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50/17 photos attached, captions embedded

21<sup>st</sup> March 2017

### **Minister launches 2017 Recommended List of Grass and White Clover Varieties**

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed TD, today officially launched the 2017 Recommended List of Grass and White Clover Varieties. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine carries out the national Crop Variety Evaluation Programme with new crop varieties of the principal crop species evaluated for suitability for cultivation in Ireland. Only crop varieties that offer superior performance over existing varieties for Irish farmers are approved and published in the annual Recommended List of Varieties. This national programme run by the Department and involving extensive testing and trialling of varieties is one of the reasons why the evaluation programme here receives such strong support from both industry and breeders alike and provides farmers with varieties ideally suited to Irish conditions.

Speaking today on a visit to the farm of Cork farmer, Michael Bateman, Crookstown, Macroom, Minister Creed said:

*“Grass is central to our efficient dairy and livestock systems and it is essential for the continued competitiveness of the sector that farmers have access to the newest high performing grass varieties. It is particularly appropriate that in this the designated Year of Sustainable Grassland that the Recommended List of Grasses and Clovers contains*

*essential information for farmers on the economic value of grass as indicated by the Pasture Profit Index.*

The Year of Sustainable Grassland initiative supports the goals of Food Wise 2025 strategy and aims at raising awareness on the critical role that grass plays in supporting competitive dairy and livestock production. These sectors possess a significant cost advantage in the form of an environmentally sustainable, rain-fed, grass based production system. It is this grass based system that provides Ireland with its comparative advantage in increasingly competitive international markets. The Recommended List of Grass and Clover Varieties underpins and supports this competitive advantage by identifying new grass varieties that can perform to the highest level whilst utilising inputs with ever greater efficiency.

A number of initiatives have already been run under the year of Sustainable Grassland initiative including a grass focused campaign in January of this year called 'Grass 10', launched by Teagasc. This is a four-year campaign which will focus on improving grass utilisation at farm level through a range of farm based activities such as grazing management, grass measurement and sward composition etc. A significant portion of the grass being measured on farms will consist of varieties tested, approved and contained on the Recommended List.

In order to strengthen coherence between the work of the Department on sustainable grassland and the Grass 10 Campaign, Teagasc will run a 'Grassland farmer of the year' competition this year, with financial support from the Department. This is a further signal of the Minister's commitment to the grassland sector.

The Recommended List is available for free download from the 'Publications' section on the Department's website: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/publications/2017/>

**ENDS**