



IFA Submission To Competition Authority - Veterinary Surgeons

Due to the continuing pressure on farm incomes it is essential that real competition be maintained in the market place for farmers. This competition should apply to the products and the services they avail of in the day-to-day management of their farms. IFA welcomes the request from the Competition Authority for a submission as part of this investigation and hope it is one of many to ensure competition is maintained in the agricultural sector for farmers.

The services of Veterinary surgeons are necessary for farmers to maintain the health and welfare of their animals. These services are also needed to comply with regulatory requirements, ranging from the prescribing process for animal remedies to the TB and Brucellosis eradication schemes. As a result of the necessity for veterinary services on farms it is vital that real and tangible competition is available in this key service area.

IFA receive complaints on a regular basis from farmers throughout the country about the lack of availability of Veterinary services. In particular, there are problems with the provision of emergency procedures on their farms. This can be attributed to two factors - very limited veterinary cover in their area or the unavailability of vets as a result of food hygiene work being undertaken in meat factories. This type of situation does not lend itself to competition for farmers' business and has further knock on effects in reducing the options available when TB and Brucellosis testing rates are being negotiated.

It is IFA's contention that the low no. of veterinary places available in Ireland, combined with the major shift towards small animal practice, of those qualifying is contributing to the lack of service and competition available to farmers. The failure to recognise qualifications other than those held by veterinarians to carry out farm work such as testing under the ERAD schemes is a major contributor to a lack of competition in this field.

Because the veterinary services market is local in scope there is an obvious difficulty in the maintenance of competition. There may not be adequate work in an area to sustain a large no. of vets and it is for this reason IFA feel other suitably qualified people should be allowed to carry out a lot of routine work on farms to at least provide competition in these areas.

The fact that the veterinary profession is self-regulating through the Veterinary Council leaves farmers with no independent recourse in the event of difficulties with a practitioner or the standard of veterinary cover provided in their area.