

GROUP POLICY REPORTS**ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE****Bluetongue**

- There are currently 4 Infected Premises (IPs) and 1 Temporary Control Zone (TCZ), covering approximately 1,500 herds. DAERA are also investigating a fifth suspected case in Portavogie, which was identified during pre-movement testing. This case is still within the TCZ and so there will be no changes to restrictions.
- If further cases are found outside the zone during the vector low period, maintain the current policy. Movement restrictions would apply in those zones. High-infection zones may need to remain in place until the end of June, due to concerns around infection during high-risk pregnancy periods.
- Surveillance options over the next 6 weeks (South East focus). The objective is to determine the extent of infection in the highest-risk areas. The proposed approach is sampling in 20 large herds (approx. 175 animals per herd). Continued enhanced abattoir surveillance in designated areas. DAERA's stated next steps continue with TCZ and high-risk animal testing, continued surveillance in risk areas, industry preparedness, and ongoing communication.
- ROI have identified one positive cow in a herd in Co. Wexford, the first confirmed case in ROI. Additional sampling and epidemiological investigations are taking place to determine if there has been any spread and ROI farmers are being urged to vaccinate. Exports of cattle and sheep to NI for breeding and production have been suspended.

TB

- **bTB Costings Project** – All analysis work has been completed and Andersons have finished their draft report. UFU are to be provided with the draft report by the end of January for any edits and changes before final editing and publication. Case studies are continuing to be drafted with an aim to be finalized before publication of the main report.
- **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.
- Approximately 90% of farmers in the area have signed up to allow for DAERA to carry out badger sett surveys on their land. UFU have been given written clarification that if a

farmer signs up to allow access for the sett surveys, they are not signing up to the full regionalisation project.

Avian Influenza

- The new avian influenza season commenced on 1st October 2025 and to date, there have been 91 cases of HPAI H5N1 across the UK (72 in England, 7 in Wales, 8 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. In ROI, there have been five confirmed outbreaks. This is the first time commercial HPAI outbreaks have been confirmed in ROI since November 2022. 27 wild bird positives were confirmed in ROI in Q4 of 2025.
- Cases in Scotland have increased over the past month. NI farmers are warned to remain vigilant to signs of disease.

Lamb Welfare Consultation

- Defra has released a joint consultation with the devolved governments on proposals to amend legislation on lamb castration and tail docking. The proposals seek to ensure that, where castration and tail docking is carried out, pain caused to the animals by these procedures is appropriately minimised. The proposals examine new methods, including methods currently used in Scotland, which are 'less harmful to welfare' than current methods, and also considers the use of pain relief and restrictions on who can carry out each method.
- The AHW committee will meet to discuss the consultation, with a deadline of 9th March.

BEEF & LAMB

AgriSearch Levy Increase

- The committee discussed AgriSearch levy increases and agreed to increase to 90p for beef and 20p for sheep.

Bovine EID

- The committee discussed the Bovine EID consultation and agreed to the mandatory introduction of bovine EID.

Sheep Carcase 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. DAERA have formed a sheep sector support working group but it has not met yet.

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

- From Monday 2nd February 2026 LMC are removing beef quotes from publication due to significant price difference in quotes and price paid. LMC will continue to publish sheep quotes.

FQAS

- The committee discussed and agreed to small farmer FQAs fee increase. The committee also discussed the printing of the standard review books.

Carbon

- The committee continues to raise issues with Carbon Footprinting project with data protection and carbon accounting.

FSA

- The UFU had a meeting with NIMEA and FSA to discuss future of 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.

Beef Conference

- The UFU and CAFRE are organising a beef conference on Wednesday 10th June at Greenmount.

Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme

- The UFU is meeting with DAERA to discuss the future of the BCRS after year 4 of the scheme.

CAFRE and AFBI Beef Facilities

- The UFU is meeting with CAFRE to discuss the future plans of the CAFRE beef facilities.

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

- They attended the Winterfair, met with 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, 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.

Fall 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) Update

- The NAP Task & Finish Group established by the Minister has held five full days meetings with several additional technical meetings also taking place. A science sub-group has been established to consider the evidence and science presented and an Economic Sub-Group appointed. Some positive progress has been made and the UFU continue to challenge the draconian measures put forward by DAERA. The Environment Committee are updated on this work and are meeting regularly to review.

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. 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 encourage 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 have met with the Minister twice and continues to lobby while taking advice from our legal team.
- The UFU are also actively engaged on issues around Shared Environmental Services and trying to find resolution to the various issues that have arisen from them. SES are employed by and servicing the demands of local Councils therefore UFU members are encouraged to raise concerns with SES with their local Councillors.

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 and workshops to trial this are currently taking place.

