

POLICY REPORTS

ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE

Bluetongue

- Since the preliminary findings of two suspected BTV cases on a Co. Down farm on the 3rd December, 4 farms have identified positive cases of BTV-3. These farms were all placed within a temporary control zone and movement restrictions have been put in place.
- From Friday, 19 December 2025, all animals, except for animals that have tested positive for Bluetongue (BTV), will be free to move under general licence within and out of the Temporary Control Zone (TCZ) unless they are in certain high-risk categories.
- High Risk categories are defined as:
- Cattle: All females 18 months and older and bulls 14 months and older
- Sheep and goats: Breeding males
- Deer, llamas and alpacas: Pregnant females and breeding males
- Those within these high-risk categories will be permitted to move under specific licence but are subject to certain additional requirements. Dependent on animal category, these requirements include either proof of a negative pregnancy test, or negative pre-movement testing or proof of previous Bluetongue vaccination.
- Moves to England, Scotland and Wales will be allowed from 10/12/2025. Susceptible species, including cattle, sheep, goats, deer and alpacas can now be moved with no requirements beyond those required by normal process. Moves will be permitted for direct slaughter, moves to markets and also for breeding and production. DAERA will conduct background checks to ensure that no animals are moved to GB from the disease control zones.
- Bluetongue cases still continue to rise across GB, with 266 farms affected since July 2025. An all-Wales restriction zone was introduced on 10th November which means that there can be free movement of livestock between England and Wales, however there are still restrictions on germinal products. Restrictions are still in place for movement from England to Scotland or GB to NI.

TB

- **bTB Costings Project** – UFU, Dairy Council and LMC met with The Andersons Centre in December and the results to date were presented. Analysis of the questionnaire results is complete, the financial modelling is almost completed and the case studies are being written currently. Results are positive so far, and the project is on track to be completed January 2026.
- **TBPSG** – The AHW committee agreed that UFU do not support the cross-border regionalisation project and this was relayed to the CVO. This is due to aspects of the project which has not been co-designed, such as the region the project is being rolled out, the method of wildlife intervention, and the lack of communication with the TBPSG. Other workshop discussions in recent weeks have included pre/post movement testing, alternative control herds, and biosecurity assessment design.

- Herd keepers are being advised by DAERA that any ‘resolved inconclusive’ reactors should either be removed from the herd or finished and slaughtered promptly to reduce the risk of acting as a disease reservoir.
- DAERA are sending letters to herd keepers who have a resolved inconclusive animal in their herd outlining this advice.

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 a response to the consultation has been submitted.

Avian Influenza

- The new avian influenza season commenced on 1st October 2025 and to date, there have been 81 cases of HPAI H5N1 across the UK (66 in England, 7 in Wales, 4 in Scotland and 4 in NI).
- Mandatory housing orders for all kept birds and poultry came into force on the 6th November in NI, and England, Wales and ROI are also under housing orders. Bird gatherings are currently suspended and increased biosecurity measures are in place.
- Four cases of HPAI H5N1 have been confirmed in either commercial or backyard flocks in NI. There have also been increased wild bird positives recently. In ROI, there have been five confirmed outbreaks in turkey flocks, with two restriction zones crossing the border into NI. This is the first time commercial HPAI outbreaks have been confirmed in ROI since November 2022.

BEEF & LAMB

AgriSearch Levy Increase

- Jason Rankin and Sean Kane from AgriSearch attended the committee meeting and discussed proposals for increased beef and lamb levies.

Bovine EID

- The committee in January 2026 will be discussing the Bovine EID consultation.

Sheep Carcass Classification and Price Reporting

- The committee discussed the legislation of the Sheep Carcass Classification and Price Reporting. The legislation will be implemented in 2026.

Future sheep support

- The UFU continues to work on the future of sheep support with the NI sheep industry taskforce. The recent DAERA APSG meeting discussed plans for sheep support.

Farming for the Generations

- The committee continues to discuss issues with previous Young Farmers' Scheme and suggestions for future Young Farmers' schemes.

