# Irish coalition seeks EU pilot for comprehensive land ownership database



A coalition of Irish farmers, environmentalists, and academics has recently attracted attention from Brussels with plans to establish a comprehensive database tracking land sales, purchases, and usage across Ireland. The informal group, known as the Irish Land Observatory, has held discussions with officials from the European Commission’s agriculture and rural development departments to explore the possibility of initiating an EU-backed pilot project in Ireland.

The initiative aims to address growing concerns over what the group terms a “land squeeze” within Ireland’s food sector. This phenomenon refers to the increasing acquisition of farmland by wealthy buyers, which, while legal, is believed to be driving up land prices. This trend poses challenges for a farming community characterised by an ageing population and limited opportunities for younger generations to participate in agriculture.

During meetings held last week in Brussels, representatives from the Irish Land Observatory proposed Ireland as a suitable location for the pilot programme. Should the project move forward, the first phase would focus on collecting and analysing data on land ownership and utilisation, with particular attention to difficulties accessing farmland in regions such as Munster and Leinster. The group also highlighted the current absence of a dedicated body to compile and interpret information on land trends in Ireland.

Daniel Long, a 31-year-old Tipperary farmer and member of the Irish Land Observatory, emphasised the magnitude of the challenges facing Irish agriculture. “Irish farming faces huge issues, from ensuring the next generation stay involved to confronting a practice known as land consolidation – meaning the greater concentration of land among a smaller number of landowners,” he told The Journal. Long added that the concern extends beyond Ireland, noting, “This isn’t just an issue affecting a small pocket of the country, it’s a European issue as well. But Ireland is as good a test case as any for an observatory, working here to see where land ownership trends are going, how land is being used.”

Among the group travelling to Brussels was Saoirse McHugh, an environmentalist from Achill Island and former Green Party candidate who ran as an independent in last year’s European elections. Speaking to The Journal, McHugh outlined her interest in the project’s potential to shed light on how land ownership interacts with environmental policies addressing biodiversity loss, peatland degradation, and water pollution. “What happens to land affects everybody and really affects the shape of our communities and societies. So even though land in Ireland is mostly owned by farmers, what happens to land affects everybody,” she said. McHugh highlighted the lack of accessible, consolidated data on land use and policy impact, stating: “We don’t have a clearly accessible database where we can see how policies really affect land and land movement.”

Long expressed that understanding ownership levels is paramount. “The biggest thing is who owns what and understanding how much people own,” he said. However, he acknowledged that the group might encounter resistance from segments of the agricultural industry, possibly including those involved in large-scale land acquisitions. “Taxpayers are entitled to transparency,” Long added, referencing the extent of both state and EU financial support present in the sector.

McHugh also noted the political implications of land ownership concentration: “The more land you own, the more political sway you may have in an area... It’s actual influence. Because if I can decide what happens to 80% of the land in the area I live, that’s a huge amount of power.”

Ireland South Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Cynthia Ní Mhurchú, who played a role in arranging the meetings between the Irish group and EU officials, emphasised the importance of safeguarding property rights throughout the process. “It is important to note that such a potential land observatory should in no way affect the property rights of farmers or other landowners, which rights are specifically protected by Bunreacht na hÉireann," she told The Journal. Ní Mhurchú advocated for the engagement of farmers as key stakeholders in the examination, describing the proposed observatory as a “multi-stakeholder project, based on a public-private partnership.”

The Fianna Fáil MEP underscored that the sector’s challenges are compounded by a lack of reliable data and difficulties faced by younger farmers in securing banking support. These issues, she noted, add urgency to the examination of land ownership patterns and usage in Ireland through a dedicated observatory. The Journal is reporting that the discussion remains ongoing as Irish representatives and European officials continue to explore the feasibility of piloting this project within Ireland.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.thejournal.ie/land-observatory-farming-6678430-Apr2025/> - Details discussions between Irish farmers/environmentalists and EU officials about establishing an EU land observatory pilot program in Ireland.
* <https://www.farmersjournal.ie/news/news/irish-farmers-lobby-in-brussels-for-eu-land-watchdog-863772> - Confirms Irish delegation's Brussels lobbying efforts and Daniel Long's statements about land consolidation challenges and generational renewal issues.
* <https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/from-farmland-to-supermarkets-the-growing-loss-of-agricultural-land-in-europe/> - Supports EU Land Observatory plans mentioned in the article, including focus on farmland monitoring and access challenges.
* <https://my.uplift.ie/petitions/put-limits-on-the-purchase-of-land-by-the-mega-wealthy?share=57123027-db2b-4b17-ac64-31b5da439c46> - Corroborates concerns about wealthy land buyers and references EU-level approval for Land Observatory concepts described in the article.
* <https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/land-use-soils-and-transport/EPA-RR-198_web-Essentra.pdf> - Documents Ireland's existing land mapping initiatives (ILMO project) related to creating detailed land cover databases as referenced in the article.