

POLICY REPORTS

ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE

Bluetongue

- BTV-3 vaccination can be used in Northern Ireland with a DAERA-issued specific licence. Northern Ireland remains BTV-3 free and so vigilance continues to be key. Vaccinating animals does not impact on trade or movement of your animal(s) so long as Northern Ireland remains BTV-3 free. ELISA tests cannot differentiate between vaccinated and non-vaccinated animals, however a PCR test will never show up positive if the animal is vaccinated but not infected, so PCR can be used accurately on vaccinated animals.
- Total number of confirmed cases of BTV-3 for the 2025-2026 vector period (since July 2025) is 87, with 4 of these cases from Wales. There has also been one confirmed case of BTV-8 in England, the first since 2008.
- The CVO for Wales has announced temporary control zone around the confirmed cases in Wales due to this being the first time BTV has been confirmed in the country.

TB

- **bTB Costings Project** – Andersons have created an online questionnaire to gather information directly from NI farmers about the cost of TB on their farm. The questionnaire is anonymous and takes approx. 20 minutes to complete.
- Alongside this, Andersons have been carrying out interviews with farming stakeholders. The project is currently on track to be completed by January 2026.
- **TBPSG** – Discussions have taken place with industry stakeholders regarding where we are heading with the group. Industry feels that we are not getting anywhere and just being used to tick a box. CVO to meet with the AHW committee beginning of October. An update meeting was held mid-September and the department outlined the work they have been doing since July.
- **QUB Research** – AHW committee had taken their proposal to fund the project into reassessing badger populations using thermal drones and thermal cameras to the UFU executive and this was accepted. Initial meetings with other funding organisations, and then with QUB researchers, will be taking place in the coming weeks.

EU Animal Welfare Laws

- The EU commission is expected to come forward with a proposal on animal welfare at farm level in 2026. This is likely to include a ban on cages (including poultry cages and pig farrowing crates), reduced stocking densities, potential ban on beak trimming/castration/dehorning, and changes to slaughter regulations. UFU have contributed some NI related points to a copa cogeca position on these potential welfare changes.
- BAB are hosting joint UK farming union discussions on the EU consultation over the coming weeks for each livestock sector.

Avian Influenza

- GB are still reporting cases of avian influenza in both commercial poultry and wild birds. With the new season starting 1st October 2025, there has already been reports of Avian Influenza outbreaks in commercial flocks in England. Concern that a housing order/biosecurity measures will come into effect much earlier for the 2025/2026 season.

DAIRY

Fair Dealing Obligations (Milk) Regulations – Adjudicator Update

Met with the Adjudication Team to discuss a range of matters following the implementation of the FDOM Regulations. The discussion focused primarily on issues specific to Northern Ireland, Adjudicator has confirmed he will attend the winter fair.

NAP – Following on from the NAP Consultation, the Dairy Committee had a proposal for AgriSearch, regarding water quality. The Proposal was brought to the executive committee and it was agreed the Environment committee would discuss further the proposal.

Milk Price Calculator – Continuing to develop the MPC. Committee are keen to see the MPC finished and operational.

Carbon Auditing – Committee are to meet with AFBI, to discuss carbon auditing and the use of methane inhibitors. Date to be confirmed.

Winter Fair - Preparations for this year's Winter Fair are underway. The Committee will soon meet to discuss and agree on the content and focus of this year's stand.

UK 4 Unions Meeting – Chair and Policy officer are to travel to Wales November 3rd – 4th to meet with counterparts. Agenda to be confirmed.

UK Dairy Roadmap – Delegate from the committee will be asked to attend the UK Dairy Roadmap Workshop, 5th November. Chair and Vice Chair are to attend along with 8 other representatives, these are still to be confirmed.

ENVIRONMENT

Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) Update

- The UFU submitted a substantial response to the revised NAP consultation in July. A copy of this can be found on the UFU website – consultations section.
- The NAP Task & Finish Group to be established by the Minister has not yet officially met – a preliminary meeting held in August with Stakeholders to discuss the group terms of reference. The Chairman has not been confirmed - it is not the name that is circulating online. UFU will review the revised terms of reference with the Environment Committee and will make a decision on participation in due course.

