family Farm Producers / Networks
- State Bodies / Facilitators
- Route to Market
- Influencer / Other



**Sectors**

3 Horticulture  
 3 Meat  
 5 Dairy  
 1 All

**State Bodies / Facilitators**

Bord Bia UCC  
 LEADER LEO  
 EI Innovator  
 Hubs GMIT

**Route to Market**

Farmer's Markets  
 Farm Shops  
 Gourmet Retail

**Influencer/ Other**

McKenna's Guide  
 Bank of Ireland

France (3), UK (3), US (4)

# Family Farm Producers



# Motivations

- **Supplement farm income**
- Better price
- Utilise their asset
- Sustain farm for future generations
  
- Younger generation want to do something different
- Sustain the land and the environment
  
- Farm fresh is better
- Want to deliver higher quality products
- See a niche
  
- Trends / policy

# Mindset

- Often a team – husband, wife and children
- **Cautious**
- Not always confident – fear of unknown
- Need to see success
- Rely on word of mouth
- Think first of commodity product rather than adding value
- Strong community network
- Sphere and lens is within peer community
- Don't always see the wider business perspective



# International Practice

# France



France has a well-established reputation for excellence in farm produce. There are several factors that drive this, from which Ireland can learn.

## Food Culture

Food is an inherent part of French culture, transcending socio-demographic boundaries

## Appreciation of local 'terroir'

Defined as the characteristic taste and flavour imparted by the environment in which something is produced: *goût de terroir*

## Well-regulated farmers markets

Markets are managed to a high standard, and a distinction is made for farm produce, which is often prioritised over other food categories

## Co-operative farm producer initiatives

Farmer producers come together to sell direct through a cooperative structure, facilitated by low rents for local council owned sites

## Tactical Government Supports

The Department of Agriculture launch initiatives to promote and facilitate the sale of farm produce at a national level

# USA

US has over 8,000 farmers markets that play a critical role in communities connecting producers and consumers, strengthening nutrition security and contributing to a fair, competitive, distributed, and resilient food system.



## Structured in Centralised Way

Markets are managed to a high standard, often as non-profit organisations with strong governance and Boards. Farm produce is often prioritised over other food categories.

## Strong Community / Volunteerism

Majority are small, community-, volunteer-led. Non-profit relying on community support to survive and thrive.

## Representative Agencies Exist

Umbrella groups maximise support through regulation, training, policy and advocacy and minimising red tape.

## Broader principles of advocacy

Advocate for affordable access to local fresh food, food security and the well-being of the food system. Diversity and inclusion core and challenging and dismantling racism and oppression in the food system.

## Tactical Government Supports

The Dept. of Agriculture launch initiatives to promote and facilitate the sale of farm produce at a national and regional level. Link government supports for low income families into farmers markets.

# Ireland - Public + Private Supports

# Family Farm Needs



# Support for Farm Enterprises

	Teagasc	LEOs	Leader	Bord Bia	Local Auth. / Udaras / Other	Skillnet
Start up programmes	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Mentoring / training	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Business Case / Feasibility	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Technical Support	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Networking	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Capital Grants	✓✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Research / Analysis & Development	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
On – line Information / Support	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Marketing Support	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Export support	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Production Facilities	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

- Based on interviews and secondary research - may not be 100% correct

# Barriers to Success

# Overall Satisfaction



- Majority very positive with public support they have received
- Supports required are available
- Supports need to be optimised (rather than re-invented) to maximise effectiveness and impact

# Barriers to Success – Producer

## Business Acumen

- Business plans often not sufficient, lack rigour
- Lack financial know how - VAT returns, pricing etc.
- Marketing needs to be integral to core business
- Haven't always registered as a food business with CRO when seeking support
- Commodity vs. value add, difficult to differentiate

## Field of Vision

- Immersed in the day-to-day, they don't have the headspace, time or information to plan a business.
- Often not prepared for what is ahead of them, short sighted
- Ambition for scale / export not always evident

## Cash Rich / Time Poor

- Asset rich but lack cash
- Capital investment difficult to secure
- Work very hard on the production / farming side
- Difficult to elevate above the day-to-day

*“They need thinking time to come up with the plan – if you don't take the time, you don't have a plan.”*

*“Trying to force skills on farm producers that don't have time to take on board”*

