

# Agenda

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thursday 30 April 2026, CAFRE Loughry Campus, Cookstown

11.00am	<p>Welcome to the AGM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address and Q&amp;A session with DAERA Minister, Andrew Muir MLA</li> </ul>
12.00pm	Lunch
1.30pm	<p><b>AGM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance and apologies</li> <li>• Minutes of the AGM held 30 April 2025</li> <li>• Matters arising from the minutes</li> <li>• Receive reports and accounts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UFU financial accounts FYE 31 December 2025</li> <li>• Countryside Services Limited financial accounts FYE 31 December 2025</li> <li>• UFU Executive, Board, Central and Subcommittee reports</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Appointment of auditors for 2026</li> <li>• Election of office bearers for 2026/2027</li> <li>• Election of President Nomination: John McLenaghan, Co. Derry/Londonderry</li> <li>• Election of Deputy Presidents Nominations: Glenn Cuddy, Co. Tyrone Clement Lynch, Co. Derry/Londonderry Cyril Orr, Co. Antrim</li> <li>• Outgoing President's Address</li> <li>• Incoming President's Address</li> <li>• Deputy Presidents' and County Chairpersons' remarks</li> <li>• Presentation of Honorary Life Memberships</li> <li>• Any other business</li> </ul>
3.30pm	AGM close



## The President's foreword

As we reflect on the year from April 2025 it is clear that Northern Ireland's farming community has once again demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of sustained pressure. The past 12 months have tested our sector in ways few could have predicted. Policy uncertainty, votes of no confidence, disease threats and difficult market conditions have come thick and fast. Yet through it all, our farm families have continued to do what they have always done best, produce safe, high-quality food with professionalism, pride and determination.

The Ulster Farmers' Union exists to represent every farmer in Northern Ireland, irrespective of size, sector or political persuasion. We are strongest when we stand together, and over the past year, that unity has been more important than ever.

At the same time, we must not lose sight of the enormous contribution our UFU members make. Northern Ireland's farm families are the backbone of a £6 billion agri-food industry. We feed more than 10 million people and produce around 20% of the UK's indigenous food supply. That is not an abstract statistic; it is a strategic national asset. Food security is national security, and that principle must be backed not just by rhetoric but by investment and policy stability.



UFU President William Irvine pictured at the UK Unions Summit, Glenavon House Hotel, March 2025.

The UK's self-sufficiency remains at approximately 60%. That is simply not good enough. If we are serious about reducing reliance on imports from countries with lower environmental and animal welfare standards, then domestic production must be supported and encouraged. A country that values food must value the people who produce it.

Disease risk has remained a constant shadow over the sector. The confirmation of Bluetongue virus, alongside the continued threats of Avian Influenza, Bovine TB and African Swine Fever, has reinforced just how vulnerable livestock production can be. These risks underline the importance of science-led, proportionate and practical policy responses. Farmers are willing partners in safeguarding animal and plant health, but measures must be workable and grounded in real-world farming conditions.



Supply chain fairness remains another critical issue. Farmers cannot continue to absorb volatility while others in the chain remain insulated. Market returns must reflect the value delivered at the farm level. Without a sustainable margin, investment stalls, innovation slows, and succession becomes harder. Restoring confidence requires transparency, balance and genuine fairness from farm to fork.

We also remain vigilant on trade. The recent recall of Brazilian beef containing banned hormones is a stark reminder of the consequences of lowering standards. Northern Ireland farmers operate to some of the highest animal welfare, environmental and food safety standards in the world. We will continue to lobby strongly against any trade policy that permits lower-standard imports to undermine our producers and erode consumer trust.

There have, however, been areas of progress. The ring-fencing of the farm support budget has provided welcome stability, and the expected 2026 capital grant programme will help farms invest in efficiency, productivity, and environmental improvement. Education and public engagement remain central to our mission. Initiatives such as the Bank of Ireland Open Farm Weekend, our schools' competitions and our work with Twinkl NI continue to strengthen the understanding of where food comes from, and the role farmers play in society. Inspiring the next generation has never been more important.

Following the launch of a reckless consultation on the Nutrients Action Programme, UFU lobbying and collaborative working, along with agri-food representatives supported by legal advice, forced the Minister to revisit the process and step up a NAP Stakeholder Task and Finish Group, facilitated independently to try and find a better way forward for farmers and the environment and that process continues. Ammonia linking to planning issues remains a huge challenge and one the UFU continues to take expert and legal advice to try and secure a viable way forward to allow our members to invest and modernise their farm businesses.

For the first time in the UFU's history the Union's Executive backed a vote of no confidence in the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. The result of no confidence in DAERA represents a deep dissatisfaction from UFU members on how the Department is handling key issues affecting farmers. The UFU had continued to engage with the Department in good faith, remaining patient and hopeful that co-operation would yield results, but felt this was not being reciprocated by DAERA. From wildlife intervention to tackle bTB, ammonia controls and planning in relation to the Nutrients Action Programme, sheep sector support and a generational renewal scheme under the sustainable farming programme, DAERA was failing to deliver for the farming industry.

Prolonged uncertainty, particularly around succession, taxation and environmental regulation, pushes family farms to breaking point. Once confidence is lost and young people decide there is no future in farming, the damage can be long-lasting and difficult to reverse. That is why the decisions taken now are so critical.



Cyril Millar pictured receiving the Belfast Telegraph (BT) cup from the UFU President William Irvine at the UFU Annual Dinner 2025.

# Membership Report

Looking ahead, my greatest hope for Northern Ireland farming is that we restore confidence and stability. That means policy clarity, fair treatment within the supply chain and a genuine recognition of the standards our farmers uphold. If farmers have certainty and a fair return, they will invest, innovate and pass on viable sustainable businesses to the next generation.

This year also marks a significant moment for the Union itself. In March, we bid a sincere and grateful farewell to our CEO, Wesley Aston, after 34 years of dedicated service to the UFU and to Northern Ireland agriculture. Wesley's commitment, leadership and steady guidance have left a legacy within this organisation. We thank him for his immense contribution and wish him every success in retirement. We also look forward to working with Conall Donnelly as he takes up the role and leads the organisation into its next chapter.

The UFU will remain steadfast in its mission to represent, support and fight for our members. Northern Ireland agriculture stands at a crossroads, but with unity, determination and strong advocacy, we can secure a viable and confident future for our industry.

We are stronger together, and we will continue to make our case at every level.

*William Irvine*

**William Irvine**  
UFU President



UFU representatives, Deputy President John McLenaghan, President William Irvine and CEO Wesley Aston met with deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly and First Minister Michelle O'Neill to discuss IHT, March 2025.



Taking part in #Farm24, UFU President William Irvine and YFCU President Richard Beattie.



## Membership figures

The UFU 2025 membership total came to 11,770 a drop of 156 from the membership total of 11,926 in 2024. Following updates to our customer relationship management (CRM) system, which now allow us to better track changes in membership, we have identified the primary reasons for the decline. This shows that the reduction is largely attributable to rural dwellers discontinuing their membership. Despite this, our retention rate finished at an impressive 94%, which is a notable achievement given the challenges faced throughout the year.

Our final income from membership subscription stands at £1,622,790, representing an increase of £60,136 compared to 2024. The average subscription amount was £144.74, reflecting a 4.8% increase from the 2023 average of £138.15.

## Awards

**The Cuthbert Trophy**, awarded to the group that secures the highest rate of retention, goes to S W Fermanagh with an impressive 98% retention.

**The Mary Wilson Memorial Trophy** is presented to the group that achieves excellence across a wide range of areas, from income growth, new direct debit sign-ups and member growth across two membership years, recognising consistent high performance. The 2025 award goes to Mid Tryone, who had an impressive 53 new members.

## Corporate membership

In 2025, we undertook a comprehensive review of the corporate membership programme, reducing the number of membership levels from five to three and increasing the minimum membership fee by 50% to £650.

During the year, we secured 17 new corporate members; as a result the total corporate membership now stands at 77. Total income for 2025 amounted to £73,710, compared to £63,700 in 2024, an increase of £10,010.

In addition, 2025 generated further income through corporate sponsorship of the Agri Conference in January and the WIA Conference in October. Total sponsorship income from these two events was £20,300, bringing total income generated through corporate members to £94,010. This is a significant achievement and ensured that the cost to the Union of delivering these popular events was minimal.

There have also been notable qualitative benefits. Corporate members have expanded the range of offers available to our membership, covering areas from machinery to medical services. This has been met with strong positive feedback from both members and corporate partners. Furthermore, we successfully developed a corporate member into an affinity partner, securing a highly competitive offer for members with Calor Gas.

Corporate membership is proving to be highly beneficial to both the Union and its members. It is a programme we should collectively embrace, as participating businesses seek to engage with our membership through sponsorship opportunities only. This engagement is undertaken with the clear understanding that corporate members have no influence over policy decisions or legislation. The protection and best interests of our members always remain our absolute priority.



UFU Corporate Sales Executive Craig Scott pictured with British Wool Head of Member Engagement Gareth Jones and UFU Beef and Lamb Chair Brendan Kelly.

### Student membership

We continue to engage with our existing student members and sign up new recruits through our agricultural college registration days and through correspondence being sent out.

### Training and events

In 2025, the UFU held and was involved in over 60 events, many beyond core policy areas, demonstrating broad engagement with members and stakeholders.

The year began with presidents' roadshows held across six counties, giving office bearers the chance to meet members, provide updates, and hear directly from them. January also featured the first UFU Agri Conference in partnership with YFCU, which was highly attended and later awarded Highly Commended at the Farming Life Awards 2025.

Spring included the UFU AGM and Annual Dinner, alongside key member and corporate events, providing valuable opportunities for networking and discussion on current policy issues and wider industry challenges.

Facing a challenging year for farming, with emerging policy, animal health, and financial pressures, the UFU expanded its programme of information and support events. Targeted webinars and briefings, including the Bluetongue and post-budget IHT webinars kept members informed and supported.

The show season began with the Balmoral Show, where over 4,000 people visited the UFU and NFU Mutual joint stand across four days, followed by a full summer programme of local shows. Working closely with local group offices and partners, the UFU ensured a consistent member experience while engaging with the wider public.



The UFU and United Feeds have launched the 33rd Annual Silage Competition. (L-R) United Feeds Sales Director Alan Boyd, Jonny Agnew (past winner), United Feeds Business Development Advisor Michael Verner, and UFU Membership Commercial and Technical Director Lucy Mitchell.

The UFU hosted a series of virtual farm tours, which continue to remain popular and well attended. Competitions run throughout the year have also continued to grow year on year. Separately, training courses run with Countryside Services were well used by members, and the programme continues to expand the list of available courses.



Overall, the 2025 events programme reinforced the UFU's commitment to member engagement, knowledge sharing and ensuring members felt informed, supported, and represented throughout the year.

### Silage competition

The annual silage competition continued to generate strong interest, with more than 350 farmers taking part to showcase their silage-making skills. The 'newcomer' category again proved highly popular, attracting over 40 first-time entrants to the competition.

Entries were assessed across four categories: dairy, beef and sheep, big bale, and alternative forage. Judging focused on a range of key factors, including fermentation quality, digestibility, effluent management, and safety standards.