Farming with Nature Package

- Farming with Nature Transition Scheme – UFU are aware of issues with the FwN Transition Scheme and have raised these with DAERA. DAERA have given a commitment to make improvements for phase two which is expected to open in mid-2026 with more measures. Members should continue to make UFU staff aware of any concerns or problems they have with the scheme. 879 farmers applied and letters of offer have been issued.
- UFU and Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) sent a joint letter to DAERA regarding commitments by DAERA around payments for existing habitat management/maintenance and making the environment a 'profit centre' on farms as we have been concerned about the progress on these elements.
- UFU representatives continue to attend Farming with Nature Stakeholder Group meetings to attempt to shape the scheme to be practical, simple and financially attractive for farmers.

Climate Change

- A draft Climate Action Plan (CAP) which covers all sectors of society has been issued for consultation for 16 weeks with public meetings held. The UFU Environment Committee are working on a response to this recognising that the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 is fundamentally flawed and needs to be overhauled.

Ammonia

- The UFU employed a legal team and key experts to submit a response to the DAERA consultation on the ammonia operational protocol in April which is used to determine planning applications and await a response. The Minister has recognised many other environmental issues cannot be improved due to ammonia planning policy but must act to ensure that replacement buildings are permitted.

Water Quality

- Farm Water Project – UFU applied to 2025/26 DAERA Environment Fund and have been successful. This fund is supporting the training of CSL staff by the Rivers Trust with the ambition that they will support farmers in key catchments with non-regulatory advice around water quality. A facilitator has been appointed to develop a Farm Water Training Course to assist farmers.
- The UFU had a useful meeting NI Water Catchment Team discussing their agricultural programmes and funding commitments but also raising concerns around sewage and wastewater discharges.
- DAERA are currently consulting on a Fisheries and Water Environment Bill which is proposing to increase powers for enforcement / fines and to allow them to make secondary legislation on spot fines/penalties for all sectors. The UFU Environment Committee will prepare a response.

Soil Nutrient Health Scheme

- SNHS applications have closed and will not re-open. 92.5% of all SAF 2024-25 Farm business applications have now registered for SNHS which will be a condition of the new Farm Sustainability Payment.

LEGISLATION

Inheritance Tax

- Government published their draft regulations to the Finance Bill, with the changes to agricultural property relief unchanged since the 2024 budget announcement.
- The Centre for the Analysis of Taxation has published an impact assessment on the proposed changes on family farms and considered a number of alternative proposals. We have met with the authors, DAERA, and the other farming unions on considering the proposals. (<https://centax.org.uk/policy-brief-the-impact-of-changes-to-inheritance-tax-on-farm-estates/>)
- We are currently exploring all legal avenues to challenge the proposals.
- The House of Lords Finance Committee are researching the costs and benefits of the proposals, and the UFU will be making a formal submission for the committee's consideration.
- Our lobbying in Westminster continues alongside the other UK farming unions.

A5 Western Transport Corridor

- Throughout the summer we have been engaged on the issue intensively with members who are landowners along the route, officials from the Department for Infrastructure, and other stakeholders and interested parties.
- The High Court halted the scheme on the basis that it was unlawful on three counts, most notably that it was not consistent with obligations set under the Climate Change Act 2022. We met with DfI shortly after who could not provide any clarity on the situation. The DfI missed their own deadlines countless times on engaging with landowners.
- We were continually denied a follow-up meeting but following correspondence with the Minister, we were granted one.
- The DfI have now issued draft licence agreements to rent the land from the landowners until the Court of Appeal case is heard, but landowners still have the option to have their land fully reinstated. We will remain in contact with landowners.

Agricultural Wages Board

- 2026 pay negotiations will begin in October with a presentation from DAERA on the state of the industry.