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

- The committee discussed AgriSearch levy increase and agreed to and agreed on an increase to 90p for beef and 20p for sheep.

Bovine EID

- The committee are 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 met with Forestry Service to discuss 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. DAERA has formed a sheep sector support working group but it has not met yet.

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LMC

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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

- Before Christmas, the UK Government u-turned on their position on inheritance tax, raising the threshold to £2.5 million transferable between spouses. The Legislation Committee will meet in February to set the UFU's future campaigning direction on the matter. The NFU have officially wound down their *Stop the Family Farm Tax* campaign, but have vowed to continue lobbying on the issue for wider reforms to inheritance tax, capital gains tax, and other taxes.

A5 Western Transport Corridor

- The A5 appeal in the Court of Appeal and High Court continues. The UFU is encouraging all affected farmers who have not yet contacted the Department for Infrastructure regarding land restoration payments and works to do so urgently.

Agricultural Wages Board

- The UFU has taken part in the AWB pay negotiations for 2026-27. Subject to final ratification of the Board following the consideration of any objections, the rates as below have been set.

#	Grade	2025-26	2026-27	Increase	Notes
1	Trainee (18+)	£8	£8	0%	National Minimum Wage
1	Trainee (18-20)	£10	£10.85	8.5%	National Minimum Wage
1	Trainee (21+)	£12.21	£12.71	4.1%	National Minimum Wage
2	Standard Agricultural Worker	£12.50	£13.30	6.4%	

3	Lead Agricultural Worker	£12.73 / £12.98	£13.66	7.31% / 5.24%	Lead worker and craft grade merged
4	Agricultural Multi-Skilled Worker	£13.37	£13.89	3.89%	
5	Agricultural Manager	£13.90	£14.44	3.88%	
Accommodation Offset		£54.71	£60	9.67%	
Overtime Rate		1.5x	1x	N/A	1.5x rate abolished

Greenways

- The UFU is actively monitoring progress and announcements related to a number of greenway schemes across the country. The UFU will meet with the DfI Active Travel Team at a high-level to discuss landowner consent to greenways and other issues. The UFU will also meet with various local councils regarding specific greenway projects.

Firearms

- A number of members have highlighted that the new PSNI Firearms Application Portal is not fit for purpose and is littered with technical issues, making it hard for older farmers to renew their licence. The Equality Commission have urged the PSNI to allow farmers to continue to choose between an online application or a paper application. The UFU will meet with the PSNI Firearms Branch to attempt to reach a solution on the matter.

Agricultural Vehicles and the Public Roads

- The UFU is engaging with partners in the PSNI, HSE, LANTRA, CAFRE, and the DVA to update the *Agricultural Vehicles and the Public Roads* booklet.

NI Water

- A number of members have flagged NI Water's seemingly more stringent inspection and enforcement regime which appears to be disproportionate to the issues on farms. The UFU is urgently engaging with NI Water to find a solution to this matter. NI Water have agreed to suspend farm enforcement until it engages fully with the UFU.

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

- They 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

Avian Influenza

- The new avian influenza season commenced on 1st October 2025 and to date, there have been 91 cases of HPAI H5N1 across the UK (72 in England, 7 in Wales, 8 in Scotland and 4 in NI).
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- Cases in Scotland have increased over the past month. NI farmers are warned to remain vigilant to signs of disease.

RHI

- The RHI closure regulations consultation response has been announced by the Minister for the Economy. The NI Executive have agreed to policy approach to allow for the closure proposals to include the introduction of a four-band usage declaration system (increased from the three-band model proposed in the consultation), a review mechanism for the 2017-2019 reference period in cases of exceptional circumstances, and provision to allow for the transfer or relocation of installations. Further, the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill continues to progress through the NI Assembly. The UFU will continue to engage with DfE and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition to the proposed closure regulations. The Committee has considered their position regarding what the UFU should lobby for regarding a grant support scheme following the closure of RHI.

Cage Reform Consultation

- Defra has released a joint consultation with the devolved governments on proposals to ban the use of cages in the laying hen sector. Four options are being consulted on – a 2027 ban on new cages, leading to a 2032 ban on all cage production (Defra's preferred

option), a 2027 ban on the instalment of new cages leading to a 2037 ban on all cage production, a 2030 ban on instalment of new cages leading to a 2034 ban on all cage production, or a complete ban on production from 2030 without a grace period.

- The poultry committee will meet to discuss the consultation, with a deadline of 9th March.

EU Animal Welfare Laws

- The killing of day old chicks is being debated currently within the EU animal welfare laws – currently, there is no provision to provide an alternative (i.e. in-ovo sexing) due to finances and planning, however the UKFUs are not against the removal of the killing of day old chicks if a long transition period was available which allowed for the changes to be put in place.