We extend our sincere thanks to our main sponsor, United Feeds, whose ongoing support remains instrumental to the success of the competition. The sustained level of engagement and participation from UFU members continues to highlight the vital role silage plays in supporting effective livestock production systems.

### Technical services

A key benefit of full farming membership is access to the UFU Technical Team, who support members with a wide range of issues affecting their farm business. For many members, a simple phone call to their local technical officer can save valuable time searching for answers and prevent an issue from escalating. Where matters are more complex, technical officers meet farmers where they are and work alongside them to resolve problems.

In 2025, the UFU Technical Team saved members over £285,000. With farming often balancing on fine margins, ensuring money remains in members' pockets is crucial. Alongside these financial savings, the Team supported members through challenging and stressful situations, where practical advice and reassurance were equally important.

Over the year, the Technical Team helped members recover compensation and overturn penalties applied under the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment, including duplicate field issues, Young Farmer Payments and late TB tests. Technical officers also assisted with applications for farmhouse rates, excusal from jury service, and resolving issues with a range of utility companies.

UFU Technical Officers understand the breadth of challenges that can affect a farming business and are on hand to help members work through problems as they arise. To contact your local technical officer, get in touch with your Group Office or UFU Headquarters.



### Exclusive member services

Our range of affinity deals continues to provide great value for money for members. In 2025, members saved in excess of £475,000 alone by utilising the discounts on a range of vehicle manufacturers.

For a full list of UFU member services, visit [www.ufuni.org](http://www.ufuni.org).

### Field staff changes since the 2025 UFU AGM

#### Retirement:

Howard Pillow, North West Armagh

#### Former employees:

Jemima Stewart, East Tyrone

Stacey Cherry, East Tyrone

Phillip Gault, Donard

John McGreevy, Donard

Louise McNamee, North Tyrone

#### Appointments:

Kathryn McCullough, Ballyclare

Marty McAleer, North Tyrone

Lesley-Anne Stewart, North Antrim

Gail Toal, North West Armagh



## UFU Membership services

Check out [www.ufuni.org](http://www.ufuni.org) for full details of all services.

### VEHICLES



The UFU has a fantastic range of discounts off a selection of 4x4 and vans which members can avail of. Discounts range from 3% right up to 24% across selected makes and models. Check out [www.ufuni.org](http://www.ufuni.org) for full details.

### TRAINING, SUPPORT & PROTECTION



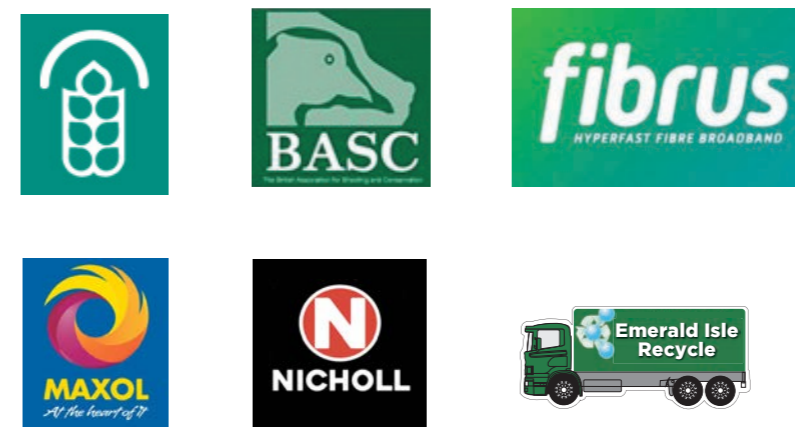
Whether it's you, your farm or farm family that need protected or help with your accounts, the UFU offers a wide range of discounts through our professional partners to drive real value into your membership. From discounted legal rates, insurance and health care to reduced rates on money transfer and renewable energy storage, you can make great savings with your UFU membership.

### SECURITY



Help put a stop to rural crime and make some great savings on security products. From tracking equipment to anti-theft locking devices the UFU has secured genuine discounts for members.

### FARMING



The UFU has secured discounts across a range of services that are needed on a daily basis on the farm, from the fuel you put in your tractor, disposal of waste plastic or access to rural broadband. A full list of services is available on [www.ufuni.org](http://www.ufuni.org).

### LIFESTYLE



While we appreciate it can be difficult to get a break from the farm, the UFU membership offers discounts in over 2,000 restaurants, hotels and shops through our numerous partnerships. So why not enjoy a discount off a trip away?

### DIRECT DEBIT



Sign up to pay your UFU subscription by Direct Debit and receive a free UFU bodywarmer as a thank-you. To switch to Direct Debit or for more information, please contact your local group office or the UFU membership team at HQ.

# UFU AGM 2025

## Attendances:

G Anderson	B Harpur	T Nixon
W Anderson	W Henry	C Orr
R Armstrong	M Hunter	R Orr
B Bell	R Irvine	M Park
I Berry	A Irwin	H Patterson
M Blair	D Irwin	L Patton
D Boyd	B Jamieson	R Pogue
B Boyes	C Johnston	J Rankin
A Brown	B Kelly	J Riddell
D Brown	D Kelso	I Robinson
J Brown	J Kennedy	D Scott
C Buchanan	C Kennedy OBE	K Sharkey MBE
M Buick	L Kinnaid	E Skelly-Smith
R Burgess	H Laird	T Smith
R Campbell	J A Lyle	P Smyth
R Carmichael	F Magill	R Stewart
J Carson	D Martin	R Thompson
J Carson	B Martin JP OBE	J Tuft
J Cavanagh	R Mayers	C Tweed OBE
A Chambers	W Mayne MBE	I Walker
S Chesney	T McAleese	D Wallace
V Chestnutt OBE	G McAuley	J Warden & Son
C Cleland	P McAuley	C Wilson
G Cooke	J McCallister	K Wilson
E Coote	A McCammond	J Wright
P Corrigan	M McCollum	G Young
K Coulter	D McCormick	
P Crawford	D McCormick	
M Cunningham	M McCracken	
G Doran	D McElrea	
S Dougan	P McKay	
R Douglas	I McMaw	
S Doyle	W McQuitty	
S Elliott	B Megahey	
L Finlay	O Mercer	
J Fleming	G Millar	
A Foster	S Millar	
T Fox	G T Monan	
D Fulton	R Moore	
G Graham	T Moorhead	
F Hanna	C Morton	

## Apologies:

R T J Abernethy
R Beattie
D Bingham
I Buchanan
E Carson
W J Cromie
H Doupe
G Gilpin
T Gilpin
W Graham
K Hawkes
S Johnston
J Keys
J E Linton
B Little
W Lowry
S Maginn
J Martin
S McCaffrey
T McCaughey
D McCracken
G McWhirter
H Millar
P Millar
A Moore
W O'Neill
H Simpson
L Skelly
J Speers
M Watson
R Wells
I Wilson
A Wilson
R Wilson

## Welcome

The President, William Irvine, welcomed members present in person and online to the UFU AGM.

## Address from senior DAERA officials: Martin McKendry, Head of Food, Farming & Rural Affairs group; and Brian Dooher, Chief Veterinary Officer.

The President apologised for the DAERA Minister, who was no longer able to attend, and introduced the speakers, Martin McKendry and Brian Dooher. He then made a number of introductory remarks around inheritance tax, farm support, bovine TB and planning controls.

Martin McKendry spoke first and focused on the new DAERA Sustainable Agriculture Programme, which delivers a range of Government-funded measures.

Brian Dooher then followed, outlining several major livestock disease issues and providing more detail of possible future bovine TB controls.

## Q&A session

A Q&A session was held and the following issues were covered:

Bovine TB - wildlife intervention and livestock valuation compensation; net zero targets; planning controls; future sheep sector support; Bluetongue disease; Farming with Nature Scheme; lack of Young Farmer and arable sector support; and payment levels in the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme.

The President thanked the speakers on behalf of the Council for their addresses and participation in the Q&A session, after which, they both left the AGM.

# Minutes

## UFU Council annual general meeting



The UFU Presidential Team pictured at the UFU AGM, April 2025, Loughry, with guest speakers CAFRE Director Martin McKendry and Chief Veterinary Officer Brian Dooher.

## UFU AGM

### Attendance and apologies

These were as recorded both in the attendance sheets and the online participants' list.

### Minutes

The approval of the minutes from the UFU AGM held on 1 May 2024, with one amendment on attendance, which will be corrected, was proposed by Crosby Cleland and seconded by Gerry Doran and was signed accordingly.

### Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

### UFU financial accounts for year ending 31 December 2024

The CEO presented the UFU's financial accounts. He then outlined in more detail that there has been an increase in income by £44k, but also an increase in expenses of £197k.

There was a net operating deficit of £72k. However, there were a number of exceptional items: non-receipt of CSL (dividend budgeted at £30k) in order to align accounting years; additional costs for the Union's 'inheritance tax rally' in Lisburn of £35k; and an overdue 'policy officeholders team-building' visit to Brussels, which cost £10k. There was a strong 'fair value' movement on investments this year of £348k, which resulted in an after-tax surplus for the year of £184k. The general trend for our investments since 2020 continues upwards. Net assets increased to £4.8m.

Adoption of the written accounts was proposed by Crawford Wilson, seconded by Campbell Tweed and agreed by Council members.



30 April 2025, CAFRE Loughry Campus, Cookstown

# Minutes

## UFU Council annual general meeting

### Report on Countryside Services Ltd

The President welcomed Conall Donnelly, CSL Managing Director, to Council.

Conall Donnelly reported that turnover has been positive this year, with a figure of £5.0m and a net margin of £319k (6.3%). The underlying performance of the business was good.

2024 developments included continued reorganisation of senior management; relocation of operations from Dalton to CSL; inflationary pressures; and a new cattle tag numbering format.

Expected challenges and opportunities in 2025 were: EID in Great Britain; NI livestock genetics programme; new NI agricultural support policy; training services; and the introduction of an Enterprise Resource Management (ERP) system.

### Q&A session

No questions were raised.

The President thanked Conall Donnelly for his presentation, who then left the meeting.

### UFU Executive, Board, Central and Subcommittee reports

Written reports on the work of the UFU Executive Committee, Board, Central and Subcommittees, had been included in the annual report circulated with the AGM notice.

Approval proposed by Dessie Fulton and seconded by Cecil Morton, and these reports were adopted.

### Proposed Rule Changes

The President provided the background to the proposed rule changes.

At the request of the UFU's Executive Committee, the Union's operational Board

in May 2023 commissioned an independent external review of the governance structures of the UFU.

The resulting report was presented to the UFU Executive Committee in January 2024 and its implementation was agreed. From this Report, the Union's Executive Committee agreed:

- the introduction of 'standing orders' for conducting meetings and a 'code of conduct' for members (copies of both documents had been included in the AGM pack).
- the establishment of a related 'Ethics and Standards Committee'.
- The introduction of a 'schedule of delegated authority' which clarifies the decision-making framework within the Union (copy also included in the AGM pack).

Changes to the existing UFU's 'rules and constitution' were necessary to implement these decisions, and the opportunity was also taken at this time to update the Union's rules, as the last major review was over 20 years ago. The Board will initiate a review of the constitution and rules at least once every five years moving forward.