# Barriers to Success – Various perceptions of State Supports

## State support difficult to navigate

- Don't know where to start
- Many agencies involved, not aware of them all or how they can help
- At times lack of coherence / joined up approach
- Roles and responsibilities unclear – an overall map of support sources for family farm producers would be beneficial
- Inconsistency in standard of service delivered

## Administrative burden

- Accessing funding - too much paperwork involved and process is overly bureaucratic
- Procurement process difficult
- Often funding just not attractive enough to warrant the hassle to get it
- Sense that getting harder with every programme

## Available expertise

- Agencies cover all sectors and can be generalists / administrators
- Lack of specialist knowledge
- Complexities of farm enterprise not always understood
- Advisory teams seem under resourced
- Niche areas not always serviced

# Barriers to Success – Market Dynamics

## Shortage of Labour

- Currently labour difficult to find and maintain
- Cost is an issue

## Lack of Co-manufacturing opportunities

- Demand for production outsourcing outstrips supply - reports of having to go to other countries

## Lack of commercial kitchens/production units

- Demand for food grade units outstrips supply
- Businesses often need to remain in Hubs longer than planned, creating bottlenecks
- Business growth curtailed

## Bank and private sector funding difficult to access

- The challenge for start-ups is having a strong business plan
- Banks need reassurance of success before lending, can be challenging to provide
- Low awareness of sector specific private finding initiatives

# Robust Business Plans Required



Premiumisation vs. mass production:

- Consumer understanding
- Market positioning
- Channel distribution
- Costing / pricing essential

**Otherwise it becomes a vicious cycle.**

- Working long hours, difficult to build business
- Pricing not delivering income required
- As they grow scale becomes an issue
- Need for investment
- Inadequate cash flow

**Longer term horizon needed.**

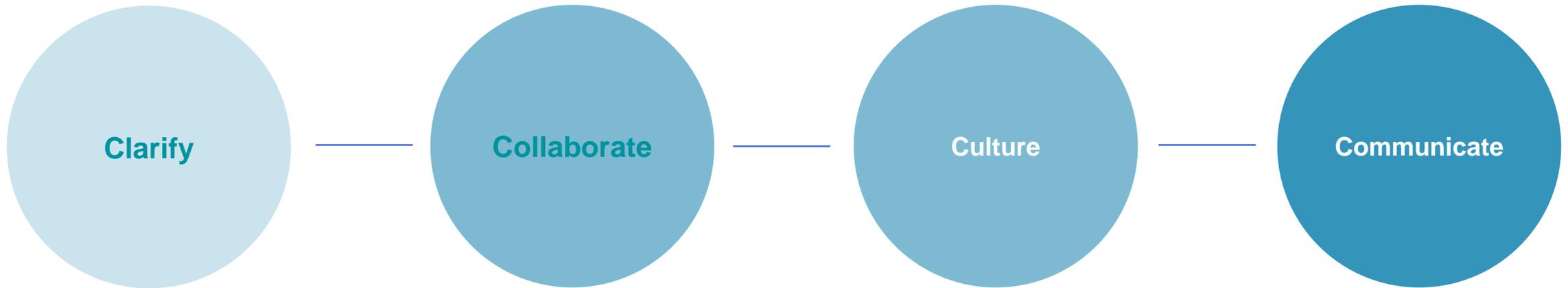
# Recommendations

# Supports available to Family Farm Producers

There are a myriad of formal supports available to family farm producers to help them develop and grow their businesses, however their effectiveness is perceived to be limited by four factors:

1. The full range of available supports is **not always visible** to producers (and sometimes providers)
2. The perception is that there is **no clear starting point** where producers can inform themselves and gain access to supports
3. Supports are **not always optimised for family farm producers**. Start your own business courses are generally not geared to food producers (some exceptions exist, e.g.: UCC specialty food production course)
4. Some supports are **not easy to access**, e.g.: LEADER funding application process is highly onerous, demand for food grade production facilities / food hubs for start-ups outstrips supply

# Guiding Success for Family Farm Producers



Clarify

**"Accessing information and support was so hard, I can easily see why people give up"**

# Clarify the role of State Bodies

- Family farms are the **cornerstone of community and rural life and need supports** to become sustainable – economically, environmentally and socially.
- **Clarify the role of each State body** in supporting family farm producers: type of support provided, eligibility criteria, demarcation lines.
- Clarify which State body is responsible for areas where today there is either a **sense of overlap or a perceived gap, i.e.:**
  - **First port of call** for farmers planning to set up a produce enterprise, where they can access information and advice and be directed towards appropriate supports
  - Provision of **marketing advice and support** when not large enough to meet current Bord Bia threshold of €100k turnover
  - Management of **farmers markets**; clarifying rules, upholding standards