Sligo, Leitrim, and Northern Counties Railway Greenway

- The proposed greenway that will run from Sligo to Enniskillen is currently on phase 3 as they work to finalise a proposed route.
- We have held a meeting of landowners, and engaged with the consultants, Arup, and all councils involved.
- We will continue to engage in the coming months to ensure vesting powers cannot be used for amenities in this case.

Reservoir Act

- Following significant delays, DfI plan to launch parts of the Reservoir Act, which governs reservoir safety in Northern Ireland.
- DfI launched a consultation for a grant scheme to help with the costs of initial inspection and supervision, with an upper limit of £10,000 per applicant.
- UFU responded to that consultation with significant concerns around the amount, the nature of the liabilities, and the lack of a capital grant scheme for repairs.
(<https://www.ufuni.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/UFU-Consultation-Response.pdf>)

Rural Crime

- UFU continues to sit on the Rural Crime Partnership, which hosted Rural Crime Week on w/c 8th September across social media channels.
- The UFU is now represented on 'Scamwise NI', a partnership organisation with government departments, PSNI, and other stakeholders, designed to identify and tackle scams. Scamwise will host a conference on 6th November.
- UFU is working with stakeholders such as Belfast Hills Partnership and Landscapes NI on a campaign to crush scramblers and quads that are caught trespassing, rather than these vehicles being returned to owners for £150.

Wayleave Rates

- NIE Networks wayleave rates have been increased by 3.06% in line with their RP7 Price Control allowances. The Consumer Price Index (CPIH) has now been adopted as the general measure of inflation. This follows advice from UK Statistics who have consistently urged that CPIH should be used instead of the Retail Price Index (RPI) as a more accurate indicator of inflation. The Utility Regulator has now adopted this approach in line with other network regulators and the recent price control period for NIE Networks, RP7, is based upon CPIH as the general measure of inflation.
- BT wayleave rates remain unchanged since 2017.

Immigration

- We are currently discussing the UK Government's immigration white paper, *Restoring Control over the Immigration System*, and working on the UFU response to it.
- The white paper will increase the entry requirements for foreign workers from RQF 3-5 (A Levels) to RQF 6+ (degree) and raise the salary threshold to approximately £38,000.
- The only way to bypass these changes is if your industry is included on the new temporary shortage list.
- The UK Government will consult on these changes before the end of the year.

PORK & BACON

IFA/UFU Meeting - Live Pig Importation Code of Practice -Met with the IFA to discuss the *Code of Practice for the Importation of Live Pigs into Ireland*. No concerns have been raised by veterinary authorities in NI. The document will be reviewed ahead of a follow up meeting.

Educational Engagement – Promoting Pig Sector Learning

A delegate from the Committee will meet with CAFRE representatives to explore ways to improve education regarding the pig sector and to further promote it within the curriculum. CAFRE has agreed to the meeting, and a date is being arranged.

Fair Dealing Obligations (Pig) Regulations – Following the introduction of the FDOP Regulations the Adjudication team are keen to meet with the committee and processors. Date still to be confirmed.

Red Tractor - Engagement with Pig Committee

Discussions with Red Tractor regarding a meeting with the Pig Committee have commenced. Red Tractor plans to provide the Committee with an overview of its current assurance scheme, along with an introduction to the concept of tiered welfare labelling. Meeting Date to be confirmed.

Pig Slurry Utilisation – Committee are to meet and hear from James Young on the Use of Pig Slurries within Digesters and alternative solutions going forward.

POULTRY

Avian Influenza

- GB are still reporting cases of avian influenza in both commercial poultry and wild birds. With the new season starting 1st October 2025, there has already been reports of Avian Influenza outbreaks in commercial flocks in England. Concern that a housing order/biosecurity measures will come into effect much earlier for the 2025/2026 season.
- Flock keepers must remain vigilant to signs of disease and maintain high levels of biosecurity as we come into the high risk period.
- Experts suggesting that the 2025/2026 period could be worse than the 2024/2025 period.