Proposals for these rule changes were presented to the Executive Committee in February 2025 for consideration, and on 24th March 2025, the Executive Committee agreed a number of changes (copy included in the AGM pack) to the existing UFU's rules and constitution which it is recommending to the UFU Council for approval.

The Council then discussed these proposals. Campbell Tweed, on behalf of the County Antrim Committee, reported that while it was acknowledged that these were likely to be approved, the County Antrim Committee could not agree with either the proposals or the process followed to develop and consider them and asked that they be looked at again. This was supported by fellow County Antrim Committee Member, Brian McGaughey.

Mary Hunter referenced the 'Independent External Governance Review Report' produced by James Withers and also stressed the importance of engaging membership on these proposals.

Further discussion took place and it was noted that this was a 'living document' which could be revisited as necessary at any time.

Proposed by Victor Chestnutt and seconded by Kenneth Wilson that these proposed rule changes would be approved. Agreed by Council.

### Appointment of auditors for 2025

It was noted that Cavanagh Kelly had been appointed as auditors for the first year in 2024. Proposed by Gerry Doran and seconded by Roberta Armstrong and agreed that they would continue as auditors for 2025.

### County chairs' remarks

On behalf of the County Antrim Committee, Vice-chair Gerry Doran apologised that their County Chairman, Harry Millar was unable to attend. He then thanked the President and the office bearer team, staff and Committee members for their activities over the last 12 months. He also outlined the ongoing and future issues facing farmers.

On behalf of the County Fermanagh Committee, Chair Darren McCormick, also conveyed thanks to the presidential team, the CEO and UFU staff teams. He also thanked all committee members, group managers and their staff. He then covered some of the current and new challenges which the Union had to address.



Launching the UFU Women in Agriculture Conference 2025. (L-R) UFU Rural Affairs Policy Officer Kayleigh Ashton-Meek, speaker Emily McGowan from Millbank Farm and UFU Rural Affairs Chair Heather Patterson.

### Any other business

#### Chief Executive

The Chief Executive, Wesley Aston, informed the Council of his intention to retire at the end of March next year after 34 years in the Union, the last ten in the role of CEO.

As this would be his last UFU AGM, he thanked the Union and its members for the very enjoyable and challenging but rewarding times which they had collectively gone through. In concluding, he outlined his optimism for both the industry and the UFU going forward.

The President then acknowledged the input which the CEO had made into the Union and the industry over this period.

#### President's concluding remarks

The President thanked UFU staff, and the members who attended the AGM in person and online and then brought the 2025 AGM to a close.



UFU President William Irvine pictured with IFA President Francie Gorman, at the UK Unions Summit, Cookstown, March 2025.





## UFU Board report

The UFU Board met regularly throughout 2025 and considered a wide range of issues on behalf of the Union and its membership. During the year, the Board oversaw significant governance, staffing and organisational developments and ensured the Union was appropriately supported in responding to major policy challenges within the agricultural industry.

There were a number of changes to the Board representation during the year. Graham Cooke joined the Board as the new County Tyrone representative, replacing Gary Hawkes, who completed two terms of service. In December, following the governance review of Countryside Services Ltd. (CSL), the Board confirmed that the incoming UFU Chief Executive will no longer serve as a CSL director. In preparation for this transition, Graham Cooke and Steven Millar were appointed as UFU-nominated directors to the CSL Board.

Staffing changes took place across the organisation at both Headquarters and Group levels. New appointments included roles within policy, communications, membership development, technical support and corporate services. Several internal appointments were made following competitive processes, including the Policy and Communications Director and Technical Manager. In the Armagh Group Office, Howard Pillow retired after 43 years of dedicated service to the Union. Recruitment was also carried out for maternity cover roles and to address staff turnover, while the Board continued to monitor increasing pressures on office capacity due to overall staff growth.

Development work on the office layout and workspace requirements commenced accordingly. The Board also noted that 2025 will be the final year in which the technical team provides nitrates form-filling support, with clinics to be explored in future years.



Catching up at the Balmoral Show 2025.

The current Chief Executive, Wesley Aston, advised that he will retire in 2026 after 34 years of service to the Union. Following a recruitment process, Conall Donnelly was appointed as his successor and will take up post in March 2026. The Board also noted the promotion of Andrew Kerr to Managing Director of Countryside Services Ltd.

The Board and its sub-groups were active on a wide range of matters. A substantial programme of governance work continued throughout the year, including the implementation of the revised Constitution and Rules, Standing Orders, Code of Conduct, and Schedule of Delegated Authority. The establishment of the Ethics and Standards Committee progressed, and board governance training was delivered at the October strategy day, with further work planned to enhance induction processes, meeting procedures and data governance.

Membership and subscription management remained a key focus for the year. The Board closely monitored subscription variances and improvements in data capture, noting a new hard cut-off date of 31 December for collections. The year saw ongoing work to refine corporate membership tiers, update guidance for groups, and improve group manager induction processes. The Membership Plus scheme, affinity deals and sponsorship opportunities were reviewed during the year as part of wider commercial development.

Financial oversight remained a significant area of activity for the Board. Subscription income increased compared to the previous year, although overall membership numbers fluctuated, reflecting a combination of new members and leavers. The Board received regular management accounts and financial updates, noting rising operational costs and exceptional expenditure associated with campaigns such as inheritance tax lobbying.

A draft budget for 2026 was developed, and in line with inflation, a 5.5% increase in membership subscription rates was put forward. Cash flow pressures anticipated for 2026 were also noted, with the possibility that investments may need to be drawn down if required.

The Board continued to monitor policy matters throughout the year. Inheritance tax reform continued to be a major issue for the organisation, with further political engagement undertaken, including planned representation in Westminster. The Union contributed constructively to the Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) stakeholder process, with representation agreed for meetings commencing in late 2025. The Board also received regular updates on the work of Countryside Services Ltd., including developments in tag production, new systems implementation and contributions to wider industry projects.

The Board continued to acknowledge the valuable support of the Union's professional advisers and commercial partners throughout the year and noted with appreciation the work of all staff across the organisation at both Headquarters and Group office level.



UFU President William Irvine signing IHT letter to Chancellor Rachel Reeves, August 2025.



UFU representatives pictured with Lord Tom Elliot, Carla Lockhart MP, Sammy Wilson MP and Jim Allister MP outside the Treasury to hand in a letter signed by members.

# UFU Executive Committee



### MAJOR ISSUES

- Inheritance Tax
- Nutrients Action Programme
- DAERA Vote of No Confidence
- Ammonia
- NI agricultural budget
- Bluetongue
- Sustainable Agriculture Programme
- Carbon
- Planning Policy
- Lough Neagh
- UK Climate Change Committee Meeting
- Windsor Framework Farm to Fork Summit
- Energy Policy
- Farm Safety
- TB
- Red Tractor/Quality Assurance Schemes
- Balmoral Show
- Supply Chain Contracts
- Bird Flu
- Food Strategy
- Just Transition
- Farming for the Generations
- Future Sheep Support
- Future Arable Support
- Vesting System Reform
- Food security
- Rural Support
- CSL
- A5



UFU President William Irvine pictured with pupils who attended the NI Farm Family Day at Stormont, April 2025.



In September, the UFU leadership met with Minister Andrew Muir and several senior DAERA civil servants to discuss the significant frustration amongst the farming community. The meeting was held at UFU President William Irvine's farm.



In October 2025, the UFU Women in Agriculture conference took place at Loughry. It was a sold out event.



# “I need to farm wiser to farm longer”

Back in the day, I didn't think twice about working with animals, machines or at heights. But I'm a bit older and wiser now.

Farming gets riskier with age. Because your strength, mobility and reflexes naturally reduce. But a few small changes can keep you safe and make life a bit easier.

To find out more, talk to the Farm Safety Partnership or

[Search HSENI Farm Longer](#) 🔍





Chairperson: John Kennedy | Secretary: Kayleigh Ashton-Meek

# Animal Health and Welfare Policy Committee



UFU Animal Health and Welfare Chair John Kennedy and member John Carson spoke to U105 at the Balmoral Show about the impact of TB on farm families.

The UFU Animal Health and Welfare Committee met on 14 occasions in 2025. The main issues worked on by the committee over the year have been:

## Bovine Tuberculosis

Bovine Tuberculosis has remained the key focus of the Animal Health and Welfare Committee in 2025, with the committee putting in unprecedented amounts of time and effort into lobbying for change.

In early 2025, the new bTB Partnership Steering Group (TBPSG) was formed following the release of the CVO review into the bTB eradication programme and Deputy President Glenn Cuddy and Policy Officer, Kayleigh Ashton-Meek continued to represent the UFU within the partnership. Throughout the start of 2025, the TBPSG worked on DAERA's new 'Blueprint for Eradication'. The committee were briefed weekly during this development stage and any proposals which did not align with farmer and industry views were contested. The final 'Blueprint for Eradication' mostly aligned with industry and farmer views, however, the UFU continues to lobby for fair implementation of proposals.

As part of the 'Blueprint for Eradication', the Minister announced a North-South regionalisation 'proof of concept', which aims to combine cattle, people and wildlife measures in two 250km regions - one in ROI and one in NI. The UFU has grave concerns that measures within this 'proof of concept' are not utilising the most important tools for disease eradication and putting unfair pressure on farmers, while not addressing the problem surrounding wildlife. The UFU continues to push DAERA to use novel technologies and prioritise wildlife intervention.

The AHW Committee met with the CVO on multiple occasions in 2025 to discuss bTB policy. The committee asked significant questions around the reasons behind policy decisions and raised concerns from wider farming representatives, highlighting the problems that both the blueprint and the regionalisation project will cause. The UFU will continue to make these problems clear, as the committee continues to feel that the input which has been given to the department has not been listened to and responded to adequately.

In 2024, discussions were raised around carrying out a study into the 'financial, environmental, and mental health costs of bTB to the Northern Irish farming industry'. At the start of 2025, a proposal was taken to the UFU Executive, and this study was commissioned through the Andersons Centre, in partnership with the Dairy Council and LMC. The study included an extensive farmer survey, financial modelling, stakeholder interviews and farmer case studies. The results will be used to lobby for robust eradication measures and provide evidence to keep pushing for fair stock valuations.

The UFU are currently supporting a QUB research project which aims to use novel thermal imaging technology to undertake an updated survey of badger and sett numbers across NI, as well as testing badger faecal samples for bTB and carrying out studies on additional wildlife and the effect of badger numbers on wildlife numbers.

## Bovine Viral Diarrhoea

Since the start of the compulsory BVD eradication scheme in 2016, the prevalence of BVD has fallen by over 70%. The new legislation measures were introduced in a phased approach from February 2025, with the final measures introduced in February 2026.

In 2025, legislative measures saw herds with BVD-positive or inconclusive animals restricted initially for 28 days after being notified of a result, then this was reduced to a 7-day restriction, and finally an immediate restriction in February 2026. From this date, restrictions are lifted when 21 days have passed since the last BVD positive/inconclusive has been removed, and all eligible animals in the herd have a negative BVD status.

