

## **Joint Statement by Farming Groups on Government Response to Storm Éowyn**

We, the undersigned organisations, representing small to medium-scale organic and/or agroecological horticultural growers nationwide, wish to express our concern about the current level of support provided by the government in response to Storm Eowyn damage to our sector. We hereby call on the government to provide comprehensive and targeted assistance to the impacted producers, details of which are outlined below.

### **Background:**

On January 24th 2025 Storm Eowyn caused unprecedented destruction to our horticulture sector. The scale and extent of the damage has left this sector in a state of crisis. On February 14th 2025, the government responded with the targeted reopening of the 2025 Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector. This response however falls significantly short of addressing the urgent and critical needs of affected farmers and growers. The €7,500 minimum investment requirement, a 50% aid cap, and the exclusion of repair work make it unworkable for many of those most affected. Moreover, the scheme provides no relief for income disruption and loss of livelihood, leaving too many growers without the support they urgently need.

### **The Reality on the Ground:**

Over 40 growers have suffered severe losses to their protected cropping infrastructure, including polytunnels, glasshouses, and other essential farming structures, with some facing total devastation of their infrastructure and crops. Many of these growers are already struggling with rising production costs and the unpredictability of weather patterns. The lack of support for income loss, in addition to the restrictive conditions of the current aid package, makes it nearly impossible for growers to rebuild and recover. The €7,500 minimum investment threshold alone means that those most impacted by the storm—many of whom are small-scale organic and ecological growers—are effectively excluded from receiving aid.

Across the country, some growers have resorted to launching GoFundMe campaigns, effectively being forced to lean on the goodwill of their communities in order to recommence their valuable work. These campaigns may cover some of the materials costs but these growers still face huge disruption as they dismantle damaged infrastructure and install replacements.

These small rural businesses provide an unmatched service to their communities while delivering vital ecosystem services, including:

- Supplying fresh, local, and organic food that strengthens regional food security.
- Supporting biodiversity and soil health.
- Enhancing climate resilience by reducing chemical inputs and fostering regenerative land management.
- Boosting rural economies by creating local employment and shortening supply chains.

Despite their crucial role, these growers have been left without adequate state support, forcing them to rely on charity rather than structured government assistance. This is neither fair nor sustainable.

We furthermore remind the government of the National Organic Strategy ambition to reduce imports of organic fruit and veg from 70% to 50% by 2030.

#### **Precedent:**

In times of crisis, the government has previously demonstrated a willingness to support other sectors with tailored financial assistance. For example:

- The **Horticulture Emergency Payment Scheme (HEPS)** provided support to tillage and larger horticultural farmers based on their declared hectares under BISS from the previous year. Similar unconditional support should be extended to small and medium-scale organic and agroecological growers who need immediate relief.
- During the **2022 pig sector crisis**, the government launched the **PEPS and PEPS2 schemes** to provide financial aid to farmers facing rising feed costs due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These schemes set a precedent for providing substantial support in response to sector-specific crises.

#### **Our recommendations:**

1. **Direct Financial Assistance:**
  - Support for crop damage and income loss resulting directly from the storm and the subsequent decommissioning of polytunnels and other infrastructure.
2. **Targeted Financial Assistance:**
  - Assistance for growers who do not meet the €7,500 minimum investment requirement under the 2025 Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector, to facilitate repairs to partially damaged polytunnels and glasshouses, with automatic exemption from planning requirements.
  - Support for the replacement of plastic covers on polytunnels and other smaller structures not covered under the reopened 2025 scheme.
3. **Amendments to the 2025 Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector:**
  - Waive the immediate requirement for planning permission documentation, with proof of planning permission or exemption required before fund disbursement.
  - Increase the minimum grant aid rate to 60%, aligning it with the Organic Capital Investment Scheme (OCIS).

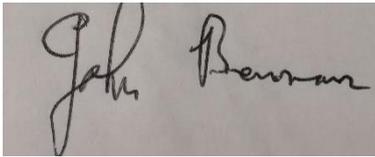
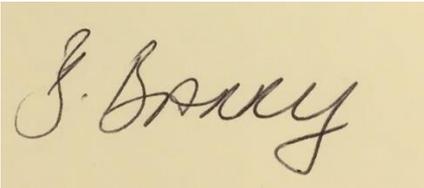
**Important Note:** All supports must be designed to avoid additional administrative or financial burdens on growers already under extreme pressure.

**Conclusion:**

The livelihoods of our growers are at risk, and without immediate action, many will be forced out of business, further eroding our country's ability to produce healthy, locally grown food. The consequences of this will be felt not only by the farming community but by all consumers who rely on local, sustainable food systems.

We call on the government to act with the urgency and commitment that this crisis demands. We remain committed to securing the necessary support for our sector and stand in solidarity with all affected growers. We request a meeting with the minister and the department to discuss the swift implementation of these critical recommendations.

**Signed:**

Talamh Beo		06Mar25
Leitrim Organic Co-op		06Mar25
Organic Growers Ireland (OGI)		06 Mar 25
Farming For Nature		10 <sup>th</sup> March 2025
Irish Seed Savers Association		7 <sup>th</sup> March 2025