# Simplify Language and Process



- There is a job to be done to simplify language and processes across all agencies so that support is more accessible
- Simplify Bureaucracy - including comprehensive application and procurement process - as the onus on small producers can be a significant barrier
- Gaps between what grant support different bodies can provide can be frustrating

## Streamline funding to reduce paperwork, e.g.:

- Simplified application process
- Procurement tenders only required > 50k funding
- Support local suppliers while ensuring transparency



Collaborate

**" We need to take a whole farm approach - Advice needs to be grounded in whole farm planning, looking at the assets they have, family involvement, a holistic approach. All about making their farm more economically viable and there could be several aspects to that "**

# Multi-agency collaboration with one clear starting point

Ensure **all agency collaboration**.

Nominate **one contact point to act as first port of call** and lead family farm diversification and support for family farm food producers.

Contact point to **signpost** farmers to appropriate supports.

# Optimise current programmes for food businesses

## E.g. The Options Programme:

- Supports farm diversification across a broad range of areas including food produce. It aims to *“help the farmer understand how to take an idea and develop it into a viable business, communicate it, develop a business plan, link them to LEO [and other bodies], provide them with a mentor”*.
- In high demand, with a recent increase in queries relating to food and agritourism in particular. Options diversification factsheets receive the highest number of hits on the Teagasc website. *“Diversification of farm income has become more important over the last 5 years in light of Brexit and especially climate change.”*

# Optimise current programmes for food businesses

## Dedicated, fulltime resources:

To meet current and future level of demand, advisory positions should be full-time and dedicated; allows for targeted recruitment.

*“You need to give them confidence to get them to diversify away from their core enterprise. There’s a very specific type – somebody with drive and determination”*

## Development of food business specialism:

Encourage the development of a sub-group e.g. within Options Programme specialising in food, ideally people with food business experience. Develop depth of expertise (vs. breadth). This would facilitate tailored training, networking with relevant bodies – public and private, and targeted workplans.

**Ensure business plans developed with rigour from the very start.**

## Specialism rather than regionally-based structure:

Allows expert advice to be provided from anywhere in the country to anywhere in the country. In line with current trend is towards more remote support (online).

*“Regionalised structure leads to disparities”. “Saying a particular Advisor only deals with certain counties is not the way forward”.*

# Collaboration strengthened by Food Producer Groups

- **Continued support for further development of regional food producer groups.**
  - Producer Groups play critical role in producer support - networking, accessing premium routes to market and attracting tourism.
  - Producer groups play a role in enhancing community spirit, volunteerism and development.
  - Some involved in education and food culture, e.g.: TFPN “Condé Nast Best for Foodies” 2021
  - Regional disparities currently exist that could be addressed.
  - Successful producer groups have had the support of a **paid full time person**. Necessary as volunteers do not have the time. Support gives them a step up for admin, marketing, etc.
  - Strong admin allows them to create a brand identity, develop a brand and supporting material – websites, etc.

# Collaboration strengthened by Innovation Hubs

- **Enhanced support for regional innovation hubs should be provided.**
  - Hubs offer innovation and incubation support in one place.
  - Larger ones cover technical and food business support and link education, training, events and food tourism.
  - Provide necessary space for start up to scale up production units and allow business expansion.
  - Any Regional disparities that may exist to be addressed.



**" Now what we have is unbelievable!  
Irish produce is great, they have added  
value. Producers have made the  
journey.**

**Consumers haven't gone on the  
journey with them "**

# Culture - Enhance food appreciation among consumers

- **Support initiatives organised through the education system to teach students about food and cultivate in them an appreciation of ‘terroir’ – the unique qualities of food that is locally produced:**

## Primary / Secondary level:

Creating a link between farmers and school children e.g.: Airfield:

- Every 2 weeks children get to interact with farmers via webcam for 15 minutes. The farmer tells them what’s going on at the farm that moment, they get to see lambs, etc. 60 farmers, 40 primary schools and 20 secondary schools across the country have signed up to date.

## Secondary level:

Transition year programme, e.g.: Airfield:

- A 6-week programme that can be offered as part of transition year junior cycle curriculum called ‘food from the ground up’.
- Community food hub: an initiative to teach children from a local DEIS school about food & cooking skills.

