



Business Strategy for a Vegetable Micro Enterprise

31st October 2025

Authors: Grainne Kelliher, James Burke & Martin Bealin



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach
Co-funded by the
European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach
an Deiscirt
Southern Regional
Assembly



**Enterprise
Ireland**

Business Strategy for a Vegetable Micro Enterprise

Teagasc states that vegetable production in Ireland is an important part of the horticultural industry, with approximately 4,237ha of field vegetables grown annually worth €76m (DAFM, 2018) at farm gate. In addition, there are 163ha of vegetables grown under protection valued at close to €29m. Production is concentrated in Dublin, Meath, Wexford and Cork, with approximately 200 growers. The largest 50 growers (in terms of area) account for 75% of the total field vegetable production area. The industry is labour intensive, employing in excess of 1,000 people full-time. These large-scale production units are highly professional and efficient, focused on producing high-quality vegetables at a competitive price for supermarkets. Ireland is about 60% self-sufficient in vegetables, and the seasonal climate means that the remainder must be imported.

Bord Bia has identified a lack of new entrants to the field vegetable sector, which is contributing to farm consolidation. As older growers retire without successors, production is increasingly concentrated in fewer, larger operations. This presents concerns for diversity, resilience, and the long-term viability of the sector.

Currently, only 84 field vegetable growers are listed on the Sustainable Horticulture Assurance Scheme (excluding potato and protected crop growers), which enables participants to use the Bord Bia Quality Mark to promote locally grown produce.

In 2023, Bord Bia stated, “If you take the field vegetable sector as an example, we did a census back in 1998 and there were about 400 growers. Currently, we estimate on the commercial side of field growers, there are about 60 growers” backing up the dramatic fall in grower numbers.

Key National Trends

- Fewer, bigger growers with production concentrating in a smaller number of large, mainly east/south-east growers.
- High-cost base e.g. labour (often 40–43% of costs), energy, packaging and inputs remain elevated, squeezing margins.
- Weather/seasonal disruption leads to delayed or uneven supply and creates occasional shelf gaps. Also, there is little spare capacity.
- Imports remain very competitive with Irish growers having to secure price recognition to stay in the retail mix.
- Policy support is mainly to stabilise, with DAFM investment schemes aiming to hold and modernise, not to expand rapidly.
- Channel diversification is seeing successful growers spreading sales across retail, foodservice, farm shop and local/online.

A previous feasibility study on the Dingle Peninsula entitled An Garraí Glas 2005 – 2006 which looked at providing fresher local food to the consumer, and the option of off-farm sales of fruit and vegetables, was also reviewed as part of this research. The report stated that there was very little fresh produce grown locally with most produce trucked in. As part of the same research, a 2005/06 survey of 30 local food businesses, however, found strong willingness to buy local veg (70%).

Local research for this feasibility study included engaging with growers on the Dingle Peninsula, understanding their business model, capacity and current supply chains.



This 2024/2025 local research indicated the same challenges on the peninsula as those seen at national level. Grower numbers are much less than they were even 5 years ago, there was evidence of succession challenges with the next generation not taking over existing land, and several interviewees talked of rising costs and elusive profitability.

The following Dingle Peninsula growers were identified:

- Manna organic, Gleann na ngealt
- Aiden O'Connor, Castlegregory
- Derek O Connor, Castlegregory
- Tim Hurley, Lispole
- Cliff Galvin, Castlegregory
- Denny Cronin, Castlegregory
- John Hussey, Castlegregory
- Green Valley Riasc

Some of the above growers were interviewed, a number of farm visits were conducted, and extensive searches were undertaken to identify any other growers. Communications were sent to the growers and an invite extended to this group to participate in a trial on a number of occasions.

While preparations were made to run a live trial with local growers as part of this feasibility study, it emerged there were not enough growers to support such a trial, and those who were still growing vegetables had already found sufficient outlets to sell their product. One grower did participate in one of the live seafood markets and expressed a desire to continue in the future.

The Dingle Peninsula producers still growing vegetables articulated that they were either growing very small amounts which were sold locally, or where they had slightly larger acreage had found a number of vegetable shops and markets which were sufficient to sell the annual crop.

Dingle Peninsula has a long history of growing vegetables, mostly small-scale and for local use, rather than commercial sale. Families typically kept plots for potatoes, cabbage, turnips and later carrots, with growing concentrated on the better ground and tied closely to mixed farming. There is now a danger that the growing skill passed from generation to generation together with cultural and heritage aspects could be lost forever.

These challenges do not mean the sector has to disappear. What emerged strongly from the interviews is that growers believe they would plant more, and younger family members might stay involved, if there was a visible, reliable outlet that paid a fair local price and promoted "grown on the peninsula" produce. A Dingle Peninsula short food supply chain, sitting alongside lamb and seafood, could give veg a profile it currently lacks, reduce the marketing/admin burden on individual growers, and create a pipeline of orders for seasonal crops.

By making it easier to sell what they grow, and by telling the story of local horticulture to consumers, such a model could help the next generation see vegetable growing as a viable, respected part of the local food economy rather than something to wind down.

A short-term practical solution which emerged during the research, and which will be implemented, is the creation of a WhatsApp group with growers who will be able to post messages about crops available/in season to an audience of store owners, foodservice operators etc to view.



Due to the routes to market already established by the existing local vegetable growers on the Dingle Peninsula together with the limited and decreasing supply of vegetables, the vegetable feasibility study did not proceed beyond desktop research and the grower engagement stage.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach
Co-funded by the
European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach
an Deiscirt
Southern Regional
Assembly



Enterprise
Ireland