EUDR

- The UFU continues to monitor the changing policy of the EU Deforestation Regulation that will apply in NI after a recent welcomed delay until 2027.

LMC

- The committee recently discussed removing beef quotes due to the large price difference between quotes and price paid.

FQAS

- The committee discussed online medicine recording and the challenges that these bring. The committee felt that the current paper-based medicine recording system should remain an option for farmers.

Carbon

- The committee continues to raise issues with Carbon Foot-printing Project with data protection and carbon accounting.

FSA

- The UFU has a further meeting to discuss FSA Meat Discount scheme. The scheme is worth £2 million to NI meat processors. If the FSA remove this discount the cost will be passed back to the farmer.

Capital Investment Scheme

- The committee considered potential Capital Investment measures items.

TB

- The committee discussed the TB Regionalisation Project.

Bluetongue

- The committee continue to discuss the ongoing Bluetongue as restrictions continue to change for zone areas.

DAIRY

Fair Dealing Obligations (Milk) Regulations

- Fair Dealing Obligations (Milk) Regulations attended the Winterfair, met with UFU members and policy staff.

NAP

- Following refinement by the Environment committee the proposal was presented to AgriSearch, awaiting a response.

Milk Price Calculator

- Further progress has been made, continue to develop the calculator with feedback from the committee.

Carbon auditing

- AFBI to meet with committee for discussion on the use of methane inhibitors and carbon calculating. Date still to be confirmed.

UK Dairy Roadmap

- A number of UFU dairy committee members attended the farmer workshop as part of the Sustainable Dairy Pathways initiative within the Dairy Roadmap. Feedback was given on the current roadmap and future direction of travel.

Falling milk price campaign

- A press release on falling milk prices went out, achieved good coverage. Campaign to raise awareness of falling farmer prices and rising food inflation continues.

Levy increase

- Committee discussed the proposal coming from AgriSearch regarding an increase in levy. Committee agreed that before the levy is increased, there needed to be a 100% collection rate achieved across all milk processors. Letter to AgriSearch for processors.

Red Tractor

- Committee expressed their dismay at Red Tractor hosting roadshows across GB but not here in NI. Red Tractor have been approached regarding this issue.

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 four times. A science sub-group has been established to consider the evidence and science presented. Some positive progress has been made and the UFU continue to challenge the draconian measures put forward by DAERA.

Farming with Nature package

- 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.
- Farming with Nature Transition scheme – DAERA have proposed additional options for 2026 FwN Transition scheme and UFU environment committee and seeds and cereals committee have considered the draft specifications for this. This will be another one-year scheme funded with plans to eventually progress to a multi-annual scheme.

- DAERA propose to launch a Farming with Nature Landscapes scheme (for groups of farmers) and a Farming with Nature Priority Areas scheme in 2026.
- Farmers who applied for the FwN Transition Scheme in 2025 to ensure they are aware of their requirements and the dates for carrying out work. Claims must be made in March and members are encouraged to try and ensure that all works are completed by then.

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 and betterment are permitted. UFU continue to maintain pressure on the Minister to progress this issue particularly in light of moves in England to allow betterment to be recognised here. The UFU met in December on this and continues to lobbying while taking advice from our legal team.

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 contractor 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.

Bovine EID

- The committee in January 2026 will be discussing the Bovine EID consultation.

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.

Peatland Barriers Report

- The committee is providing feedback to the UFU peatland's officer report on 'Barriers to Uptake' report.

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 through the Wildfire Stakeholder Forum.

NIEA

- The Hill Farming committee have written a letter to NIEA requesting a meeting to highlight past failures of environmental schemes and restrictions e.g. coniferous trees, heather overgrown etc.

Forestry Service NI

- The Hill Farming committee has written to Forestry Service NI requesting a meeting on the issue with coniferous seedlings from government coniferous sites establishing on privately owned peatlands.

AFBI Data Breach

- The committee raised concerns with the recent AFBI data breach.