Untested animals were also placed under legislated restriction. Movement restrictions prohibiting all moves in or out of a herd and any associated herds will be applied if there are five or more untested animals in a herd. The UFU is supportive of the implementation of herd restrictions and swift removal of persistently infected cattle and the continued work towards BVD eradication.

## Bluetongue

Bluetongue continued to be a concern throughout 2025. Representatives from the UFU worked alongside key stakeholders to ensure that DAERA's disease control framework for BTV-3 was fair and transparent for farmers in case of an outbreak in NI.

England and Wales continued to report affected premises over the course of 2025, with increased cases being identified from foetal abnormalities, abortion or stillbirths, rather than clinical signs in the dam. England

and Wales removed their regional control zones, meaning that they could trade between each other, but trade of BTV susceptible animals continues to be halted for movement from GB to NI.

Although there was some debate around the use of BTV-3 vaccines, three vaccines became permitted for use within NI in mid-2025. The UFU continues to remind members that they should seek advice from their own veterinarians on vaccination. Timing of vaccination, as well as breeding status of animals, can all affect the efficacy of vaccination, so having a plan with your veterinarian is key.

At the end of 2025, NI reported the first case of BTV-3 in County Down, and subsequently, four more herds were restricted with positive cases. A control zone remains in place around these herds, although movements in and out of the zone are allowed, subject to conditions. Various trade restrictions remain in place for ROI and GB, and the UFU continues to lobby for restrictions to be lifted, as long as the risk of further outbreaks remains minimal. UFU members continue to be affected by these trade restrictions and there are concerns around the impact on cattle and sheep genetic lines.

## Avian Influenza

The UFU continues to engage with DAERA and other industry stakeholders on the Avian Influenza situation across NI, GB and Europe, providing biosecurity advice and increasing awareness to backyard flock owners. The start of 2025 saw the first wild and commercial bird cases of AI for over 15 months. The UFU, along with industry stakeholders, lobbied for preventative housing orders to be pushed forward to minimise the risk to the poultry industry. Throughout the summer period, cases in GB continued to rise, and NI saw four commercial cases in October 2025. Experts have been warning that the 2025/2026 season will be difficult and the UFU continues to monitor the situation.

## Foot and Mouth

In an unprecedented year for disease outbreaks, the start of 2025 saw Foot and Mouth disease outbreaks in Germany, Hungary and Slovakia. Great Britain introduced import bans from all three countries and strengthened their ban on personal meat imports from the EU to protect farmers from FMD. The UFU continued to meet with DAERA, DAFM and the UKFUs to monitor the situation.

## African Swine Fever

The UFU has continued to highlight risks associated with the movement of products of animal origin as it continues to endeavour to protect NI

Chairperson: Brendan Kelly | Secretary: Kellie McEvoy

# Beef & Lamb Policy Committee



from the importation of exotic diseases such as ASF. The UFU continues to meet with DAERA on this matter via the Pigs Core Group, which has the aim of preventing disease incursions. Cases across the EU have continued throughout 2025, including new cases in Spain.

### Maedi Visna

Small numbers of infected animals continued to be detected across NI over the past 12 months. DAERA is still in discussions around withdrawing from MV surveillance, which would have adverse effects on NI trade as NI would no longer be able to keep MV free status. The UFU held a joint meeting with NSA to outline various options for the future of MV support within NI, including options for accreditation schemes. The UFU continues to push for DAERA not to withdraw MV-free status and has been working to increase awareness of disease management.

### Sheep Scab

The committee continues to raise the need for tackling scab appropriately and effectively with limited treatment options. Suspected or visibly infected animals should never be presented for sale either privately or through marts.

### Schmallenberg

Concerns have been raised over the breeding and early lambing seasons about increased cases of Schmallenberg. The UFU continues to push for increased testing and vigilance around the disease. Schmallenberg in foetuses presents similarly to intrauterine BTV-3 infection, so vigilance and reporting are recommended.

### EU Welfare Legislation Proposals

EU welfare proposals are still in discussion, and the UFU is continuing to be involved in providing detailed and robust feedback on these proposals. The main concerns over the past 12 months have been proposals related to welfare in transport, as well as cage bans for poultry, pigs and dairy, reforms for the killing of day-old male chicks, and discussions around tail docking, castration and beak trimming.

### Veterinary medicines

The grace period for NI to transition to full EU compliance expires at the end of 2025 and no additional extension period has been granted. The committee, along with the UFU Parliamentary Officer, continue to lobby for this additional time period to ensure that NI can clearly transition to EU compliance and protect the veterinary medicine supply from GB-NI. The UFU is concerned that pharmaceutical companies will have already been forecasting for the coming year and that an unknown number of medicines could already be limited. The committee and UFU Parliamentary Officer continue to monitor progress between the UK Government and the EU.

### Other issues discussed by the committee throughout the year included:

- Lumpy Skin disease.
- Animal welfare inspections on farm.
- Farm Sustainability Standards.
- Farm Assurance Schemes.
- Transition from UK to XI tag identification.
- Abattoir CCTV surveillance.
- EU Animal Health Law.



The UFU Beef and Lamb Committee met on nine occasions since the AGM April 2025. The main issues addressed were:

### Sustainability Agriculture Programme

The committee regularly discusses the current Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme which is now in year three of the scheme with a target age of slaughter of 27 months and under. Payments are £75 for eligible animals. The Suckler Cow Scheme started on 1st April 2025 - 31st March 2026 with a calving interval of 415 days and age of first calving of 34 months and under. Payments are £100 for eligible animals. The aim of the schemes is to improve productivity, efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### Future agriculture support

The committee continues to work on future support policy for the NI sheep sector. The UFU, through its role on the NI Sheep Industry Taskforce and DAERA Sheep Sector Working Group, has been lobbying for targeted sheep support, but progress from DAERA has been limited. The Sheep Taskforce is calling for a NI Sheep Development Programme, including genetic improvement, health and welfare measures, sustainable land management, capital investment and a dedicated research programme.

The Bovine Genetics scheme is due to commence in late 2026 and aims to improve productivity, environmental performance, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance animal health and welfare by supporting better on-farm breeding decisions. The committee has also engaged with DAERA through the Agriculture Policy Stakeholder Group on the future Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme and Farming for the Generations Scheme.



The UFU alongside Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Food Heartland, partnered with Shanaghan Hill Farm, Katesbridge, to host 'Lamb and Local', a one-day food fayre celebrating sustainably raised lamb and the best of local artisan produce.

### Carbon Footprinting Project

The UFU sits on the Carbon Farming Partnership and Carbon Technical Working Group, where they discuss the practical and technical aspects involved in the Carbon Footprinting project including the tender specification for the carbon calculator, farmers opt-in portal and carbon training. The proposed project will carry out a carbon footprint on all farms in NI. The committee regularly discuss issues with data ownership and data security with the project. The committee highlighted that farmers must maintain ownership of the data when completing the Carbon Footprinting project.

### EU

The committee is regularly informed of developments on EU animal health law including the EU proposed Animal Welfare in Transport proposal and the introduction of the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Farmers in the EU including NI will have to produce evidence that beef sold in the EU has come from land that has not been deforested and has not been fed animal feed containing soy or palm oil from deforested land. The proposed date of implementation has been delayed until 2027.

### Farm Quality Assurance

The UFU representatives sit on the FQAS Industry Board and Finance Subgroup which scrutinises FQAS accounts and budgets and reviews the risk management register. Recently the committee agreed to a FQAS producer fee increase. The UFU also sits on the scheme's Standard Setting Committee where it continues to review the beef and lamb standards. FQAS continues to discuss recording of medicine usage digitally. Recently the UK Farm Assurance Review was carried out and the report was analysed and FQAS responded to the review.

### Livestock Meat Commission

The UFU responded to the LMC survey on beef quotes after many years of issues with beef quotes having a significant price differential from prices paid. LMC has taken the decision to stop publishing beef quotes from Monday 2nd February 2026 but they will continue publishing lamb quotes. In October 2025, UFU representatives attended Anuga in Cologne, Germany with LMC. Anuga is a world trade fair, and representatives got an opportunity to see how other countries around the world are marketing their beef and lamb products.

### Beef and Lamb prices

This time last year beef was approximately £5.57/kg deadweight and has increased steadily this year to approximately £6.42/kg deadweight. Lamb price is approximately £6.18/kg deadweight compared to £6.88/kg deadweight this time last year. 2025 saw a significantly lower number of lambs exported to ROI for direct slaughter at 197,261. NI lamb kill throughput also decreased in 2025 to 375,178. In 2025 there was still a significant trade in lambs exported as stores and for direct slaughter to GB and EU.

### Factory slaughtering fees, Food Standards Agency and AgriSearch levies

The committee has been discussing recent factory slaughtering fees increasing including TB levy, veterinary inspection and waste disposal costs. The Food Standard Agency (FSA) plans to end its meat discount scheme which NI receives £2 million of each year. UFU representatives will continue to meet with the FSA and NIMEA to discuss retaining the meat discounting scheme for NI. The committee discussed AgriSearch's proposed levy increase of 90p for beef and 20p for sheep and agreed to the levy increase.

### Animal health and disease updates

The committee continues to remain frustrated with DAERA's inaction on TB. The committee has discussed DAERA's TB regionalisation project. The committee welcomed the new measures to help eradicate Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD). From 1 February 2026 movement restrictions will apply to all breeding females within herds containing positive BVD animals. Members continue to be concerned with the presence of Bluetongue in NI and ROI and its effect on trade particularly with farmers in the control zone. The UFU and NSA continue to lobby DAERA to maintain their MV surveillance and testing to maintain NI MV free status.

### Bovine EID

The committee has been discussing the Bovine EID consultation for the mandatory introduction of Bovine EID. The committee is in support of introducing bovine EID tags from 2027 in newborn calves.

### Animal welfare

The committee has been discussing and responding to the UK Lamb Welfare consultation on proposed changes to castration and tail docking methods. The committee responded in support of mandatory CCTV in abattoirs.

### UK LCAG update

Union representatives continue to participate in the UK Livestock Chain Advisory group. The group is made up of industry representation from all the main sectors (beef, sheep, dairy, pig, poultry), including DEFRA, Welsh government, Scottish government and DAERA. The group discusses key UK agriculture issues.

### UK union livestock meetings

The UFU hosted the UK union livestock meeting with representatives from NFU, NFU Scotland and NFU Cymru in attendance. The visit went to Hill Farming member James Davidson's calf rearing farm followed by a UK nation meeting. The next day the visitors attended the Balmoral Show including meetings with the supermarkets.

### CAFRE lowland beef and sheep enterprise industry advisory group

Representatives from the committee attended the CAFRE lowland beef and sheep enterprise industry advisory group which ensures the CAFRE lowland beef and sheep centre CES implementation plan meets the needs of the agri-food industry in particular the beef and sheep sector wider society in line with DAERA strategic priorities.

### Supply chain meetings

The UFU had meetings with Asda and Marks & Spencer at Balmoral Show. The discussion included beef and lamb sales, FQAS labelling, imports, environment, animal welfare and prices. The UFU also meets with NIMEA regularly.

### IFA Meeting

UFU representatives met with IFA in May 2025 to discuss dog controls in border regions, markets, wool, targeted support in the sheep sector and sheep diseases.

