

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 your animal(s) does not impact on trade or movement of your animal(s) so long as Northern Ireland remains BTV-3 free. K Ashton-Meek highlighted to the committee that 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.

TB

- **bTB Costings Project:** An update meeting was held with Andersons mid-October. Approximately 350 responses have been received for the TB questionnaire to date. The responses have started to be analysed, and modelling has been started on the financial data. 28 stakeholder interviews have been conducted with two more interviews still to be completed. UFU will be looking for farmers to be part of case studies. Results are positive so far, and the project is on track to be completed January 2026.
- **TBPSG:** Wildlife Intervention consultation has been delayed until Spring 2026. DAERA announced a new cross-border DAERA/DAFM regionalisation project which will include aspects of wildlife intervention, cattle and people measures. K Ashton-Meek and Glenn Cuddy have been included within workshop discussions to finalise the proposals on these measures however there are industry concerns which need to be dealt with.

EU Animal Welfare Laws

- The EU commission has released a consultation on the proposed new animal welfare on farm laws. 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 been involved in discussions with the other devolved farming unions regarding the proposals with all livestock species covered, and BAB representatives will be drafting up a response in the coming weeks.

Avian Influenza

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- Defra announced housing orders for the North of England and Welsh border counties to be put in place Thursday 30th October.

- DAERA announced that a new AI prevention zone will be introduced in NI from Saturday 1st November. There will be no requirement for poultry to be housed, and bird gatherings will not be prohibited at this stage, however there will be increased mandatory biosecurity measures to help prevent the spread of disease from wild birds or another source.
- There has been one case of HPAI in NI to date, which was present in Co. Tyrone. A protection zone and a surveillance zone have both been declared around the area.

BEEF & LAMB

ICBF Tully Centre Day Away Trip

- The committee day away trip is to ICBF's Tully breeding centre and Sheep Ireland on Wednesday 19th November and the visit is open to other committee members. The committee felt that the visit will be worthwhile in the context of the new bovine genetics project.

AgriSearch Levy Increase

- Jason Rankin and Sean Kane from AgriSearch attended the committee meeting and discussed proposals for increased beef and lamb levies. The committee agreed to the levy increases and proposed an additional 10p levy increase bringing the new proposed beef levy to £1 and sheep levy to 30p.

Anuga Food Trade Fair

- UFU representatives were invited by LMC to attend Anuga world food trade fair in Cologne, Germany a couple of weeks ago. The aim of the trip was to highlight the global context of beef and lamb production around the world and resilience for our local supply chains over reliance on imports.

Bovine EID

- The committee continue to discuss bovine EID introduction to NI. The UFU recently attended a DAERA meeting on EID. DAERA will launch a consultation in the next couple of months on Bovine EID. The policy officer is part of the industry bovine EID stakeholder group. Discussions include implementing EID with the Bovine Genetics project.

Residue Action Group

- From 1st May-10th September 2025 there has been positive residues detected in 12 bovine, 7 ovine and 1 pig. Residues were anthelmintics, hormones and heavy metal (Cadmium) found in batteries, pigments in paints for protective coating of steel and plastics. One residue of anthelmintics was due to dosing gun having residue of other anthelmintics.

Sheep Carcase Classification and Price Reporting

- The committee discussed the legislation of the sheep carcass classification and price reporting. The processors have raised some timing and technical issues.

Future Sheep Support

- The UFU continues to work on the future of sheep support with the NI sheep industry taskforce. There is an APSG meeting with DAERA in November on the future of sheep support.

DAIRY

Fair Dealing Obligations (Milk) Regulations

- Met with the adjudication team, discussion focused on problems specific to Northern Ireland. Adjudicator has confirmed his attendance on the UFU stand at the winter fair.

NAP

- The proposal for AgriSearch regarding water quality testing, was further refined by the Environment Committee and has been presented to AgriSearch for their consideration.

Milk Price Calculator

- Further developed and circulated with committee for trial and feedback.

Carbon Auditing

- AFBI to meet with committee, discussion on the use of methane inhibitors and carbon calculating. Date to be agreed.

Winter Fair

- Preparations for this year's Winter Fair are underway. A number of suggestions on the content and focus of this year's stand to be considered.

UK 4 Unions Meeting

- Chair and Policy officer to travel to Wales December 4th – 5th to meet with counterparts. Agenda still to be confirmed.

UK Dairy Roadmap

- Dairy Committee invited to attend the UK Dairy Roadmap Workshop, 5th November. Aim to gather stakeholder input, to better understand barriers, enablers and activity already underway.