RSPCA Assured

- Very poor communication from RSPCA Assured in recent months. Monthly meetings have been delayed on numerous occasions leaving producers and industry frustrated and ready to move away from RSPCA. Meeting on 22nd September has been postponed so no update or full meeting has been provided since June 2025.

Broilers

- Most producers have signed the new contracts with some producers still holding off signing. Hearing that there is still movement from broilers to eggs, both already planned

and initial discussions. Egg prices are still strong, but concern from within eggs that this may not last.

RHI

- Consultation on the closure of the RHI scheme was released on 29th September and members are encouraged to submit a response to the consultation. UFU Poultry and Rural Enterprise committees have been meeting to discuss these updates and will be meeting on the 21st October to curate a joint response to the consultation.

RURAL AFFAIRS

Women in Ag Conference

- The conference will be held on the 23rd October at CAFRE Loughry campus, with a theme of ‘cultivating a healthy future’ – focus will be on one health and how human health can link with all other aspects on the farm. Speakers and sponsors have been confirmed and tickets went on sale 19th September.

Women in Agriculture Leadership Programme

- Participants have met with Katrina Godfrey to discuss the results of the pilot programme and potential collaboration with DAERA to expand the programme further. Veronica Morris drafted a proposal for consideration which has been sent to Katrina Godfrey.

Meeting with Rural Support

- K Ashton-Meek, D Kelso and H Patterson met with Gyles Dawson and Kevin Doherty in UFU HQ to discuss the current provisions within Rural Support, successes and problems which they are facing, and finance. The link between the UFU Rural Affairs committee and Rural Support was discussed, and Rural Support are keen to have a member of the committee on their board.

Agri Education

- K Ashton-Meek and L Beattie met with Twinkl to introduce new staff members and start discussions around seasonal resource design, such as Christmas and February (Februdairy/pancake day).
- J McCluggage, K Ashton-Meek and L Beattie met with the Minister for Education, for a meeting arranged by Carla Lockhart MP and also including teacher representatives. The meeting was very positive, focussing on UFU education initiatives, open farm weekend, and agriculture within the current and future NI curriculum. Minister Givan was keen for UFU to be involved in the changes in the curriculum.

BOIOFW

- BOIOFW dates for 2026 have been confirmed and sponsorships are being sought out. A host appreciation event was held at CAFRE Greenmount alongside the most recent steering committee meeting and was very successful. A new rural affairs representative has been appointed.

Rural Communities Network

- K Ashton-Meek and D Kelso attended a forum discussion on the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy at the RCN offices in Cookstown. RCN will be responding to the consultation on the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy, focussing on the lack of rural needs and representation within the suggested changes.

RURAL ENTERPRISE

Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)

- The Department for the Economy have launched a consultation with proposals on how they will close RHI.
- Using historic heat usage from the 2017-2019 reference period, participants will receive an annual payment rather than quarterly payments based off metering.
- If you use your installation at least 50% as much as you did between 2017-2019, you will receive the full payment. If you use it less than 50% but more than 5%, you will receive a 50% payment. If you use it less than 5%, or less than 438 hours a year, you will receive a minimum payment and will be treated as if you had used it at 438 hours.
- The UFU have engaged alongside partners on the closure scheme ahead of publication.
- DfE are consulting for an 8 week period and the UFU will be providing a full response.

Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association

- Their annual Northern Ireland conference was held on Tuesday 23rd September.
- Deputy President John McLenaghan appeared on a panel outlining the opportunities and challenges within the AD sector, and we will continue to engage with stakeholders.

NI Energy Summit

- The Policy Officer attended the NI Energy Summit hosted by the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy (CASE).

NIE Networks 'Big Network Rebuild'

- NIE Networks have announced a £250 million investment in their electricity network. The project involves rebuilding approximately 1500km per year of 11kV overhead lines, constructing new overhead lines and increasing the capacity and resilience of the low voltage and 33kV networks. In total, it will involve rebuilding and refurbishing approximately 14,000km of the electricity distribution network over a six-year period.
- Deputy President John McLenaghan spoke on the panel at the launch, highlighting that whilst we welcome this significant investment, respect for landowners and communication will be fundamental throughout the rebuild.
- The UFU will continue to engage with NIEN throughout the process and ensure mitigations are put in place for farm businesses should there be disruption.