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.

Capital Investment Scheme

- The committee considered potential Capital Investment measures items.

Farming for the Generations

- The committee continues to discuss issues with previous Young Farmers' Scheme and suggestions for future Young Farmers schemes.

Future Sheep Support

- The UFU continues to work on the future of sheep support with the NI sheep industry taskforce. The recent DAERA APSG meeting discussed plans for sheep support.

FQAS

- The committee discussed online medicine recording. The committee agreed to oppose mandatory online recording until it becomes a statutory requirement, preferring to maintain the current paper-based system.

LMC

- The committee recently discussed removing beef quotes due to the large price difference between quotes and price paid.

Environmental Farming Scheme

- The committee recently wrote to Minister Muir requesting that the EFS Higher scheme should not be continued until an adequate replacement scheme is designed following may unsatisfactory outcomes of the EFS Higher scheme e.g. low stocking rates.

LEGISLATION

Inheritance Tax

- The Chancellor of the Exchequer made a small adjustment to the new proposals to inheritance tax at the 2025 Autumn Budget. They will proceed with the new £1 million 100% relief threshold for APR/BPR, with 50% relief thereafter, but the £1 million allowance will now be transferable between spouses. The UFU now turns to amendments to the Finance Bill to attempt to overturn this change. Since the Budget, the NFU in England has met with the Prime Minister and the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury on the matter.

Budget

- **Inheritance Tax (APR/BPR):** From 6 April 2026, a new £1m 100% relief cap on combined APR/BPR; any value above this gets 50% relief (effective 20% tax rate). Unused £1m APR/BPR relief transferable between spouses.
- Nil-rate bands frozen to 2031 (£325k standard, £175k residence);
- APR: UK-only from April 2024; from April 2025 includes land not in agricultural production if under environmental agreements.
- BPR: 100% relief for trading businesses owned 2+ years, not investment businesses.
- From April 2027, executors can request pension schemes to withhold 50% of taxable benefits for up to 15 months toward IHT liability.
- IHT on property/land/business assets can still be paid in 10 annual instalments (interest-free for agricultural and business assets).
- **Income Tax:** Personal allowance (£12,570) and higher/additional thresholds (£50,270 / £125,140) frozen until April 2031, pulling more taxpayers into higher bands.
- Rental and savings income tax rates +2% from April 2027.

- Dividends: from April 2026: basic and higher-rate dividend taxes rise to 10.75% and 35.75%; additional rate stays at 39.35%.
- **National Minimum Wage:** UK-wide increase from April 2026 to £12.71/hr.
- Government aims to align 18–20 rate with National Living Wage over time; NI Agricultural Wages Board meets January 2025 to set NI-specific grades.
- **Pensions:** £2,000 annual cap on tax-free pension contributions via salary sacrifice. From 2029, contributions above this face employer + employee NICs.
- From April 2027, pension death benefits included in IHT estate (spousal exemption still applies). Income tax rules unchanged: pre-75 no income tax, post-75 beneficiaries taxed after any IHT.
- **ISA Allowances:** Annual limits remain: £20,000 standard, £4,000 lifetime, £9,000 junior until 2031.
- From April 2027: cash ISA cap reduced to £12,000 within the overall £20,000; savers 65+ can still put £20,000 into cash ISAs.
- **Sugar Tax (Soft Drinks Industry levy):** From 1 January 2028, levy extended to sugary milk-based drinks and milk substitutes; exemption removed.
- Threshold lowered to 4.5g sugar per 100ml; OBR expects 65% of products to reformulate.
- **Fuel Duty:** Temporary 5p cut reversed in three steps: +1p (1 Sept 2026), +2p (1 Dec 2026), +2p (1 Mar 2027).
- Red diesel returns to 11.14p/l; from April 2027, duty uprated by RPI annually.