### Mercosur Deal

The committee have regularly discussed the ongoing EU Mercosur deal and the impact on NI.

### Sheep carcass classification and price reporting

Mandatory sheep carcass classification and price reporting will be introduced in 2026. The UFU believes that having this system in place will lead to more transparency and fairness in the industry for sheep farmers.

### Events

In November 2025, the committee had an away day trip to ICBF Tully Progeny Test Centre, Kildare. ICBF demonstrated the difference genetics can make when finishing cattle.

In December 2025, for the joint committees Christmas dinner they were joined by Colin Smith, LMC, who gave an overview of LMC, and discussed trade and market outlook.



UFU beef and lamb representatives alongside LMC, attended Anuga Food Trade Fair to see the global aspect of beef and lamb exports around the world, October 2025.



In November, UFU Beef and Lamb and Hill Farming Committees travelled to visit the ICBF Tully Progeny Test Centre in Kildare.

Over the course of the year the committee discussed a range of other policy issues including:

- Wool prices.
- Nutrient Action Programme.
- Knowledge transfer.
- Sheep scab.
- Future research projects.
- Farming with Nature.



Chairperson: Cyril Orr | Secretary: Andrew Robinson

## Dairy Policy Committee

The UFU Dairy Committee met on six occasions since the AGM, April 2025. The main issues discussed were:

### NAP Consultation

The committee discussed the NAP consultation process, the measures already in place and the 30 additional measures proposed. Discussions focused on the impact these additional measures would have both on farm and across the wider industry. Following these discussions, the committee developed a response, noting its concerns about each of the proposed measures, which was subsequently incorporated into the broader response from the UFU.

### UK Farm Assurance Review

The committee discussed the UK Farm Assurance review, the discussion focused on the thirty-eight recommendations most relevant to the dairy sector, with additional focus on the Red Tractor Scheme. The feedback obtained from the committee was used to form part of the wider UFU response.

### Carbon Footprinting project

The project aims to complete a carbon footprinting audit on all farms in Northern Ireland. The UFU sits on both the Carbon Farming Partnership and Carbon Technical Working Group. The discussions of the Dairy Committee have focused on the issues around data ownership and data security. The committee emphasised that ownership of the data collected must remain with the farmer.

### Bovine EID

The committee has discussed the Bovine EID Consultation and DAERA's proposal to introduce voluntary use of LF EID tags from July 2026 and then from 2027 mandatory use of LF EID for newborn calves. The committee are not in support of this, raising concerns with additional cost and questioning the benefits it offers to farmers.

### Animal health and disease updates

The committee continues to discuss the issues and challenges presented by both TB and BTV in Northern Ireland. Discussions have centred around DAERA's inaction on TB. The committee has expressed concern with DAERA's handling of BTV, noting confusion around control zones, vaccinations, movements and exports.

The committee did welcome measures introduced to eradicate BVD. From 1st February 2026, movement restrictions will apply to all breeding females within herds containing BVD-positive animals.

### Member profile forum

Committee members completed a member profiling exercise, helping to build a better understanding of the complex dynamic of the group. Members were asked to provide information regarding milking, calving and feeding systems, farm size and processor information, allowing for targeted engagement depending on topics or issues presented.

### Februdairy

The UFU ran its annual Februdairy campaign across its social media platforms, website and e-bulletin, engaging with staff, members and the younger demographic. This year's focus was on educating the wider public, the health benefits of consuming dairy and showcasing Northern Ireland's versatile dairy sector.

### UK Farming Unions Meeting

The committee chair and secretary met with the dairy representatives from NFU, NFU Scotland and NFU Cymru. A two-day visit hosted by NFU Cymru consisted of a series of meetings, looking at a range of topics and issues faced at both a national and devolved level. The agenda included a market overview, Red Tractor, disease and devolved nation updates, followed by a series of farm visits.

### Royal Ulster Winter Fair - engagement

The chair and committee secretary attended the Royal Ulster Winter Fair, engaging with farming members on the UFU stand and meeting with the milk processors and the agricultural supply chain adjudicator. Discussions with the processors centred around Red Tractor audits, milk markets and current pricing, NAP and TB. The adjudicator met with a delegate of the committee and several members on the UFU stand to discuss their contacts, concerns and the FDOM regulations.

### Agri Search - levy increase

The committee met with AgriSearch to discuss the proposed levy increase. AgriSearch outlined the work they are currently undertaking and what increased funding would enable them to do with regards to future projects and research. The committee broadly agreed with the proposal, but only if a higher collection rate across all milk processors could be guaranteed.

### Balmoral Show - meeting the processors

The committee delegate along with the UFU presidential team met with the milk processors and discussions centred around the NAP announcements. Other topics of discussion included milk contracts, market sentiment, carbon auditing, TB and Red Tractor compliance.

### Engagement with the ASCA

The committee chair, secretary and deputy president met with the Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator. The committee was provided with an overview of the meeting and discussed further the role of the adjudicator. The committee agreed farmers needed to be made aware of the team's purpose, to follow complaints raised with regard to milk contracts and processor behaviour. It was requested that the adjudicator attend the UFU stand at Balmoral Show to engage with farmers. The committee invitation was accepted.

### Falling milk prices press release

Following the downward turn in the milk market, the committee agreed it was important to highlight the severe pressure farmers were coming under as they moved into the winter months. The committee issued a press release highlighting the fact that while farm gate prices were falling, supermarket pricing and food inflation were continuing to rise.

### Milk pricing

Following a pricing structure change by some processors, the committee agreed that farmers needed to better understand the value of their milk. The committee proposed the development of a milk price calculator that allows farmers to enter their milk data to determine its value across the various processors. The milk price calculator is currently under development and has been trialled by the committee.



### Events

#### Semex Conference

The committee chair and secretary attended the Semex Conference in January. The conference provided an opportunity to engage with farming experts and industry leaders. This year's conference focused on market sentiments, industry challenges and global production trends.

#### Dairy Road Map

Members of the committee attended a farmer-focused workshop as part of the Sustainable Dairy Pathways initiative within the Dairy Roadmap. The workshop provided committee members with an insight into the map, and achievements and committee feedback from this event will be used to shape the future direction of travel.

#### Red Tractor

With committee representatives on both the Red Tractor Board and Red Tractor TAC the committee has discussed various issues with both scheme delivery and the standards set. With concerns and issues raised at Red Tractor meetings, Red Tractor have agreed to extend its roadshow program to Northern Ireland.

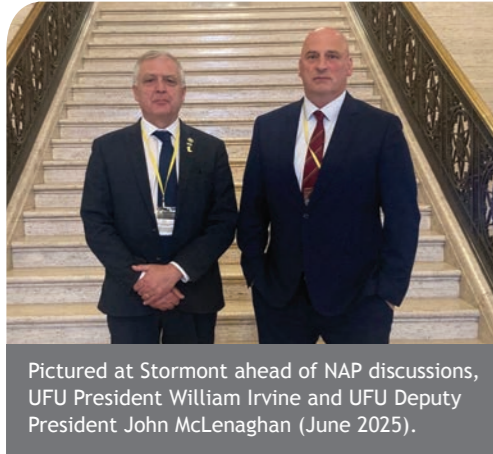
Over the course of the year the committee discussed a range of other policy issues including:

- DAERA, the Behaviour Change Branch and the online survey.
- Farming with Nature.
- Future Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme.
- A5 road project and land vesting.
- Methane inhibitors, carbon calculating using GWP 100 versus GWP\*.
- IHT campaign.
- CBAM.
- Agri education.
- Red Tractor & NIFCC.



Chairperson: Ian Buchanan | Secretary: Aileen Lawson

# Environment Policy Committee



Pictured at Stormont ahead of NAP discussions, UFU President William Irvine and UFU Deputy President John McLenaghan (June 2025).



Working together to improve water quality. (L-R) Andrew Kerr Countryside Services Limited, Mark Horton Rivers Trust and UFU Deputy President John McLenaghan, July 2025.

The UFU Environment Committee met on 13 occasions since the UFU AGM in April 2025. The main issues discussed were:

## Review of Nutrients Action Programme (NAP)

The review of the 2019-2022 Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) and proposals for a new NAP were considered by the committee during the year. Around 40 changes were proposed in May 2025 with the majority being unacceptable to the UFU and causing outrage in the industry. Following extensive internal discussion, a robust consultation response was agreed by the Executive and submitted alongside a joint industry/UFU/AgriSearch economic assessment. The UFU co-ordinated and worked alongside agri-food industry stakeholders taking legal advice to challenge the flawed consultation process and secure concessions to the process. This resulted in a new NAP Stakeholder Task and Finish Group being established by the Minister to relook at the NAP proposals and the science supporting them. The UFU has four seats on this group and sits on Technical Sub-Groups in addition to appointing representatives to the Science and Economic Sub-Groups. To date, progress has been made and a more pragmatic approach taken to many of the measures however, this work is ongoing.

The Stakeholder Group will produce a revised set of proposals that will be forwarded to the Minister, and a further public consultation will take place. It is recognised that political lobbying and communication with the wider farming industry will be vital as the process moves forward.

## Lough Neagh judicial review

The UFU has agreed to become a 'notice party' in a judicial review case against DAERA taken by a Lough Neagh eel fisherman. The case focuses on eight grounds and raises concerns around the NAP, derogations, habitats regulations and human rights. The Union stance is supported by the main agri-food industry organisations.

## Lough Neagh

The Committee discussed the Lough Neagh Action Plan and was represented at the DAERA Lough Neagh Stakeholder Forum. The further rollout of the Sustainable Catchment Programme Scheme was discussed with The Rivers Trust.

## Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS)

Updates on the rollout of the SNHS were provided to the committee and the UFU is represented on the SNHS liaison group. The UFU promoted the application process and training to members. The committee agrees that SNHS must not be used to regulate farmers however agreed the information could be volunteered by farmers if appropriate to demonstrate compliance.

## Fisheries and Water Environment Bill

The UFU responded to a consultation opposing higher penalties for water pollution offences and a proposal to introduce spot fines.



## Farm Water Project

The UFU were successful in a second bid to the DAERA Environment Fund (Water Quality Strand) for £30,000 in conjunction with The Rivers Trust and Countryside Services Ltd (CSL). The funding was used to continue training CSL Farm Advisers and for the development of a Farm Water training course. A further application to fund this work into 2026-2027 is being considered.

## Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) 2019-2022 implementation

The UFU continues to highlight key information and deadlines to members. Support was offered through the UFU Technical Team to UFU members who were selected for environmental cross-compliance inspections and those submitting derogation applications and slurry export forms.

## Contractor training

The committee discussed options for training contractors around water quality and a meeting was held with DAERA to explore this further.

## Ammonia

Planning issues linked to ammonia emissions remain a significant issue and the UFU has been assisting members where possible with the planning process. The UFU met with the Minister on several occasions on this topic and highlighted the concerns and frustrations of farmers. A team of experts, including a barrister, was engaged to find a resolution to the planning issues within the legal framework and this work is ongoing. The Minister is receptive to finding a solution to the replacement/betterment issue and meetings continue with the Union seeking legal advice

as the issue progresses. The UFU worked to find common ground with the ENGOs on this matter. The Union also continues to work on ongoing issues with Shared Environmental Services and their implementation of the planning operational protocol particularly in relation to north/south movements of organic manure. In addition, a meeting was held with the NI Chief Planner and the NI Local Government Association.