The TASTE Council of Ireland  
‘Future is Food’ education module.

## Third level:

Continue to support courses tailored to artisan food production and encourage prioritisation of family farm producers – UCC Diploma in Specialty Food Production.

Encourage showcasing of family farm producers at University campus food markets and events.

# Culture - Enhance food appreciation among consumers

- **Educate and drive awareness** about family farm produce:

## **Educate:**

Educate consumers on the features and benefits of local farm produce: unique taste, health benefits, short supply chain, environmental benefits. Cultivate an appreciation of 'terroir':

*“the environment, the geography, the soil, the microclimate, how it is farmed and the people who tend to it, all influence everything about its taste, texture, smell, and overall quality”.*

## **Explain:**

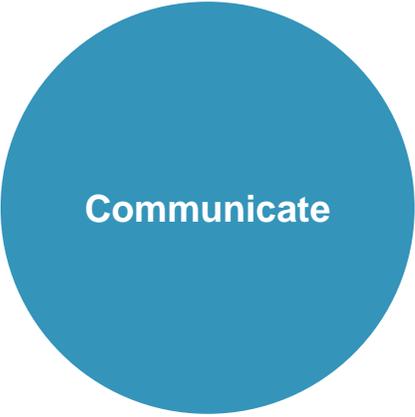
Explain what terms such as “farmhouse”, “artisan”, “traditional” and “natural” mean to enable consumers to distinguish produce of these types from others.

- E.g.: explain what “farmhouse cheese” means so consumers appreciate what it involves and are motivated to pay a premium for it. Explain farmers markets so people can distinguish from other food markets.

# Culture - Enhance food appreciation among consumers

- **Encourage the further development of farmers markets and the implementation of consistently high standards across all farmers markets, to enhance the consumer experience:**

1. Support existing farmers markets that authentically feature and promote family farm produce. In mixed markets encourage a dedicated area for local produce.
2. Support the regeneration of markets in urban areas including Dublin, ensuring Irish family farm produce is prioritised, and the market becomes a showcase for the quality of Irish produce for urban dwellers and domestic and international visitors.
3. Maintain a rigorous, centralised management system for farmers markets to uphold and maintain standards, and ensure a consistent experience across the country with regard to local farm produce.



Communicate

" It's VERY challenging navigating the State system, a minefield - and I work in it! We need to help farmers know where to go "

# Communicate to Farmers + Consumers

Create a platform for farm enterprises to access public and private supports.

A **dedicated website** that has all the information needed to start the journey from idea generation to scale up. A roadmap highlighting first point of contact, and how to navigate the system.

The website should cover all areas – production, regulation, marketing, finance, etc.

It could incorporate links to Producer Networks and Innovation hubs.

Same platform can inform consumers.

**Enable consumers** to find out about family farm producers in their local area and where they can buy their produce. It would give consumers a single entry point to find family farm produce and give greater visibility to family farm producers.

It could act to educate and explain as part of addressing food culture.

French example; [www.fraisetlocal.fr](http://www.fraisetlocal.fr).

# Communicate to Farmers + Consumers

Encourage the creation of a **national annual event** aimed at farmers to encourage farm diversification.

This would serve to inspire farmers about how to maximise the potential of their farm.

Ensure food produce is one of the featured areas, and use this as an opportunity to showcase family farm produce. Encourage input from stakeholders.

Example: Farm Business Innovation Show held at NEC Birmingham November 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Foster community spirit and volunteerism by promoting farmers markets to consumers.

Create a programme of a **nation wide farmers market events** to encourage foot fall, community engagement and appeal of local produce. This will increase visibility and income streams for family farm produce.

Example: Farmers Market Week, US

Create ABL campaign to communicate resources available to farm enterprises.

Targeting the farming community to **encourage innovation and highlight State supports** available to them.

This would create awareness for the website and all initiatives and events taking place throughout the year.

It would also create awareness at consumer level for farm enterprises, their amazing products and dedication to the three facets of sustainability.

# Priority Actions

1.

Clarify the role of each State body in supporting family farm producers: type of support provided, eligibility criteria, demarcation lines.

Develop awareness tools that can be easily accessed and understood by farm families.

2.

Nominate one contact point to act as first port of call to lead family farm diversification including farm food produce. This contact point should signpost appropriate supports and ensure all agency collaboration.