Egg Quality Standards Guide

- APHA have been working on updating the egg quality standards guide for egg quality, grading, marking and packaging. Meetings have been held with the UKFUs, BEIC and BFREPA with significant concerns raised about the changes to the standards guide.

RURAL AFFAIRS

Women in Agriculture Leadership Programme

- DAERA are providing £10,000 funding for the joint UFU/DAERA women in leadership taskforce which is in the process of being set up. Meeting with Veronica Morris and DAERA on 2nd February to discuss who we want to be invited to the taskforce and the first steps.

Food Strategy Framework

- FoodNI are keen to work with UFU on raising awareness around the food strategy framework and gain more feedback from rural voices. Looking at hosting discussion events with different groups, i.e. chairs and vice chairs, rural representatives, industry representatives.

Food NI/Women in Agriculture Event

- FoodNI are wanting to host a women in agriculture event with UFU on 10th March at Hillsborough castle, with potential suggested speakers including Minette Batters, Abi Reader and Catherine Hughes (UU Nutritionist). The event will focus on food security, health, and the food strategy framework.

Violence against women and girls

- Rural communities network are currently undertaking a project to look at the impact of violence against women and girls on rural communities. UFU sit on the stakeholder group and as part of the current project will be attending a focus group with members of the RA committee.

Farm Families Day

- A Kinnear spoke with the committee to get their thoughts on farm families day including ideas for the event. The committee are keen to be involved in the planning and on the day activities.

Finance/Pensions

- Money, Advice and Pension Service are looking to host a free pension workshop, either online or in person, tailored to farmers/rural communities. UFU will work with RCN and MAPS to facilitate and advertise these workshops.

Rural Support

- Gyles Dawson will be attending the next committee meeting on 24th February to update the committee on the work of Rural Support

Women in Business

- Women in Business representatives will be attending the next committee meeting on 24th February to update the committee on membership benefits.

RURAL ENTERPRISE

Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)

- The RHI closure regulations consultation response has been announced by the Minister for the Economy. The NI Executive have agreed to policy approach to allow for the closure proposals to include the introduction of a four-band usage declaration system (increased from the three-band model proposed in the consultation), a review mechanism for the 2017-2019 reference period in cases of exceptional circumstances, and provision to allow for the transfer or relocation of installations. Further, the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill continues to progress through the NI Assembly. The UFU will continue to engage with DfE and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition to the proposed closure regulations. The Committee has considered their position regarding what the UFU should lobby for regarding a grant support scheme following the closure of RHI.

System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI)

- The UFU has engaged with SONI on their SRP27 Price Control submission and has sat on their *Stakeholder Advisory and Challenge Group*. The UFU will continue to engage with SONI, and will meet with them shortly to discuss the North-South Interconnector.

Utility Regulator (UR)

- The Committee engaged with the Non-domestic Consumer Protection Team at the UR on their *Farming Sector Project* – a project aimed at better understanding the farming sector's interaction with the energy market. Farmers are not polled on the UR's usual non-domestic consumer protection tracker because of their irregular interaction with the market. The Committee advised the UR on a sample for their qualitative interviews and will be working with the UR on the questions for the project. The UR have commissioned Ipsos to carry out the fieldwork.

ARABLE & HORTICULTURE

PARLIAMENTARY UPDATE

Stormont

- Meeting held with Jon Burrows MLA in December.
- Draft budget published, consultation closes 3rd of March.
- Monitoring RHI scheme closure legislative developments.
- Private member bills such as the ANC and hunting with dogs, are likely to be progressed through the Assembly process soon.
- NI Farm Family Day 2026 will be held on the 16th of March.

Election Committee

- Established to plan and prepare ahead of the next local government and NI Assembly Elections in Northern Ireland that will take place in May 2027, with the ambition of having the UFU manifesto completed before the Autumn 2026 party conference season.

Westminster

- DEFRA SoS repeated message that the government will not concede anymore ground on IHT, Labour backbenchers previously in support of our campaign, now stating that the government has finally struck the right balance.
- Finance Bill moving through various legislative stages.

Brussels/Windsor Framework

- A new veterinary medicines group set up to monitor supply chain disruption.
- A new business stakeholder group has been set up by the Cabinet Office, the NI Business Stakeholder Group (NIBSG), and the NIBBWG will coexist alongside the NIBSG.
- Horticulture Working Group work also continuing.
- SPS/Veterinary agreement discussions will ramp up throughout 2026. This is positive and a position which we support the government on.
- EU on farm animal welfare consultations are ongoing with BAB.
- Organic Egg farmers in the UK, including NI, are now under one regulatory regime.

Local Government

- Meeting requests are being put in with all Councils in relation to planning and SES.
- Meeting request with Fermanagh and Omagh Council to discuss local greenway proposals.