## Farming with Nature (FwN) Package

There have been regular meetings with DAERA to discuss the FwN Package. The UFU core principle is that there should be an opportunity to get back the equivalent amount of money through FwN that is taken off the Farm Sustainability Payment and that the scheme needs to be simple, practical and financially attractive. The committee discussed the rates of payment that would be needed to make the scheme attractive to farmers and agreed on the importance of maintenance payments for existing habitats/features. The committee supported the FwN Transition Scheme rolled out in 2025 and 2026 with additional funding and discussed measures for inclusion. The Union also fed back practical/technical issues and concerns following the opening of the first tranche. The committee was updated on proposals for the Priority Land Scheme and Landscapes Scheme with the Union continuing to lobby DAERA to ensure that the majority of the funding goes to farmers and not to administration or facilitation.

## Climate change

The Committee continued to express concerns around the unachievable targets within the Climate Change (NI) Act (2022) and agreed to focus lobbying efforts on amending the legislation in the next NI Assembly mandate and is discussing options around this. The committee responded to a consultation on the draft Climate Action Plan (CAP) and the Fourth Carbon Budget. Lobbying continues at the UK Union, COPA and World Farming Organisation level on methane accounting. A meeting was held with DSM (makers of Bovaer) highlighting the Union concerns around costs, efficacy and consumer acceptance. The UFU also met DAERA to discuss the Just Transition Fund for agriculture.

## Other issues which the Environment Committee considered or discussed during the year included:

- SULS/off-farm slurry treatment/visit to Blakiston Houston Estates.
- Proposal for AgriSearch water sampling programme.
- Representation at Climate NI.
- Regular meetings with BAB and UK Unions on environmental and climate change policy.
- Meetings with ENGOs - NIEL, RSPB, UWT, National Trust, NFFN.
- Issues with Woodland Trust/Lough's Agency Wet Woods Project.
- Environment and Nature Bill - Mark H Durkan MLA survey responded to.
- Fertiliser - Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.
- OEP investigations - water, biodiversity and ammonia.
- UK Budget and Inheritance Tax changes.
- All-Ireland Pollinator Plan - the UFU continues to support.
- Nature Recovery Strategy consultation.
- Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP).
- Land Use Framework.
- Review of Environmental Governance.



Chairperson: Clement Lynch | Secretary: Kellie McEvoy

# Hill Farming Policy Committee

The UFU Hill Farming Committee met on nine occasions since the 2025 AGM. The main issues addressed were:

## Future agriculture support

The committee continues to work on future support policy for the NI sheep sector. The UFU, through its role on the NI Sheep Industry Taskforce and DAERA Sheep Sector Working Group, has been lobbying for targeted sheep support, but progress from DAERA has been limited. The Sheep Taskforce is calling for a NI Sheep Development Programme, including genetic improvement, health and welfare measures, sustainable land management, capital investment and a dedicated research programme.

The Bovine Genetics Scheme is due to commence in late 2026 and aims to improve productivity, environmental performance, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance animal health and welfare by supporting better on-farm breeding decisions. The committee has also engaged with DAERA through the Agriculture Policy Stakeholder Group on the future Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme and Farming for the Generations Scheme.

## Carbon Footprinting Project

The UFU sits on the Carbon Farming Partnership and Carbon Technical Working Group. They discuss the practical and technical aspects involved in the Carbon Footprinting Project including the tender specification for the carbon calculator, farmers' opt-in portal and carbon training. The proposed project will carry out a carbon footprint on all farms in NI. The committee regularly discusses issues with data ownership and data security with the project. The committee highlighted that farmers must maintain ownership of the data when completing the Carbon Footprinting Project.

## NI Peatland Strategy

The committee discussed the launch of the NI Peatland Strategy in September 2025. The strategy sets a vision for 2040 to protect, restore and manage NI peatland habitats. The committee raised issues with the lack of farmer/landowner recognition, designation of land, peat cutting, wildfires and lack of funding.

## Wildfires

The Wildfire Strategy was launched in October 2025. The UFU continues to stress the importance of supporting livestock in hill areas to reduce the risk of land abandonment and wildfires. The UFU remains committed to supporting controlled burns. The UFU is also part of the industry Wildfire Stakeholder Forum which will develop, implement, monitor and review the delivery plan to deliver the strategy actions.

## Peatland Collaborative Network

UFU representatives attend the Peatland Collaborative and Technical Network which promotes peatland work via collaboration and sharing of best practices to achieve a range of environmental, cultural and social benefits.

## Peatland Officer

Stephanie Clokey the Peatland Officer, has been providing advice and organising events for farmers interested in peatland management. She also regularly updates the Hill Farming committee on peatland matters. The committee have provided feedback on her Barriers to Uptake report.

## Conservation Management Plans

The committee continues to discuss CMP, however, there has been little to no progress on this.

## Designated sites

The committee remains opposed to the formation of any new designation of sites. In conjunction with the UFU Environment Committee, the Hill Farming Committee continues to highlight to DAERA and NIEA the concerns around designated sites and the impact of planning on family farm business. The committee has recently written to NIEA requesting a meeting to discuss uplands and designated sites.

## Area of Natural Constraint (ANC) consultation

The committee has responded to an ANC consultation on a private members' bill to reinstate the ANC payment.

## Farming for Nature

The committee successfully wrote to Minister Muir requesting that the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) Higher would not be extended but instead replaced with a Farming for Nature scheme that would be more suitable to farmers while achieving environmental outcomes.

## CAFRE Hill Farming Industry Advisory Group

Representatives from the committee attend the CAFRE Hill Farming Industry Advisory Group, which ensures that the CAFRE hill enterprise CES implementation plan meets the needs of the agri-food industry, in particular the uplands sector and wider society in line with DAERA strategic priorities.

## CAFRE sheep visit

In May 2025 UFU representatives went on the CAFRE sheep trip to Scotland which included visits to Moredun Research Centre, SRUC hill's farm and local sheep farms.

## Forestry Services NI

Committee representatives met with Forestry Services NI to discuss the ongoing issue of coniferous seedlings from government forests establishing on farmed-owned peatlands and the effect this is having on peatland status as well as the seedlings removal difficulties.

## Farm Quality Assurance

The UFU representatives sit on the FQAS Industry Board and Finance Subgroup which scrutinises FQAS accounts and budgets and reviews the risk management register. Recently, the committee agreed to a FQAS producer fee increase. The UFU also sits on the scheme's Standard Setting Committee where it continues to review the beef and lamb standards. FQAS continues to discuss the

recording of medicine usage digitally. Recently, the UK Farm Assurance Review was carried out, and the report was analysed and FQAs responded to the review.

## Bovine EID

The committee has been discussing the Bovine EID consultation for the mandatory introduction of Bovine EID.

## British and Ulster Wool

The UFU meets regularly with British and Ulster Wool representatives to understand and monitor the wool market.

## Sheep scab

UFU, CAFRE and other industry stakeholders organised a series of sheep scab events with Dr Stuart Burgess from Moredun Research Centre with the focus being 'Sheep scab: Breaking the cycle'.



Launching Love Lamb Week 2025, (L-R): Keith Williamson, ABP Linden, Campbell Tweed, UFU Hill Farming Committee and Colin Smith, LMC Chief Executive.

## Love Lamb Week

The UFU, along with LMC continued to get behind the annual Love Lamb Week initiative in September, to promote the importance of lamb production in NI and the nutritional benefits of consuming the red meat product.

## UK union livestock meetings

The UFU hosted the UK union livestock meeting with representatives from NFU, NFU Scotland and NFU Cymru in attendance. The visit went to Hill Farming member James Davidson's calf-rearing farm, followed by a UK national meeting. The next day the visitors attended the Balmoral Show, including meetings with the supermarkets.

# Legislation Policy Committee

## Events

In June 2025, the committee representatives attended the NSA sheep event at Alwyn McFarland's farm outside Dungiven. At the event a meeting with the Sheep Taskforce and DAERA took place to discuss future sheep support.

In June 2025, the committee had their away day trip to Rathlin Island, where they went to the RSPB puffin site and had a presentation from Ulster University on their Rathlin Wool project.

In September 2025, a committee representative attended the CAFRE and Teagasc Sustainable Upland Livestock and Habitat Management event at CAFRE's Glenwherry Hill farm. The event highlighted the important role uplands play in the rural economy and the multiple benefits to the wider economy, the issue of generational renewal in uplands due to the low profitability and the important role of livestock in maintaining uplands.

In September 2025, UFU representatives attended the IUCN UK Peatland Conference. The conference's theme was 'Water connections: From source to sea'. The conference covered an overview of peatlands globally and field visits to peatland sites across NI. The UFU gave a presentation on the farming perspective on atmospheric pollution.

Throughout the course of the year the committee also discussed a range of other policy issues including:

- Ammonia.
- Nutrient Action Programme.
- Knowledge transfer.
- Research programmes.
- Farming for Nature.



In April 2025, the Mourne were badly affected by wildfires.



The UFU's Hill Farming Officer and Peatlands Officer attended the 15th Annual IUCN Peatland Programme Conference held in Derry/Londonderry.



## Inheritance tax

Inheritance tax reform has been a central and sustained policy focus for the UFU throughout the year. From the initial proposals in the 2024 Autumn Budget to the Government's late-December announcements, the Union has worked tirelessly to represent the interests and realities of Northern Ireland's farming community.

The Union prioritised this issue in response to proposed changes that would introduce a £1 million cap on Agricultural Property Relief (APR) and Business Property Relief (BPR), leaving many farming families liable to inheritance tax for the first time. The UFU warned of disproportionate negative impacts on farm succession and viability.

The UFU undertook an intensive programme of engagement on the issue. Office Bearers, staff and members travelled to Westminster on multiple occasions to meet with MPs from all parties, including backbench Labour representatives, opposition MPs, and Northern Ireland's Westminster delegation to deliver first-hand testimony of the potential harm these reforms could cause. In November 2025, the UFU hosted an event at Westminster, titled Securing the Future of Family Farming in Northern Ireland, placing pressure on policymakers and delivering a letter to HM Treasury outlining members' concerns. The UFU engaged with the parliamentary scrutiny process, providing written evidence to the House of Lords Finance Bill Sub-Committee on reforms, setting out detailed analysis of their impact on family farm businesses and succession planning.

Throughout the campaign, the UFU maintained active communication with members and the wider public, issuing multiple press releases and statements urging the Government to go further in mitigating the impact of the proposed



UFU President William Irvine chatting with farmers at Markethill mart, as part of its inheritance tax campaign 'Write to your MPs'.

changes and attempting to keep the issue politically salient in local and national media. At the 2025 Autumn Budget, the Chancellor conceded that the £1 million threshold would be transferable between spouses.

Then, in December 2025, the Government announced an effective combined threshold of up to £5 million in qualifying circumstances. While welcoming this as a step forward, the UFU made clear that the campaign would continue to seek fairer, long-term solutions and the full reversal of the punitive tax measures.