Falling Milk Price Campaign

- To engage with the consumer and raise awareness of the falling milk price, highlighting that food inflation continues to rise.

ENVIRONMENT

Nutrients Action Programme (NAP)

- 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 established by the Minister has met once and agreed a terms of reference and a work programme.

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 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

- The UFU Environment Committee has responded to the consultation on draft Climate Action Plan for NI 2023-2027 (CAP) which covers all sectors of society. UFU has highlighted 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. UFU continue to maintain pressure on the Minister to progress this issue.

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 Environment Committee have responded to a DAERA consultation 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 – UFU have opposed increase fines and penalties.

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. Farmers in zone 4 should respond to contactor emails/ texts to help plan sampling programme in that area.

HILL FARMING

AgriSearch Levy Increase

- Jason Rankin and Sean Kane attended the committee meeting to discuss the AgriSearch proposed levy increase. The committee agreed to proposed levy increase of 90p for beef and 20p for sheep.

NI Peatland Strategy

- Minister Muir recently launched the NI Peatland Strategy however the strategy failed to acknowledge farmers/landowners' part in peatlands. The strategy lacks details and information on funding for the peatland works.

Wildfire Strategy

- The wildfire strategy was launched; however, it lacks key details. The UFU will continue to work with DAERA on actions in the strategy.

IUCN Peatland Conference

- UFU representatives attended the IUCN Peatland conference and presented at the conference on the "Farming Prospective of Peatlands," explaining the farmers story behind peatland restoration. At the conference there was minimum farming representation. The UFU commented that farmers/landowners who own the land that peatland restoration is to be carried out are left out of the conversation.

EUDR

- The UFU continues to monitor the changing policy of the EU Deforestation Regulation that will apply in NI.

MV

- The UFU have submitted a paper to DAERA on behalf of the industry MV stakeholder group. The paper shows a list of action points that needs completed before further action can be taken by DAERA on stopping all current testing and restrictions.

LEGISLATION

Inheritance Tax

- Evidence to the House of Lords Finance Bill Sub-Committee was submitted outlining the disproportionate impact of the proposed changes to agricultural property relief.

(<https://www.ufuni.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2025-10-Evidence-to-House-of-Lords-Finance-Bill-Sub-Committee.pdf>)

- The UFU will host a rally in Parliament on Monday 17th November, which will include MPs, Peers, UFU office bearers, staff, and members.
- The UFU continue to make regular visits to Westminster to lobby backbench MPs against the proposals ahead of the Budget on 26th November. We are engaging with all political parties, the other UK farming unions, and other stakeholders to ramp up the campaign.

A5 Western Transport Corridor

- Meetings continue to be setup with landowners.
- UFU have requested a meeting with the DfI to check on progress and work through any issues regarding the divesting process.

Sligo, Leitrim, and Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR) Greenway

- The UFU and IFA met and agreed to put out a joint statement against the proposals for the greenway, highlighting that landowner opposition to the greenway must be respected and actioned. Greenways should be developed on public lands.
- UFU will meet with landowners, stakeholders, and politicians in the coming weeks and months on the issue.

Rural Crime

- UFU attended the Rural Crime Partnership meeting on Tuesday 14th October.
- Preparation for a UFU campaign with stakeholders to scramblers and quads that are caught trespassing continues.

Immigration

- The UK Government have confirmed a change to the Seasonal Worker Scheme which allows workers to re-enter the country sooner than was previously allowed. From 11th November, horticulture workers will be able to work in the UK for up to six months within any 10-month period. Previously, this was six months in any 12-month period.
- UFU Legislation Committee has setup a subgroup to consider immigration changes in the UK Government's White Paper, *Restoring Control over the Immigration System*, which increases 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 industry is included on the new temporary shortage list.

Educational Engagement

- CAFRE has agreed to meet with the committee. To discuss the opportunities for enhancing education around the pig sector and promoting its inclusion within the curriculum.

Fair Dealing Obligations (Pig) Regulations

- Following the implementation of the FDOP Regulations, the Adjudicator has agreed to meet with the committee. Date to be confirmed.

Red Tractor

- Agreed to meet with the committee. To provide an overview of the current assurance scheme, along with an introduction into the concept of tiered welfare labelling. Date to be confirmed.

Pig Slurry Utilisation

- Committee met with Dr J Young of the Mid Ulster Biorefinery Project. Discussion focused on the utilisation of livestock slurries within anaerobic digestion (AD) and further treatment for carbon and nutrient recovery. A site visit to a pig unit with onsite AD facilities, provided an overview of the process and the practical solutions available on farm and on a greater scale.