Hydrogen

- The DfE have launched a consultation on low carbon hydrogen and have commissioned NI-based research on the opportunities.

Utility Regulator

- We continue to engage with the Utility Regulator on a wide range of issues.
- They have launched a consultation on the role of Third Party Intermediaries in the Energy Market.

Renewable Electricity Support Scheme

- The Department for the Economy has launched the Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee (REPG), Northern Ireland's version of Contracts for Difference, to help meet the legal target of 80% renewable electricity by 2030.
- The first auction, due in 2027, will support large-scale onshore wind, solar PV, and hybrid projects over 5 MW, with successful bidders receiving 15-year CPI-linked contracts.
- While this will stimulate investment, it excludes most farm-scale renewables (<5 MW). Key risks include grid constraints, delayed reinforcements, and consumer cost impacts, though compensation for curtailment aims to maintain investor confidence.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural Development Programme

- DAERA are currently designing a new Rural Development Programme, and have concluded the work of three working groups.
- They wish to have all policies finalised by Christmas, and a public consultation in the new year.
- Details of what will be included are still unclear and the UFU is engaging with DAERA closely in the process to ensure the priorities of farmers are reflected.
- UFU Rural Affairs and Rural Development committees will have the opportunity to feed into the policy development stage before the end of the year.

ARABLE & HORTICULTURE

Potatoes

- Supply chain stocks of old potatoes blamed for low current prices. UFU Monitoring and progressing IFA meeting.
- UFU liaising with DAERA Plant Health representatives regarding seed potatoes. EU officials continue to have a presence at the docks monitoring the situation as 100% checks are now applicable.
- UFU have asked DAERA for potato inspector reports for seed crop

DAERA Producer Organisation (PO) Meeting fruit and vegetables (the future)

- UFU met with DAERA to discuss future and opportunity for industry to shape a new scheme for Fruit and Vegetable sector. POs have been granted a 3 year extension and applications are sitting with RPA for two new PO's in N Ireland (One for mushroom and the other NI Horticulture including possible apple and veg in the mix with mushroom).

Fresh Produce Contract Consultation: UFU responded to consultation on behalf of vegetable potato and apple sector. The UFU welcomes the opportunity to influence and promote greater fairness, transparency, trust, and confidence across all supply chains. However, we caution

that legislation alone cannot ensure fairness. Growers have little power in the value chain, and we urge the government to carefully consider how this mechanism will operate to effectively rebalance power and create a truly fair system for our many grower members.

NAP – all arable and horticulture sectors contributed to the Economic Impact assessment progressed by Agri Search. With no representative body holding credible data for the sectors impact was difficult to quantify.

DAERA Future support – Horticulture

- UFU Vegetable and Apple sectors updated again on future support model.
- UFU covered what was known about the future support in Commodity Watch for Horticulture
- UFU issued text message to all members advising on information dates and times (CAFRE paid for issue)
- UFU awarded production horticulture bursary to CAFRE student for 2025/26.

Labour

- Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme & Restoring Control over the Immigration System White Paper under view. Labour availability for horticulture high on UFU agenda.

Voluntary initiative

- UFU Senior Policy Officer on VI Board and work progressing about aims and objectives of VI.

Protein Crop UFU meeting with DAERA to discuss Protein Crop Payment

Future Arable Support UFU progressing DAERA meeting to discuss future support for arable farms.

IFA / UFU meetings reviewing both Cereal and Potato Sectors profitability and need for support

Quality Assurance review – All UFU Arable & Horticulture viewpoints have been fed into UFU template to aid progressing the UFU formal response.

Fields Good - *‘Horticulture everything but Grass’* listed as a new exhibitor area of interest - Senior Policy Officer and some chairs attended.