Establish Forum with state agency representation to encourage and support collaboration.

3.

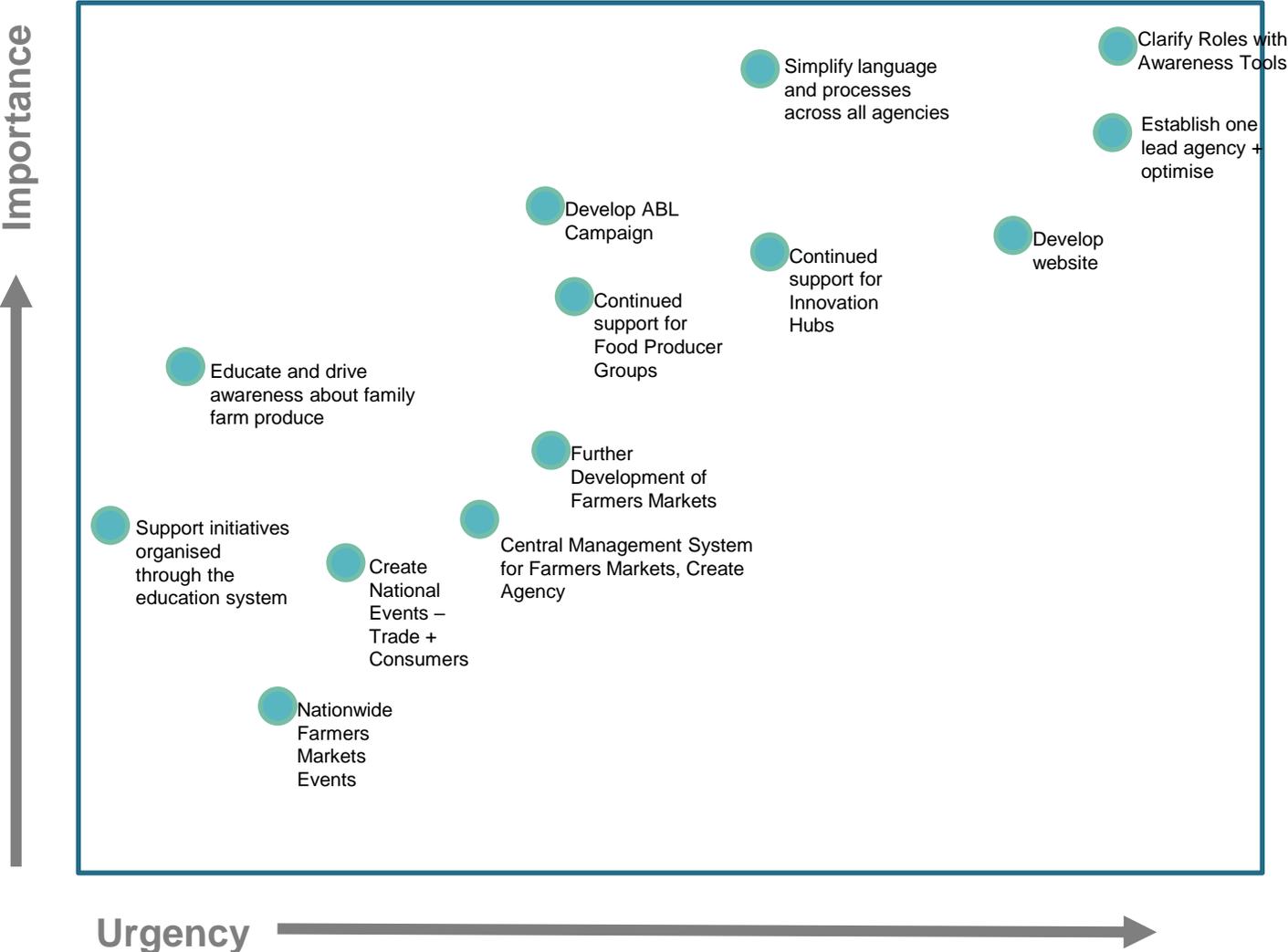
Create a platform for farm enterprises to access public and private supports.

A dedicated website that has all information for farmers and for consumers.

Launch and communicate website.

**While all recommendations are necessary, the above three are the most critical and will produce the greatest results in the short to medium term.**

# Actions Prioritised



# Thank you

BORD BIA   
**Thinking**  
**House**