Meeting FSA

- FSA have agreed to meet with the committee, to discuss the requirements of Trichinella Inspections. Date to be confirmed.

POULTRY

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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.
- Progress group had outlined an agenda to discuss moving forward with the group and the proposals for the previous meeting; however, the meeting was cut short, and nothing was discussed. An update meeting was to be arranged, however was delayed an additional two months.
- Laying hen industry setting up a task force to discuss options for developing a new independent assurance scheme to replace RSPCA Assured.

RHI

- UFU Poultry Committee and Rural Enterprise Committee held a joint meeting to discuss the RHI closure consultation and chart out the UFU response to it. UFU continues to engage with other bodies and stakeholders such as DfE, RHANI, FSB, and MLAs on the closure. UFU members affected are encouraged to submit their own consultation response. (<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/consultations/closure-northern-ireland-non-domestic-renewable-heat-incentive-scheme>)

Immigration

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Conferences

- Members of the committee attended the NI Poultry Conference on 28th October at CAFRE Loughry, with Deputy President J McLenaghan chairing the morning session.
- K Ashton-Meek will be attending the Egg and Poultry Industry Conference in Newport, Wales over 2nd-4th November.

RURAL AFFAIRS

Women in Ag Conference

- WIA conference was held on the 23rd of October at Loughry Campus. It was a highly successful, sold-out event, with 3 key speakers and 3 breakout sessions held across the day.

Women in Agriculture Leadership Programme

- K Ashton-Meek and programme participants spoke with Katrina Godfrey at the WIA conference and she updated on the progress of the proposal.

Meeting with Rural Support

- The Rural Affairs committee are in the process of arranging a wider update meeting and discussion with Rural Support. The committee are happy to have some further involvement with Rural Support and are keen to re-develop the link between UFU and RS over the coming months.

Agri Education

- K Ashton-Meek and L Beattie have been working with Twinkl on seasonal resources. Information has been provided to Twinkl regarding Christmas resources, focussing on 'where your Christmas dinner comes from'.
- The UFU post-primary schools' competition was launched at the start of October. The competition is open to pupils in Years 10 to 14 who are either studying agriculture or are active members of a school-based agricultural club. Working in teams, students will be tasked with devising a business proposal to enhance a real-life farming enterprise case study.

Food Strategy Framework at Hillsborough Castle for Female Farmers

- Food NI are hosting food strategy focus groups for key stakeholders over the next few months and have invited the Rural Affairs committee to attend an event at Hillsborough Castle on 10th November.

New Rural Policy Framework

- DAERA continue to develop a new Rural Policy. DAERA will host a UFU policy development session in the coming weeks for Rural Development and Rural Affairs Committee members to feed into the policy development stage ahead of the proposals being finalised at the end of the year, and a public consultation next year.

IFA/UFU Joint Brussels Outing

- Nina Carberry MEP has invited members of the IFA Farm Families Committee and the UFU Rural Affairs Committee to be hosted in Brussels over 1st – 3rd December 2025. 10 members from each of the committees will be attending.

RURAL ENTERPRISE

Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)

- UFU Poultry Committee and Rural Enterprise Committee held a joint meeting to discuss the RHI closure consultation and chart out the UFU response to it.

- UFU continues to engage with other bodies and stakeholders such as DfE, RHANI, FSB, and MLAs on the closure.
- UFU members affected are encouraged to submit their own consultation response. (<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/consultations/closure-northern-ireland-non-domestic-renewable-heat-incentive-scheme>)

NIE Networks ‘Big Network Rebuild’

- UFU will meet with NIE Networks at a high level on w/c 3rd November to discuss mitigations for landowner impact, and how NIE Networks will improve their offering to landowners as they engage in their network rebuild.

Renewable Electricity Support Scheme

- UFU met with DfE to express concerns that farmers have been completely excluded from the NI RESS scheme due to the 5 MW threshold, whereas in other jurisdictions they would be able to join the scheme due to an extremely lower threshold.

Biomethane

- UFU met with DfE to check on progress on the upcoming biomethane policy strategy and potential support mechanisms.
- NI is the only country in Europe without any biomethane support mechanisms and UFU called on DfE to urgently rectify this and unleash the biomethane market in NI. Grid connections and planning issues also were raised as items hampering the development of the market.
- UFU attended the Phoenix Energy Renewable Gas Conference and will attend the Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association National Conference in Westminster in December.