A5 Western Transport Corridor

- An appeal over the A5 remains delayed as the Court of Appeal ruled that key climate arguments must be considered by the High Court following a procedural flaw in how issues under the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 were originally presented. The Court of Appeal has now sent the climate-related arguments back to the original judge and has granted DAERA permission to intervene in the appeal in support of a scheme.

Agricultural Wages Board

- The UFU will engage in the 2026 Pay Negotiations in January. The UFU has provided its submission ahead of this meeting.

PORK & BACON

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

- Red Tractor have 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 at 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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- DAERA looking at a potential joint webinar with UFU to raise awareness of clinical signs, what to do in a potential outbreak etc.

RSPCA Assured

- A joint meeting with industry, producers, processors and RSPCA Assured is to be held at the end of January. The aim of this meeting is to go over key problems within the laying hen standards and then discuss plans for working groups going forward.
- Laying hen industry setting up a task force to discuss options for developing a new independent assurance scheme to replace RSPCA Assured.

RHI

- UFU submitted a joint consultation response with the Rural Enterprise committee and the consultation closed in November. The proposed new tariff increase was passed on 2nd December and will start to be received in the coming months. The next stage of the legislation is to be presented in Stormont in Q1 of 2026.

RURAL AFFAIRS

Women in Ag Conference

- WIA conference was held on the 23rd October at Loughry Campus. It was a highly successful, sold-out event, with 3 key speakers and 3 breakout sessions held across the day. A meeting was held with the sub-committee on 20th November to go over feedback and plans for the next year.

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. DAERA have responded about setting up a taskforce in relation to the leadership programme and further initiatives. Meeting with Veronica Morris to discuss the next steps and how we move forward in relation to the vote of no confidence.

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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.

Food Strategy Framework at Hillsborough Castle

- The rural affairs committee attended a focus group with FoodNI to discuss the new NI Food Strategy Framework. The evening included dinner at Hillsborough Castle, a tour of the castle and focus group discussions. Discussions focused on links with education, links with health, how farmers on the ground can help push forward improvements and suggestions of how to incorporate local products into wider industry.

IFA/UFU Joint Brussels Outing

- Nina Carberry MEP invited members of the IFA Farm Families Committee and the UFU Rural Affairs Committee to be hosted in Brussels over 30th November – 2nd December 2025. 9 members of the UFU Rural Affairs committee and 25 members of the IFA committee attended. The event included meetings with Irish MEPs, a tour of parliament, meeting with Copa-Cogeca and IFA representatives, and a tour of a Belgian dairy farm and cheese making facility.

RURAL ENTERPRISE

Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)

- The tariff uplift was passed through the NI Assembly on 2 December 2025. Lower-medium biomass tier 1 rates have increased from 2.2p/kw to 6.1p/kw. The scheme closure regulations will be debated and voted on by the NI Assembly in the New Year. The UFU has submitted a consultation response to the closure regulations, which can be found here: <https://www.ufuni.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/RHI-Closure-Consultation-Response-Ulster-Farmers-Union.pdf>

Socialisation of Grid Connection Costs

- The announcement sets out the Department for the Economy's decision to change how electricity grid connection costs are charged in Northern Ireland by fully "socialising" network reinforcement costs, meaning these costs will be shared across all electricity consumers rather than paid upfront by the first customer to connect. A High-Cost Cap

will apply to limit the impact on consumers, and the policy will be implemented by the Utility Regulator, with changes expected to take effect in the first half of 2026. Read more here: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/decision-fairer-grid-connection-costs>

ARABLE & HORTICULTURE

New Support Pilot scheme for Horticulture

- UFU continues to support and issue CAFRE text messages.
- The Horticulture Pilot Scheme is made up of three individual elements: Note only one & three open.
- Pilot one: Sustainable Sector Growth Groups.
- Pilot two: Innovation Driver and Support Scheme.
- Pilot three: Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme.
- Extension for application for sustainable sector growth group applications -- 19th January 2026.

Producer Organisation(s)

- 2 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 of apple growers and large-scale field veg producer(s). Awaiting RPA decisions. No progress to-date.

