



Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing Employment in the Western Region

This *WDC Insights* summarises the key findings of 'Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing Employment in the Western Region: Regional Sectoral Profile',¹ the sixth in a series of reports analysing employment data for specific economic sectors in the Western Region.

Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing is a complex sector which plays many economic, societal and environmental roles. This report only examines **direct employment of those whose main economic activity is working in the sector**, as reported in the Census. It does not include persons who farm part-time but have another 'main' job. It includes those working on farms, fishing vessels, aquaculture farms, forestry and stables but not in agri-food processing.² Of everyone working in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing in Ireland, 1 in 4 live in the Western Region. Of all economic sectors it is where the region accounts for its highest share of national employment.

Employment in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing in the Western Region

According to Census 2016, 22,733 people worked in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing in the Western Region and it was the region's sixth largest employment sector. It accounts for a higher share of total employment in the region than nationally (Table 1). In the region it is most important in the highly rural counties of Roscommon, Leitrim and Mayo, but all western counties³ are considerably above the national average.

Table 1: Selected employment indicators for Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (AFF) in the Western Region and state, 2016

County	AFF as % of Total Employment 1996	AFF as % of Total Employment 2016	No. Employed 2016	% Change 2011-2016	% of AFF that is Male 2016	% of AFF that is Self-employment 2016
Clare	14.4%	6.9%	3,423	-8.7%	91.4%	84.8%
Donegal	12.5%	6.8%	3,977	0.8%	92.8%	68.0%
Galway City	1.0%	0.5%	163	-3.0%	87.7%	62.0%
Galway County	20.0%	7.3%	5,505	-6.8%	92.4%	79.5%
Leitrim	21.8%	8.6%	1,091	-8.6%	91.9%	76.4%
Mayo	20.1%	8.5%	4,395	-17.9%	89.5%	74.0%
Roscommon	22.7%	9.0%	2,311	-3.9%	94.0%	79.4%
Sligo	13.3%	7.2%	1,868	8.5%	92.3%	74.1%
Western Region	15.6%	6.8%	22,733	-7.0%	91.9%	76.5%
State	9.2%	4.4%	89,116	-2.6%	88.2%	71.1%

Source: CSO, *Census 2016: Summary Results Part 2, Table EZ011*; CSO, *Census of Population 1996, Volume 5 – Principal Economic Status and Industries, Table A0513*; CSO, *Census 2016: Profile 11 – Employment, Occupations and Industry, Table EB027 and Table EB033 (special run from CSO)*

1. Download from <https://www.wdc.ie/publications/reports-and-papers/>
2. Agri-food processing forms part of the Industry sector and was examined in a previous Regional Sectoral Profile, WDC (2019), *Industry in the Western Region: Regional Sectoral Profile* <https://www.wdc.ie/publications/reports-and-papers/>
3. At 0.5%, Galway City is an exception. Given the low numbers involved, Galway City will be excluded from much of the following discussion.



Its importance as an employment sector has changed dramatically over the past two decades, declining in the region from 15.6% in 1996 to its current 6.8%. While the region has consistently had a far higher share working in this sector than nationally, the gap has narrowed. At a county level the most dramatic changes occurred in Roscommon, Leitrim, Galway County and Mayo where over 20% of jobs were in this sector two decades ago.

There was a 7% decline in the number working in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing between 2011 and 2016, considerably higher than the 2.6% decline nationally. The 17.9% drop in Mayo is particularly striking and was the largest decline in Ireland. It is important to note this only counts people whose main economic activity is in the sector, some may have continued to farm part-time. At 8.5% growth, Sligo actually experienced stronger jobs growth in this sector than in total jobs (2.2%), one of only two counties where this happened.⁴

As would be expected, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing is strongly male-dominated. In the Western Region the male share is 91.9%, somewhat higher than nationally and the male share actually increased between 2011 and 2016. As a percentage of total men's jobs, Roscommon (15.4%), Leitrim (14.8%) and Mayo (14.2%) is where it is most important.

Three-quarters of people working in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing in the region are self-employed (employer or own account worker). At 80+%, Clare, Galway County and Roscommon have the region's highest incidence of self-employment.

In terms of activities, 'Animals & Mixed Farming' accounts for 88.6% of total jobs in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing in the region, a notably higher share than nationally (82.6%). It dominates in all western counties and particularly in Clare, Sligo, Roscommon and Galway County, explaining their high self-employment. It is least important in Donegal which has however the largest share working in 'Fishing & Aquaculture' (14.3%).

'Tillage, Horseracing & Other Farming' accounts for a small share of the sector's jobs in the region (5.1%), less than half the national share (12.6%), reflecting the region's reliance on cattle and sheep farming. At 2.6% of all Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing employment, 'Forestry & Logging' is the smallest activity. It is most important in Leitrim (6.4%).

Key Policy Issues

Despite declines, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing continues to play a larger role in the region's labour market. Changes in the sector, for example as a result of Brexit or climate change mitigation efforts would have a particular impact on the region's labour market and rural areas in particular. It must therefore be considered as a priority sector in national, regional and county strategies aimed at sustaining and revitalising the regional and rural economy.

The sector is highly exposed to Brexit. It is already facing challenges due to exchange rate fluctuations and future challenges will depend on the nature of the EU-UK trading relationship.⁵ Considerable efforts are underway to mitigate the impact of Brexit, including through product and market diversification, and it is important that the issues and needs of the sector in the Western Region, characterised by smaller scale operations, is addressed in Brexit adaptation efforts.

Western Region plays a strategic role in Ireland's Fishing & Aquaculture sector and is home to 43% of Ireland's 'Fishing & Aquaculture' jobs. Killybegs is a key strategic asset in the country's seafood sector, along with the Marine Institute and other education and research facilities in the region. Ireland's seafood sector has shown strong recent growth, predominantly export-led. Brexit however poses many challenges and addressing these will be vital to future jobs growth in the sector.⁶

Further potential for Forestry & Logging. The region's forestry resource is a valuable asset, supplying the construction industry with quality product. The region is also well placed to further develop a wood energy sector using by-products. This involves local supply chains and can bring positive local employment impacts primarily benefitting rural areas.⁷ There is an opportunity to further develop wood energy to stimulate local job creation as well as increase renewable energy use.

For more detailed analysis see 'Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing Employment in the Western Region: Regional Sectoral Profile'
<http://www.wdc.ie/publications/reports-and-papers/>

4. The other was Carlow.

5. Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (2019), [Brexit Fact Sheet, Irish Agri-Food Sector](#)

6. BIM (2018), [The Business of Seafood 2017: A Snapshot of Ireland's Seafood Sector](#)

7. WDC (2014), [A Study of Local Economic and Social Benefits of Bioenergy Installations and their Associated Supply Chains in the West of Ireland](#)