The Legislation Committee played a central role throughout, scrutinising Government proposals and alternatives, analysing evolving policy positions and helping to shape the UFU's priorities and responses. This work ensured that UFU advocacy was grounded in robust evidence and aligned with members' interests at every stage.

## A5 Western Transport Corridor

The proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor remained an important policy issue this year. Throughout the year, the UFU engaged with the policy and legal context around the scheme, particularly in light of ongoing legal challenges, revised climate change considerations, and significant uncertainty for landowners. The UFU met with the Department for Infrastructure and other local stakeholders regularly to seek clarity and fight for the rights of affected landowners to fair compensation and good communication.

A key focus of UFU engagement was to ensure that the interests of farmers and landowners were properly recognised and including raising concerns around compulsory land acquisition, severance, access arrangements, compensation and the long-term viability of farm businesses impacted by the proposed route.



# Farming gets riskier with age

STOP AND THINK  
**SAFE**  
SLURRY ANIMALS FALLS EQUIPMENT

Over half of all farm deaths in NI involve farmers aged 65 and over.\*  
**Know your limitations and get help with trickier jobs.**

For more advice on farm safety, visit [hseni.gov.uk/farmsafe](https://hseni.gov.uk/farmsafe)



\* Based on HSENI farm fatality data 2002-2020

The A5 project was delayed again after a High Court ruling quashed the Executive's approval of the scheme on the basis that DfI had not complied with the requirements under the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022. This decision halted the project and resulted in vesting orders being quashed and land returned. The UFU then navigated the land restoration compensation scheme that arose from the judgement.

DfI has lodged an appeal in relation to the judgement. At the time of writing, the scheme remains in appeal and unresolved. The UFU continues to monitor developments closely and engage with relevant stakeholders to ensure that members' interests are fully represented as decisions on the project's future are taken.

**Agricultural Wages Board**  
The UFU continues to engage in the Agricultural Wages Board, while maintaining its long-standing position in favour of reform and abolition. The UFU has engaged in the 2026/27 pay negotiations, in which it has secured the abolition of the 1.5x overtime rate whilst retaining the national minimum wage as the baseline for agricultural wages.

**Belfast Hills Partnership**  
The UFU continues to act as Secretariat to the Belfast Hills Stakeholder Group, held in partnership with the Belfast Hills Partnership, to bring together local farmers, other businesses, the PSNI, and other organisations, to tackle issues related to rural crime on the hills. The group has met a number of times in the last year to discuss both immediate actions to be taken to cut rural crime but also longer-term projects and campaigns designed to secure legislative change.

**Rural Crime Partnership**  
The UFU continues to participate in the Rural Crime Partnership, working with stakeholders in the Department of Justice, PSNI, NFU Mutual, Federation of Small Businesses and others, to reduce incidences of rural crime and provide awareness campaigns on actions farmers and local people can take. The forum

allows stakeholders to raise wider rural crime concerns and engage with DoJ and PSNI on initiatives and campaigns to overcome them. The committee has also considered rural crime legislation to identify gaps and potential amendments to ensure they are fit for purpose and will be engaging with the DoJ on them. The NFU Mutual released their rural crime report which showed that the cost of rural crime had dropped by 9% between 2023 and 2024.

**Northern Ireland Water**  
The UFU continues to engage with Northern Ireland Water. Concerns around the stringent inspection and enforcement approach from NI Water was raised with the committee frequently. At the time of writing, the UFU is engaged with NI Water in discussions on how best to approach this issue that both provides security for the national water supply and fairness for farmers and landowners, ensuring the enforcement regime is proportionate.

**Immigration**  
The committee has watched the developments regarding immigration policy closely, particularly the UK Government white paper 'Restoring control over the immigration system'. The Committee will discuss and consider their position in the coming months and will engage with other stakeholders, industry and Government to ensure the proposals are workable for farms in Northern Ireland.

**Agricultural vehicles on the road**  
The Committee is actively looking at the Agriculture and the Public Roads booklet with a view to updating it. The booklet is widely used by stakeholders including the PSNI, CAFRE, LANTRA, HSE, among others.

**Greenways**  
The UFU has been involved in discussions surrounding a number of greenway schemes, including the proposed Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway. The UFU has engaged with local landowners across a number of schemes, the Department for Infrastructure, local councils and consultants to ensure landowners voices and rights are respected. It continues to push for greenways to be progressed only with voluntary agreement of landowners.

- The committee discussed and acted on a number of other issues, including:**
- Involvement in capital grant schemes.
  - Issues surrounding the Reservoir Act.
  - Engagement with DVA/DVLA on agricultural vehicle guidance.
  - Lucy's Law - rules on selling puppies and kittens.
  - Speed limits.
  - The proposed Hunting Bill.
  - Issues with regulatory agencies such as the Utility Regulator.
  - 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill and other workforce proposals.
  - Other tax-related matters.



Secretary: Alexander Kinnear

# Parliamentary Policy Committee

## Westminster

The UFU Westminster lobbying in 2025 focused on the changes to Agriculture Property Relief (APR), Business Property Relief (BPR) and ending the farm family tax, as discussed under the Legislation Committee report.

The UFU hosted the NI Affairs Select Committee at Balmoral Show. The UFU also presented evidence to the Committee on Lough Neagh in Westminster.

## Stormont

The UFU continued to lobby the NI Executive, Assembly, AERA, Infrastructure and Economy Committees on many issues, including:

- Nutrients Action Program (NAP).
- Climate Change Act.
- Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) closure scheme.
- Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP).
- Farm Sustainability Standards & Penalty Matrix.
- Conditionality.
- TB policy.
- Ammonia and planning protocols.
- Shared Environmental Services.
- Bluetongue.
- Farm family tax.
- Water quality.
- Lough Neagh.
- Vote of no confidence in DAERA.
- A5 road scheme.
- Windsor Framework issues.
- International trade.
- Commodity prices.
- Sheep Carcass Classification and Price Reporting NI.
- Private member bills: Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC), Hunting with Dogs and The Environment and Nature Restoration Bill.
- Review of Environmental Governance.
- AFBI.
- Meeting newly co-opted MLAs.



Pictured prior to a meeting on veterinary medicine in London, UFU Parliamentary Officer Alexander Kinnear, Baroness Ritchie, Baroness Hayman DEFRA Minister and UFU President William Irvine.

## NI Farm Family Day 2025

The theme for NI Farm Family Day 2025 was 'Nurturing young farmers for the future'. The event was sponsored by AERA Committee chair Robbie Butler MLA and co-sponsored by Deputy Chair Declan McAleer MLA and Michelle McIlveen MLA. The event saw the First and deputy First Minister speak about the importance of farm families.

## Party Conferences

The UFU has also attended the political party conferences of the Northern Ireland Executive parties, the Official Opposition and the Labour Party. This is an important activity and presents an opportunity to further relationships within political parties.

## Brussels

The UFU works in partnership with the British Agricultural Bureau (BAB), which lead on Brussels-based matters, ensuring Northern Ireland farmers' interests are represented at EU level.

## COPA COGECA

The UFU has participated in COPA COGECA Praesidium and working parties, raising concerns about many issues around regulations that directly apply in NI such as animal welfare in transport and on farm, monitoring ongoing CAP reform and how EU agricultural and environmental policies are evolving.

## Windsor Framework

The UFU has worked closely with the UK Government to address the challenges arising from the post-Brexit settlement, including regulatory divergence and the Windsor Framework. Our focus has been on

securing a practical Sanitary, Phytosanitary, and Veterinary (SPS/Vet) agreement with the EU, while maintaining the benefits currently enjoyed by farmers. Through this engagement, the UFU continues to ensure that farmers' interests are protected and that any proposed future agreement addresses issues which currently remain.

The 1st of January 2026 brought an end to the veterinary medicine derogation, with many veterinary practices, distributors and merchants stockpiling to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements. The UFU remains disappointed that veterinary medicines were not included in the negotiation terms set out at the EU-UK summit in May 2026 and continues to make the case to the UK Government that it should seek a veterinary medicine agreement between the UK and the EU.



A delegation of UFU members travelled to London on Monday 17 November to host an event on the proposed reforms to agricultural property relief, which enabled them to engage with backbench MPs.

## Issues

- Veterinary Medicines importation from GB to NI.
- Plant Protection Products/MRL changes.
- GB companies supplying NI.
- Bureaucracy and costs for businesses produced from GB to NI imports.
- Used agricultural machinery importation from GB to NI.
- Animal movements (on hold whilst wider animal health issues are resolved).
- Importation of seeds from GB-NI.
- Horticulture issues.
- The democratic deficit with EU law that applies in NI and our ability to influence the legislative process.
- Regulation and standards for NI farmers versus GB farmers.

## Engagement

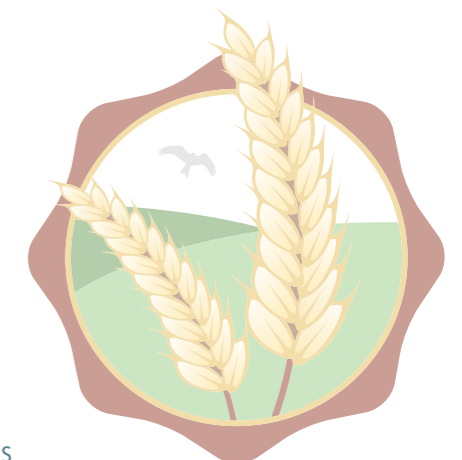
The UFU has continued to meet with various groups in Brussels and continues to meet with MEPs, the UK Mission to the EU and the NI Executive Office in Brussels.

- Met with Government ministers at a devolved and national level.
- Worked with, and gave evidence to, the NI Assembly Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee and Northern Ireland Scrutiny Lords Select Committee.
- Participated in the NI Business Brexit Working Group (NIBBWG).
- Participated in the NI Business Stakeholder Group (NIBSG).
- Participated in the Veterinary Medicine Working Group (VMWG).
- Participated in the Veterinary Medicine Supply Coordination Forum (VMSCF).
- Participated in the Horticulture Working Group (HWG).

## Local Government

The UFU has continued to work with councils and councillors across NI on:

- The ABC Food Heartlands strategy.
- Local development plans for residential housing in rural communities.
- Shared environmental services and planning policy.





Secretary: Stephaine Clokey

# Peatlands Policy Report

## The Northern Ireland Peatlands Strategy

The Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy for 2024 was published in September 2025. The UFU responded to the original consultation in 2021, however, the strategy failed to address many concerns outlined in the response. The strategy presented ambitious aims including an action to restore 150,000 hectares of peatland by 2040, and a phased ban of peat within the horticulture sector by 2030. However, the strategy lacked detail on the nature and implementation of these targets. Further information will come in the form of a Delivery Plan, with the government going to consultation in Spring of 2026. The UFU plans on forming a response and continues to monitor its progress.

## Barriers to Uptake Report

The UFU will publish a report on the barriers to the uptake of peatland restoration to farmers and landowners in Northern Ireland in March 2026. Feedback and surveys were gathered from farmers at outreach events last year to create the report, with the purpose of identifying and assessing the barriers to uptake, while highlighting possible solutions. The aim of the report is to assist future policy and to aid the UFU in lobbying for a fair upland scheme. Findings included the necessity of appropriate and reflective funding and long-term government commitment through a dedicated peatland fund. Other issues arose, such as concerns over an increase of wildfire risk (caused by heavy stocking prescriptions, increasing vegetation/fuel load) as well as other impacts designation has had on appropriate peatland management.