Quality Assurance review

- All UFU Arable & Horticulture viewpoints have been fed into UFU template to aid progressing the UFU formal response.

Arable Conference 2026

- No arable conference in January 2026.
- New exciting on-farm event for arable - June 2026 (details will follow).

Seed Potato Inspections

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

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 at meeting on Wednesday 19th November growers updated on PPP transition from paper to electronic and confirmed no press on harvest and yields.

Proposals for Fair Dealings Regulations in the Fresh Produce Sector

- UFU submitted a response endorsing the need for transparent and functional supply chains.

DEFRA proposals Fair Dealings

- Supply chain grain consultation open and committee discussing.

DAERA Arable protein meeting

- UFU had a productive meeting committee asked to identify gaps and business asks for next DAERA meeting. Discussions remain ongoing about who should progress this piece of work.

New EU electronic PPP record keeping requirement Jan 2026

- No progress - 2 DAERA meetings for clarity. Crop lists had been circulated to all arable & hort chairs regarding EU Codes over the summer. Meeting two 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 has negotiated and secured a soft transitional window from 1st Jan 2026 with full compliance from Jan 2027. Negotiations and discussion ongoing.

AHDB winter program update

- New structure in NI – will move around farms for discussion on specialized area of production including finance and environment – greater participation in AHDB benchmarking needed. Committee reported CAFRE benchmarking is not fit for purpose.

DAERA UFU meeting to discuss arable support

- It was a frank meeting and both arable and potato chairs/vice attended as potato also sits in the DAERA arable portfolio. Interesting meeting and a report with gaps and solutions sought this work is in hand. A draft support document ready for discussion with DAERA at next meeting.

UK/EU rebalancing – PPP discussions

- Discussion around timelines and impact on Northern Ireland. NFU NFUS wish for long transition and UFU believe short swift, alignment would be more beneficial for NI and remove window for greater confusion and administrative burden.

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. Not progressed.

The Official Controls (Plant Protection Products) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

- The OCR applies to all professional users including farmers of plant protection products (such as insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, molluscicides, and plant growth regulators), across all sectors including agriculture, horticulture, amenity and forestry.
- You are required to comply with the OCR if as part of your work / business activity you:
- Store professionals use plant protection products (PPPs);
- Supply professional use PPP's yourself; or
- Have professional use PPP's applied by a third party / contractor on your behalf.
- The OCR also applies to businesses involved in the supply chain of PPP, their components and adjuvants.
- Operators and businesses may be inspected under the powers given by The Official Controls (Plant Protection Products) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 to ensure they comply with existing PPP legislation, including The Plant Protection Products Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 and The Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012.

Equine – registration requirement update

- From 1 February 2026, Registration of Equine Establishments (obtaining an Equine Establishment Number (EEN) will be required when you apply for a horse passport, apply to update an existing horse passport, or apply for a replacement/duplicate horse passport.
- You should therefore ensure that you register your equine establishment now in advance of this date to avoid any delays in your passport application(s). It is a legal requirement to hold a valid, up to date passport for your equine.
- You may be unable to sell, buy, move, transport or export your equine if you cannot provide a valid EEN and keep your passport up to date. Moving your equine to Great Britain, Ireland or other countries for competitions, shows or other activities requires an up-to-date passport and possibly an export health certificate (subject to export destination), which requires an EEN. Full details on DAERA website.

2026 NRSo Operator Roadshow dates announced delivered in Partnership by CAFRE and UFU

- Tuesday 20th January: Bushtown Hotel, Coleraine
- Tuesday 27th January: French's Bistro, Clough
- Thursday 29th January: White Horse Hotel, Campsie
- Tuesday 3rd February: Rice's Hotel, Poyntzpass
- Tuesday 17th February: DAERA Atek building, Armagh
- Wednesday 18th February: Rockmount Golf Club, Carryduff
- Wednesday 25th February: CAFRE Greenmount, Antrim

PARLIAMENTARY UPDATE

IHT covered by Legislation update above.