

## GROUP POLICY REPORTS

### ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE

#### Bluetongue

- Discussions have been held with DAERA to consider the removal of the TCZ in NI, the impact to any upcoming shows into the spring/summer, and options for re-opening up North/South trade and the impact this could have on East/West trade. UFU are in continued discussion with DAERA and the IFA and will continue to update members as changes occur.

#### bTB

- bTB Costings Project – The draft report has been circulated with the steering group for comment and final edits and will be meeting with Andersons for a presentation in the coming weeks. Once the report is signed off by all parties, the results will be launched with a potential launch event and then online webinar.

#### 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. Approximately 90% of farmers in the area have signed up to allow for DAERA to carry out badger sett surveys on their land.
- Other workshop discussions in recent weeks have included pre/post movement testing, alternative control herds, and biosecurity assessment design.

#### Avian Influenza

- As discussed in Poultry.

#### Cage Reform Consultation

- As discussed in Poultry.

#### 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 9<sup>th</sup> 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 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 through the DAERA sheep sector support working group that UFU will attend.

#### **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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 met with CAFRE to discuss the future plans of the CAFRE and AFBI beef facilities.

#### **Carbon Footprinting project**

- The committee continue to discuss the development and issues with the Carbon Footprinting project.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **Lamb Castration and Tail Docking Consultation**

- The committee will be discussing the UFU's response to the Lamb Castration and Tail Docking consultation.

## **DAIRY**

### **Fair Dealing Obligations (Milk) Regulations**

- The four unions have agreed to meet with the adjudicator for an update on the regulations.

### **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 in April, discussion on the use of methane inhibitors and the new proposed research facility.

### **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 and a response was provided for a joint 4 unions response.

### **Februdairy**

- Februdairy campaign has concluded, with plenty of positive social media engagement.

### **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**

- Red tractor & NIFCC are aware of the committee concern and actions have been agreed to try and address these. On going progress being made

### **Bovine EID**

- Committee discussed DAERA's proposals around Bovine EID and disagreed, making reference to additional costs, benefits to the dairy farmer and the added bureaucracy.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) update**

- The NAP Task & Finish Group established by the Minister has held 8 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.
- The UFU will 'intervene' in a legal case being taken by a Lough Neagh fisherman against DAERA around water quality. The UFU will ensure the farmer's position is heard in Court.

### **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 and will open in summer 2026.
- 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 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.

#### **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.

#### **Weather**

- UFU has raised concerns around wet weather and significant issues around slurry spreading with the Minister and officials in DAERA and NIEA. NIEA will take sympathetic approach as long as farmers try best under the extreme circumstances to comply and do not cause water pollution. Exceptional circumstances / reasonable excuse is applicable and farmers with concerns who wish to discuss this should contact their UFU Technical Officer.

### **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 discussed the Bovine EID consultation and did not agree to support the implementation of Bovine EID.

#### **ANC Private Members Bill**

- The UFU supports the ANC private members bill to reinstate the ANC payment.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **Lamb Castration and Tail Docking Consultation**

- The committee will be discussing the UFU's response to the Lamb Castration and Tail Docking consultation.

#### **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 through the DAERA sheep sector support working group.

#### **FQAS**

- The committee discussed and agreed to a small farmer FQAs fee increase with the conditions that FQAS continue print standard review books, NIMEA communicate they want aggregated anonymised data and FQAS work to increase recognition of FQAS logo.

#### **LMC**

- From Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

#### **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 Legislation Committee has confirmed the continuation of the UFU's Stop the Family Farm Tax campaign.

#### **A5 Western Transport Corridor**

- UFU met with DfI to discuss progress on landowner compensation for restoration works post-court case, and the UFU will keep reminding farmers to contact DfI regarding this if they have not already. They also discussed possible outcomes relating to the appeal with regard to forward-planning and land values. The UFU is monitoring developments in the court closely.

### **Agricultural Wages Board**

- The Board met on the 27th February, where the Board approved the new rates ahead of introduction in April 2026: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/meeting-agricultural-wages-board-northern-ireland-9-january-2026>

### **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**

- The UFU met with NI Water to discuss their inspection and enforcement regime. The parties will meet again in the next few weeks to discuss the way forward and potential solutions to the issues raised regarding the enforcement regime. Farm visits and enforcement remains suspended.

### **Greenways**

- The UFU met with the DfI Greenways team to discuss the development of new greenways, landowner rights over the project, and compensation. The possibility of a document similar to that of the National Code of Conduct for Greenways in the Republic of Ireland was discussed, with both sides exploring options. Significant concerns relating to specific greenway projects were provided.

### **Vesting reform**

- The UFU has called for reform of the vesting / compulsory purchase system, highlighting issues such as inconsistent communication, out-of-date legislation and process, and unfair compensation. The Legislation Committee will work to agree a position paper on the matter. A meeting request has been sent to the Minister for Infrastructure and the Minister for Finance on the matter. The UFU had met with Land and Property Services (LPS) with concerns.

