

**Address by**

**Mr. John Gormley, T.D.,**

**Minister for the Environment,**

**Heritage and Local Government,**

**at**

**Cré Conference**

**Croke Park Conference Centre**

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## **Welcome**

I am delighted to be with you all today and it is wonderful to see so many people interested in the future of the composting industry. I hope you all enjoy the day and benefit from today's informative discussions.

## **Background**

Ireland faces significant challenges over the next number of years in meeting daunting targets for the diversion of biodegradable municipal waste from landfill, commencing in 2010. The Government is acutely aware of the need to make rapid progress in diverting biowaste and, towards that end, the *Programme for Government* commits us to implementing the *National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste*.

I know that you are all aware of the detail of that document (and I believe Percy uses it as bedtime reading) but I feel it is vital to set out the challenging goals it covers.

The Landfill Directive requires Member States of the European Union to reduce their dependence on the landfill of municipal waste in favour of more environmentally sound and sustainable alternatives, which I fully support.

The *National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste*, which was published in April 2006, sets out measures to progressively divert biodegradable municipal waste from landfill in accordance with the prescribed targets in the Directive. The strategy is based on the internationally recognised hierarchy of waste management options adopted as Government policy since the publication of *Changing Our Ways* in 1998 and more recently incorporated into the new Waste Framework Directive (Directive 2008/98/EC) adopted by the EU institutions in late November last. The preferred options for dealing with biodegradable municipal waste are:

- prevention and minimisation,
- reuse,
- recycling and biological treatment,
- residual treatment.

As you are all aware, the Directive also sets out targets in relation to the progressive diversion of biodegradable municipal waste from landfill to 75% by 2006, 50% by 2009 and to 35% by 2016 of the amount of biodegradable municipal waste generated in the baseline year of 1995 (estimated for Ireland at around 1.3 million tonnes). In the case of Ireland, we availed of a derogation and so interim diversion targets to 75% by 2010 and 50% by 2013 have been established.

This is the context in which we all must work. The challenge we face will not be an easy one! In order to meet the Directive's targets, it is estimated that in the region of 1.4 million tonnes of biodegradable municipal waste will need to be diverted by 2010 rising progressively to 1.8 million tonnes by 2016. But we shouldn't be daunted by the task. We have achieved much in recycling in

recent years and by continuing to work together I have no doubt that our success in recycling can be replicated across the composting sector!

### **Current situation**

There are challenges to face as I outlined but along with challenge comes opportunity. This is an exciting time for the compost industry and there will be rapid changes in the short term. I realise the need to drive material away from landfill and so I will be introducing new legislation to make changes to the landfill levy. Diversion of material from landfill will provide the composting industry with opportunities for expansion.

You may also be aware that my Department issued a circular to each local authority last summer regarding the implementation of the *National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste*. This circular strongly advocated the need for the rapid roll-out of segregated “Brown Bin” collections for biowaste in all suitable areas complemented by arrangements to promote the greater use of home composting. This will drive the roll out of “brown bins” right across the country and will ensure that vital feedstock becomes available for the composting industry.

As many of you know my Department is also working on the development of new regulations to source separate food waste arising in commercial premises. I am pleased to announce that a stakeholder conference will take place on 11<sup>th</sup> February in relation to the proposed regulations. These regulations aim to provide another steady feedstock for the composting industry. Other benefits will also accrue in that it should cut waste costs in the business community and also make for a more sustainable economy going forward.

It is time that everybody realised that this material is a resource and not a waste. This is the message that must be understood by all stakeholders if we are to collectively achieve what is needed. Once this message is understood and accepted we will have a vibrant compost industry that is good for jobs, good for business and good for the market.

My Department is working closely with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who are endeavouring to develop guidance on the application of the new Animal By-products Regulations.

This is a vital area to facilitate investor confidence in the market and I am delighted to see that you have a speaker later on today to discuss this guidance.

Co-operation is key to the growth of your industry and being compliant with all relevant legislation and regulation can only benefit all players in the industry. There must be a belief in the quality of the end product to allow for growth in market share and indeed growth in the entire market. To assist in this regard work is ongoing to develop a quality compost standard which is vital to ensure stability and consistency in the product. This leads to confidence by

consumers and ultimately growth for the entire industry. We must strive to be market leaders and set rather than follow the standards.

### **The future**

I am determined to work with industry to promote the use of quality recycling and to change mindsets to see the various waste streams as a valuable resource. However, good intentions and good product are not enough. Without a viable market to sell into the industry will not survive.

The Government's policy statement, *Preventing and Recycling Waste - Delivering Change*, identified a lack of sustainable and economically attractive markets and outlets for recyclable materials as one of the main barriers to an improved and sustainable national recycling performance.

The significant cost and effort associated with the segregation, collection, sorting, pre-treatment and reprocessing of recyclable materials demands that markets be developed to realise the full resource value of all recyclable materials that are reclaimed. To address these issues I am providing funding to implement the recommendations set out in the *Market Development Programme for Waste Resources*.

The €13 million multi-annual market development programme is primarily focussed on promoting sustainable demand for recovered materials, supporting the achievement of economies of scale in the production of products made from recycled materials and in identifying the need for additional recycling infrastructure to reduce Ireland's reliance on overseas markets as well as identifying new applications and markets for recyclable material and secondary recycled products.

One of the key components of this programme is the organic fraction of waste. I understand that one of your speakers here today, Conor McGovern, manages the organics programme for the Market Development Group and will set out how the MDG can help your industry to grow.

### **Conclusion**

I hope I have managed to convey to all of you the central role I see for composting in meeting our diversion targets. I think the future is very bright for this industry, I expect to see job growth and market growth and I promise to do my part to help you make this happen. A lot of work has already taken place and there is more to do to meet our targets but you should know that we face it collectively. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning and I hope the day is productive and informative for you all.