Arable Conference 2026 - date being progressed is the 22nd January 2026. Note the plan is conference will run in 2026 nothing 2027 and delivered again in 2028.

Horticulture Strategy - **QUB** Prof Mark Emmerson met with UFU Arable and Horticulture chairs.

Cider & Perry Marketing Standards: Top Fruit (Bramley Apple) / UFU Considering Copa Cogeca cider and perry marketing standards, locally big crops reported, some harvest and supply chain concerns.

New EU electronic PPP record keeping requirement Jan 2026 – UFU Chairs meeting DAERA for clarity.

UK/EU rebalancing – PPP discussions around timelines, impact and or unintended consequences on N Ireland.

Cereal competition review being progressed with membership

- Date for UFU Cereal competition awards **Wednesday 5th November 2025 in Dunadry Hotel**

NI Peatland Strategy 2040 – UFU lobby DAERA seeking caution and need for meaningful consultation for horticulture sector on ambitious withdrawal date for peat.

PARLIAMENTARY UPDATE

Brussels / Windsor Framework

Democratic Scrutiny Committee

- Kate Adams from the British Agricultural Bureau (BAB) and Parliamentary Officer participated in an evidence session at the DSC on animal welfare in transport.

Lord Murphy Report Recommendations

- The Lord Murphy Report recommends strengthening democratic oversight and supporting business under the Windsor Framework. It proposes giving the Democratic Scrutiny Committee ten working days to review EU acts, with added expert staff, closer Whitehall–Belfast coordination, and more empowered Northern Ireland Civil Servants. Greater UK Government backing, expanded use of the Executive’s Brussels office, and transparency over the Stormont Brake are also urged, alongside seconding more staff to Brussels. On business and trade, the report calls for regular engagement with Northern Ireland and GB firms on a potential SPS deal, a faster Duty Reimbursement Scheme, clearer consolidated guidance for SMEs, promotion of dual-market access, protection of veterinary and human medicines from regulatory divergence, and full support for the Independent Monitoring Panel and IntertradeUK.

SPS/Vet Agreement

- Ongoing meetings with DEFRA on strategic and technical matters.

WF Issues

- Veterinary medicine changes are beginning to take effect, with pharmaceutical companies providing restricted choice from 1st of January 2026. Concern is growing for non-veterinary companies that cannot avail themselves of new government schemes. Whilst complete discontinuities are reducing, traditional product choice and pack size are becoming the main issues.
- Continuing to raise concerns about used ag machinery concerns

Westminster

IHT

- Back British Farming Day lobbying: NI SoS, DEFRA SoS, EFRA & NI Affairs Chairs, Shadow Farming Minister, SF, DUP, SDLP, Lord Murphy, Baroness Ritchie and Foster.

- The Budget will take place on 26th November, and the Finance Bill will be debated around the same time. Amendments are expected to be laid based on the EFRA Committee report and CenTax report. To date, there has been no movement from the Treasury, and our efforts will continue to focus on NI land prices, farm structure, and the impact on those most vulnerable.

Immigration

- Ongoing work taking place around the UK Government white paper on immigration. DT to raise with the legislation committee.

NI Affairs Committee

- Lough Neagh evidence session on the 15th of October.

Party Conferences

- Labour Party conference in October.

Stormont

RHI

- NI Executive has confirmed plans for the RHI scheme closure and an uplift in the current tariff.

Lough Neagh/NAP

- A motion was passed, expressing regret about the previous motion, which had also expressed regret about the NAP process. We continue to meet MLAs on this topic.
- The SDLP's *Plan to Restore our Environment* document was released, and a meeting was held with Claire Hanna MP to discuss.

AERA Committee

- SDLP have replaced Patsy McGlone with Daniel McCrossan on the AERA Committee.

Party Conferences

- DUP, SDLP, UUP in September/October

Local Government

- Ongoing work to approach councils about planning issues and advice from Share Environmental Services.