### **Speed limit review**

- The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is undertaking a Speed Limit Review with the aim of reducing road deaths and serious injuries and aligning NI's approach with the Road Safety Strategy to 2030. Particularly, they argue that excessive speed remains a major factor in collisions, especially on rural roads, and that current speed limits do not always reflect road design. They wish to expand 20mph limits, particularly around schools, and reducing speed limits on national roads. The UFU will respond.

## **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.

### **Meeting with Sofina Foods (Cookstown)**

- Delegate met with management to discuss a number of issues and to determine the companies strategic plans for Northern Ireland. A further meeting is to follow.

#### **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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025 and to date, there have been 94 cases of HPAI H5N1 across the UK (74 in England, 7 in Wales, 9 in Scotland and 4 in NI).
- Mandatory housing orders for all kept birds and poultry came into force on the 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)**

- The consultation report is due imminently. DfE have announced slight changes to banding structures, an increase in desk-based assessments within the closure regulations model, and the ability to transfer the boiler to a new owner in a new location. UFU will meet with DfE shortly to discuss other changes. We support their minor amendments.

### **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 (Defras 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 have met to discuss the consultation and a response is being drafted, with a deadline of 9<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **RSPCA**

- K Ashton-Meek will be meeting representatives from RSPCA and RSPCA Assured with the BEIC, BFREPA and NFU on 26<sup>th</sup> February to discuss the lack of progress, lack of communication, and planned work going forward.

## **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. Met with Veronica Morris and DAERA on 2<sup>nd</sup> February to discuss who we want to be invited to the taskforce and the first steps. First meeting of the full taskforce in 19<sup>th</sup> March.

### **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 hosting a women in agriculture event with UFU on 10<sup>th</sup> March at Hillsborough castle, with speakers including Minette Batters, Catherine Hughes (UU Nutritionist) and Rebecca Orr. The event will focus on food security, health, and the food strategy framework.

### **Violence against women and girls**

- Rural communities' network is 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 members attended a focus group.

### **NI Farm Family 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.

### **Rural Support**

- Gyles Dawson attended the committee meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> February to update the committee on the work of Rural Support

### **Women in Business**

- Women in Business representatives attended the committee meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> February to update the committee on membership benefits.

## **RURAL ENTERPRISE**

### **Tree Planting Action Plan**

- In October, the DAERA Minister announced the development of a Tree Planting Action Plan. The Woodland Trust's report showed that Northern Ireland not only has the lowest woodland cover in the UK and Ireland, and on the current trajectory, will miss DAERA's targets on tree cover. The UFU has been invited to participate in the Tree Planting Action Plan Stakeholder Co-Design Group, to provide input into the action plan. The action plan will develop a high-level strategy on what DAERA must do regarding tree planting to hit their targets. The stakeholder co-design group will be facilitated by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). The staff appeared before the Committee to hear concerns from landowners to factor into the action plan, and the UFU will monitor the progress of the action plan in the coming weeks and months.

### **Interdepartmental Biomethane working group**

- Former UFU President Ian Marshall OBE has been appointed chair of the Interdepartmental Biomethane Working Group, with representatives from the Department for the Economy and Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. In addition, the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy (CASE) has been commissioned by DfE to write a biomethane strategy, with a plan to deliver it by Q3 2026. Ian and David appeared before the committee to receive initial feedback on the work programme, and we will be engaging with them closely.

#### **Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)**

- The UFU responded extensively to the consultation on the proposed closure regulations. Following the consideration of consultation responses by DfE, they have proposed the following changes to the closure regulations: 1) More desk-based assessments and risk-based inspections 2) An additional band in the banding system 3) The ability to change both ownership and location of your installation, subject to pre-approval checks.

#### **Utility Regulator Farming Sector project**

- The Committee heard a presentation from the non-domestic consumer protection team at the Utility Regulator. This is a new team specifically focusing on non-domestic consumer protection, which previously had no dedicated team and handled by the wider consumer protection team. It was explained that in the non-domestic energy usage tracker, the farming sector is specifically excluded due to its unique energy usage. As such, the UR has committed to a Farming Sector Project to better understand the sector's energy usage and how farmers can be better protected through utility regulation. The UR has commissioned Ipsos to conduct a project involving 36 farmers, each being interviewed qualitatively for 1 hour each. The

Committee pledged to support the work of the UR in this area and have followed up since.

#### **Socialisation of Connection Charges**

- The UFU continues to monitor policy and technical progress on implementing DfE's decision regarding the socialisation of grid connection costs, including the licence modifications for NIE Networks by the Utility Regulator.

#### **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.

## **ARABLE & HORTICULTURE**

## **PARLIAMENTARY UPDATE**