Hydrogen

- UFU met DfE to discuss the launched hydrogen consultation and policy framework. (<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/news/archibald-launches-consultation-low-carbon-hydrogen>)

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ARABLE & HORTICULTURE

NAP

- Committee(s) updated on current UFU situation.

New Support Pilot scheme for Horticulture

- UFU Senior Policy Officer attended 6 CAFRE launch events in 10 days.
- The Horticulture Pilot Scheme is made up of three individual elements: Note: only one and three open.
- Pilot one: Sustainable Sector Growth Groups, pilot two: Innovation Driver and Support Scheme, pilot three: Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme
- Expressions of interest for pilot schemes closed on September 30, 2025. Note: still happy to receive expressions of interest.

Producer Organisation(s) Update

- Two applications currently sitting with RPA for recognition and approval (one mushroom only and other veg, top fruit (apples) and mushroom) reports suggest a new interest from group(s) of apple growers and large-scale field veg producer(s). Awaiting RPA decisions. No update.

CAFRE – Production Horticulture open day

- Senior Policy Officer and Peatland Officers attend.

HTA

- Invitation Tuesday 11th November.
- UFU Senior Policy Officer registered to attend CAFRE.

Quality Assurance review

- All UFU arable and horticulture viewpoints have been fed into UFU template to aid progressing the UFU formal response.

Arable Conference 2026

- Date being progressed is the 22nd January and UAS will chair organising committee for this event. (Conference meeting organised for 23 September on Teams). Note the plan is conference will run in 2026 nothing 2027 and delivered again in 2028 - slow progress.

Horticulture Strategy

- QUB Prof Mark Emmerson – UFU Arable and Horticulture chairs approached to host and attend a briefing update – in hand no date confirmed.

Seed Potato Inspections

- UFU have requested a report on the 2025 seed potato DAERA inspection findings. Awaiting full report from DAERA.

Cider & Perry Marketing Standards

- Top Fruit (Bramley Apple) / UFU Considering Copa Cogeca cider and perry marketing standards however UFU NI Armagh Bramley Grower Association members reluctant to engage in the discussion. An additional challenge for the industry is the big crops with reported supply chain concerns. Labour reported as an issue. Next NIFGA/UFU meeting scheduled for Wednesday 19th November (TBC).

Proposals for Fair Dealings Regulations in the Fresh Produce Sector

- UFU Response submitted. UFU always calling on transparency and fairness.

UFU and IFA Meetings

- Cereal meeting confirmed Friday 7th November 2025, City North, 11am. Potato meeting – no date confirmed.

DAERA Arable protein meeting

- Productive meeting, now looking for a business case to identify gaps and asks.
- Discussions are ongoing about who should progress this piece of work.

New EU electronic PPP record keeping requirement Jan 2026

- Two DAERA meetings for clarity on transition from paper to electronic. Crop lists had been circulated to all arable and horticulture chairs regarding EU Codes over the summer. Meeting 2 was widened to include UFU environment and grass-based input.
- DAERA progressing clarity on the roll out detail. Is Windsor Framework related with 100% compliance reported as necessary. UFU have negotiated and secured a soft transitional window from 1st January 2026 with full compliance from Jan 2027. Negotiations and discussion on going date of next meeting to be confirmed.

AHDB winter program update

- New structure for delivery in NI - will now visit farms for discussion on specialized area of production including finance and environment – greater participation in AHDB benchmarking needed. Committee hold concerns about CAFRE benchmarking.

DAERA approached UFU offering a meeting to discuss arable support

- Date confirmed Monday 10th November for both arable and potato chairs/vice attending as potato also sits in the DAERA arable portfolio.

UK/EU rebalancing

- PPP discussions around timelines and impact on N Ireland. NFU NFUS wish for long transition UFU reported a short swift alignment would be more beneficial for NI and remove window for greater confusion and administrative burden.

Cereal competition review being progressed with membership

- Date for UFU Cereal competition awards Wednesday 5th November 2025. Committee agreed that rules to be reviewed for 2026 chair and vice will progress with membership.

Grain Price

- UFU and chairman monitoring AHDB price reporting, note no signals coming through for a lift in price. Meeting also being considered Irish Grain Trade.

NI Peatland Strategy 2040

- Circulated to Hort for consideration and input to UFU PR. Horticulture holds level of concern with no confidence in alternatives available.

Asian Hornet

- One detection in NI confirmed, UFU met with Ulster Beekeepers Association representative to agree to a communications strategy.

PARLIAMENTARY UPDATE