

The Irish Farmers Journal welcomes readers' feedback and comments. Text FJ, followed by your comment and name, to 51444. From Northern Ireland text FJ 86122.

FARM PLASTIC

IFFPG needs to develop efficient recycling facilities

Seamus O'Callaghan, Managing Director & IFFPG Director.

DEAR SIR, I wish to refer to the letter by Michael Slattery, chairman of the IFFPG on page 13 of the *Irish Farmers Journal* on 2 June 2007.

As a Director, I have tried to work with IFFPG to develop a fair and cost effective system for the farmer to ensure that waste plastic is collected in a responsible way and allows the farmer to collect his REPS, Single Farm Payment cheques etc. in an unhindered fashion.

LEVY

Our experience in Ireland is that the trade levy system, which has now been in existence for a number of years, has not worked and has been abandoned in nearly every other country where it was tried and proved to be unworkable. In addition, the current levy system will cost the farmer more, with a huge amount of unworkable administration, compared with efficient commercial operations.

COSTS

While there are a number of commercial collection systems, the FRS/Solway system is the best known commercial operation in Ireland and, if one compared their costs with the highly intricate IFFPG costs, it's easy to understand why farmers and the trade are up in arms about where we are heading in relation to waste plastic disposal. As you can see from Table 1 (below), I have calculated the costs and related them back to per reel cost as most farmers are familiar with the cost/charge for a "roll of wray".

For comparison purposes, I analysed the only plastic product category that has a traceability system in place and that is 'stretch film' for round bale silage or, as the product is regularly referred to by farmers as, a 'roll of wrap'.

Briefly, the IFFG service is costing the farmer about €11/reel where the farmer has retained the 6-digit traceability numbers. And, God forbid if he loses or misplaces the numbers, his cost of disposing of each reel of waste will amount to €16.68 per reel.

By comparison, the FRS/Solway system is much more straightforward, with payment when the service is provided, no traceabiity, no proof of purchase required and at a cost of about €8.00/reel if you wish to have the plastic collected and about €7.30/reel when the farmers bring the plastic to the new evolving Bring Centres being set up by FRS.

TRACEABILITY

According to Mr Slattery's letter, costs would be reduced by 50% with the introduction of the traceability system. The figures in the table below do not bear this out and, in fact,

the reduction in cost between 'proof of purchase' and 'no proof of purchase' is of the order of 34% and is still about 30% higher than the efficient commercial service offered by FRS.

If IFFPG were to withdraw from the collection system and allow an efficient market driven collection service evolve, more and more recyclers would be encouraged to enter the market. A clear, transparent market in the collection and disposal of plastic, together with the growth and development of new recycling plants would be good for everyone, including recyclers and farmers. The main advantage of moving to a free open market would be as follows:

- 1. Lower costs to the farmer of products such as wrap, sheet, twine, netwrap etc.
- 2. Farmers could avoid pre-paying for a service which they may or may not receive.
- 3. Farmers who have pre-paid for a collection service and do not receive that service, end up having to pay twice in order to dispose of their plastic. This would be avoided in a changed market.

Finally, Mr Slattery makes the point that farmers should not be saddled with all the cost and I agree completely with him. For this reason, I would be suggesting that IFFPG should concentrate on encouraging and monitoring the Producer Responsibility Principle with all manufacturers and assist in the development of efficient recycling facilities in Ireland. We would thereby achieve what we all want - the efficient collection of all waste plastic with guaranteed recycling outlets for all types of plastic.

Table 1: Current collection costs compared on a 'Roll of Wrap' basis

	Irish Farm Films Producers Group IFFPG		Farm Relief Services/Solway FRS	
Costs per reel of 750 mm x 1500m 'roll of wrap'	With proof of purchase	No Proof of purchase	Collection Costs	Bring Centres
Trade Levy/R	€3.30	€3.30	-	-
Trade Margin/R	€0.69	€0.69	-	-
VAT 21%/R	€0.84	€0.84	-	-
Cost of Traceability/R	€0.50	€0.50	-	-
Charge at collection time	€5.00	€10.00	€6.98	€6.45
VAT 13.5%/R	€0.68	€1.35	€0.94	€0.87
Total collection costs /roll of wrap	€11.01	€16.68	€7.92	€7.32