

Having read both the Terms of Reference and the Issues Paper relative to the Farm Household Allowance review, I would appreciate the opportunity to submit my ideas about the application process. There are many issues which are applicable to our farming situation outlined in the paper, but for the purpose of efficacy, I will focus on the main points.

By way of introduction, my husband and I operate a successful farm, which in an average season, makes a profit.

However, owing to the prolonged and widespread drought, we find ourselves in a situation where there is no prospect of income through cropping in the near future and we are feeding our breeding cows and calves to attempt to keep them alive.

With the above in mind, we have begun the process of applying for the Farm Household Allowance. We are on the verge of cessation with the application because of several reasons.

- The application is a convoluted, confusing and interrogative form, which requires many supporting documents, some of which, in our case are extremely difficult to obtain.
- We are not welfare-minded folk and we do feel uncomfortable accepting, or asking for help. It is only through need that we started the process, but it has become all too hard to gather the required information, some of which seem irrelevant to the issues at stake.
- We are self-assessing as we do own property (but do not collect income from them) other than our current property, so feel that we would not meet the assets test. Do we sell these? (our two sons work these other properties, but the land is in my husband's name.)

- I spoke to a friend recently who, luckily for them will receive the FHA, but her comment to me was “I will never, never do it again” when I said how very difficult the paperwork was. It is an arduous, burdensome and extremely laborious process.

Further to the above:

*We do not feel the FHA should be a business support payment, because our farming business can support itself comfortably in an average season. Rather, it is a household support when farm incomes are depleted. We certainly do not view the FHA as a vehicle to improve our long term financial circumstance.

*Therefore we do not regard it as a long term solution, but a short term assistance to buy food to put on the table. It would be a great help to us to gain this assistance, but because of the hurdles in the application process, at this point, we will not be proceeding with our claim.

* The program appears to be failing in its delivery. The application process discourages farmers from applying because of the obstacles in both the ten page document and its support requirements.

In conclusion, our values dictate that our farm should and can sustain us when seasons are average, without any Government help. The FHA would not diminish our adherence to them, but would help to pay a few small bills in the short term. This drought is a most widespread and devastating event – we do not believe the Government, or any person can resolve the problem, but the FHA would assist us until things return to normal.