## Knowledge shares and best practice site visits

The UFU hosted educational and best practice site visits to help inform farmers and land managers of the practicalities of peatland management. Some of the site visits in 2025 included:

- **Springwell Farm Visit, Antrim Hills:** Farmers were invited to Kilmore Country House for a talk on RSPB's Peatland Code restoration site, the first farmer-owned carbon finance project in NI. The talk covered the planning stages, interventions and an overview and discussion around Peatland Code and the possibilities for farmers, followed by a walk of the site.
- **Slieveannorra mountain:** Here landowners saw a forest to bog site and the use of 'zippering' dams, a less severe form of drain blocking, avoiding pools of water, that may be more suitable alongside grazing.
- **CAFRE's Glenwherry hill farm:** Interventions here include a range of damming and adjusting sticking densities, peat, dams, forest to bog, monitoring and grazing for biodiversity.
- **Peatland biodiversity and condition assessment talk:** Ulster Wildlife and the UFU held an Online Biodiversity Talk in January. Simon Gray gave an overview of indicator species within upland areas to help landowners with peatland condition identification. The talk also covered the process of Condition Assessments carried out by the NIEA. Species identification booklets are to be launched this spring.
- **Peatland Code Talk:** The UFU and Ulster Wildlife gave a joint presentation on the potential for private finance through carbon credits to facilitate restoration and provide a financial return for farmers.

## Farm Visits and Baseline Surveys

The Ulster Farmers' Union continues to represent and assist farmers in navigating peatland management plans, from initial consultation with Ulster Wildlife to baseline monitoring and development of restoration plans. With more projects to begin work in Autumn 2026 through the PEAT+ fund.

## Future schemes

The UFU Peatlands Officer continues to feed back to DAERA on the barriers to uptake of peatland restoration, with the aim of influencing policy and future agri-environment schemes. The UFU continues to push for support in the form of a long-term, results-based scheme that rewards farmers for positive management. Currently, peatland-

specific management is limited to landscape schemes and not available to farmers across Northern Ireland. The UFU continues to lobby for a broader scheme, highlighting the need for funding to come from outside of the agricultural budget.

## Private finance

With ambitious aims set out in the peatlands strategy, private finance may be a key component moving forward. Plans are already underway on some sites to enter farmers into the IUCN Peatland Code. The UFU continues to represent farmers in meetings with Ulster Wildlife around the IUCN Peatland code registry and creation of contracts around restoration work.



Trial of wool logs in North Pennines.

## Wool log trial

A pilot has been created through collaboration with Ulster Wildlife, Sustainable Rope, Ulster Wool, Ulster University and Ulster Farmers' Union to use local wool in peatland restoration. With 60 wool dams going atop Slievenanee, the pilot will begin in late February and represents a major step forward in the future use of wool in peatland management, with hopes to expand the pilot to help support local hill farmers across Northern Ireland.



UFU Peatlands Officer Stephanie Clokey attended the IUCN Peatland Programme Conference 2025.

## Peatlands Collaborative Network

Established in 2024, the Peatland Collaborative Network supports organisations delivering peatland restoration work. The UFU continues to work with the network, hosting knowledge shares between associates of the Peatland Collaborative Network and farmers across NI.

## Other projects

The UFU has also supported a host of other projects and research in 2025, connecting researchers with farmers and highlighting the role of farmers and landowners in peatland management. These projects included:

- Queen's University Peatlands Communication project.
- Ulster Wildlife Peatlands Trainee Placement.
- MIT Research Project on IUCN Peatland Code.
- JUSTLANZ advisory group.

## Other Events

- **IUCN UK Peatland Programme conference:** Held in Derry/Londonderry in September, Peatlands and Hill Farming Officers presented on the barriers to uptake at the conference, to spread awareness of the issues farmers face while managing peatland areas.
- **CAFRE/Teagasc Upland Symposium.**
- **Tay in the Bog:** A community event held at An Creagan in Omagh to raise awareness amongst local farmers of the importance of positive peatland management.

Chairperson: Edgar Carson | Secretary: Andrew Robinson

# Pork & Bacon Policy Committee



## Transition to Peat Alternatives in Horticulture

Discussions of peat use in the horticultural industry have increased with the publication of the Peatland Strategy in September, with pressure building from environmental organisations such as the Peat Free Partnership. DAERA has recently reconfirmed the commitment made in the strategy for a phased ban by 2030.

### Peat bans

Commitments have been outlined with the publication of the NI Peatland Strategy, which highlights an ambitious aim to phase out professional peat use by 2030 (and a ban on retail bagged peat by 2027). With the delivery plan said to go to consultation in early 2026, the UFU will continue to raise awareness of the impact on our horticulture sector and the need for a phased and tailored approach.

### Addressing research and development needs

At the Growers Gathering at CAFRE in October, stakeholders discussed the proposed aims within the peatland strategy and the limitations of current peat alternatives. These limitations have also been reflected in a recently commissioned report by DEFRA, 'A Roadmap to Peat Free', which outlines that a longer timeline is necessary, along with significant capital to aid the transition. The UFU has reiterated to DAERA the need for appropriate funding for a transition and special consideration for sectors like propagators, mushrooms and soft fruit. An industry consultation is to follow this year.

### Peat alternative knowledge exchange

The UFU continues to meet with growers to discern individual barriers regarding the transition to peat-free. Meeting with industry representatives at the RHS conference in Wisley to understand current developments with peat-free alternatives and their potential for commercial horticulture in NI.



Peatlands, Cuilcagh mountain, Co. Fermanagh.



The UFU Pork and Bacon Committee met on three occasions since the April 2025 AGM. The main issues discussed were:

### Proposed welfare legislation

The Committee has been assessing the impact of proposed EU animal welfare reforms on pig producers in Northern Ireland. Under the Windsor Framework, EU animal health and welfare laws will apply directly to Northern Ireland, meaning the industry will need to comply with these regulations. Current proposals focus on animal welfare during transport. The Committee is also looking into possible future EU legislation on 'flexible farrowing', which could ban the use of farrowing crates for sows.

### UK Farm Assurance Review

The committee discussed the UK Farm Assurance Review; the discussion focused on the recommendations most relevant to the pork sector, with additional focus on the Red Tractor Scheme. The feedback obtained from the committee was used to form part of a wider UFU response.

### Red Tractor

With committee representatives on both the Red Tractor Board and Red Tractor TAC, the committee continues to discuss and raise issues with both scheme delivery and the standards set. These concerns are then brought forward to Red Tractor meetings. Red Tractor have now agreed to extend its roadshow program to Northern Ireland.

### Engagement with the Chief Veterinary Officer

Committee Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary and a UFU Deputy President met with the CVO at the Balmoral Show, where a number of key issues were discussed, including the risk



UFU representatives attended the pig conference at Glenavon House Hotel, March 2025.

ASF poses and the enhanced risk from illegal food imports. The CVO outlined the existing procedures in place and agreed that more needed to be done.

### Fair Dealing Obligations (Pig) Regulations

Following the approval of the legislation by both Houses of Parliament at Westminster and its implementation across all of the UK from 14th August 2025. The committee discussed the details of the legislation, what it means for producers, and the role of the adjudicator. The committee welcomed its implementation.

### Tiered welfare labelling

The committee discussed the proposals around tiered welfare labelling. Following discussions, a response was submitted to the Red Tractor consultation. Red Tractor has expressed interest in meeting with the UFU Pork and Bacon Committee.

### UFU/NIGTA NAP industry meeting

The Committee attended a joint meeting hosted by the UFU and NIGTA, with industry, DAERA and farmers present. The meeting looked specifically at the impact the NAP proposal would have on the pig sector in Northern Ireland. With Dr V Wylie providing an initial analysis of the cost and extent of disruption for the industry. Following the meeting a committee response was prepared, and this was incorporated into the broader response from the UFU.

Chairperson: David McElrea | Secretary: Patricia Erwin

# Potato Policy Committee



## Events

### Committee away day

The Committee met with Dr J Young of the Mid Ulster Biorefinery Project. The 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.

Over the course of the year the committee discussed a range of other policy issues including:

- Carbon Auditing.
- Ammonia and planning.
- AFBI data breach.
- Trichinella/ Hygiene inspections.
- Educational engagement.
- Environment committee updates.
- Future agricultural policy.
- Engagement with IFA counterparts.



The UFU Pork and Bacon Committee met with Dr. James Young of the Mid Ulster Biorefinery Project, a project linking agriculture, renewable energy and cross sectoral decarbonisation, October 2025.



The UFU Deputy President Glenn Cuddy and UFU Pork & Bacon Committee Chair Edgar Carson, met with Christopher Frizzell from Sofina Foods in Cookstown to discuss a variety of topics, including the company's strategic plans for Northern Ireland.



The Potato Chair, Vice-chair and Senior Policy Officer have attended UFU Committee meetings and sub-group meetings. The Chair and Vice attended DAERA meetings discussing potato investment needs, plant health, plant protection product concerns, local supply chain and more recently, potato support structures going forward.

The main issues addressed for potatoes over the year have been:

### NI future agriculture policy

UFU Potato Chair David McElrea and Vice-chair continue to meet to DAERA officials to explore the need for meaningful support for the potato industry. A new draft UFU working document has set out some specific needs as a starting point for these discussions with DAERA officials. These discussions are ongoing. The UFU Policy Manager briefed the potato growers on the new support measures with a focus on young farmers requesting suggestions for the next farm business investment scheme.

### Farm business investment

The Committee holds strong its position regarding how the scheme should be structured. It is the view of the arable sector, including potatoes, that applications should be made on a farm business case-by-case demonstrating the need for investment, and not from a list of DAERA chosen options. These discussions are ongoing and DAERA actively welcomes suggestions from potato growers. The UFU asked again that DAERA consider second-hand equipment for the potato sector in the mix.

### Seed potato movements

The new simplified NI plant health label has aided movements of seed potato from Scotland/GB into NI for a professional operator to grow on. The UFU continues to monitor. The UFU potato committee represents both seed and ware growers.

### DAERA plant health

The UFU continues to help growers with necessary pre-notification requirements, Traces NT and Ched-PP requirements. It is reported that small ware imports continue to be on the move, DAERA is aware of the activity and officials are monitoring the situation. The Committee acknowledges this is an illegal activity.

### Land tenure and access to clean ground

The UFU potato committee advises that access to the right ground is critical. Plant and soil health fits best within the existing conacre system and it is critical for the growth of the sector that clean land is made available. The Chair continues to raise this with DAERA officials and the Minister.

### Supply chain issues

Across Europe, potato yields, including in Northern Ireland, have been exceptionally high. This has put incredible pressure on the local supply chain. The retail price remains strong, however, the lack of support within the local supply chain is putting growers under pressure. The UFU has encouraged all to be responsible in the supply chain and support local first before importing.

### DAERA plant health

The UFU continues to liaise with DAERA officials to review and monitor all aspects of plant health including imports. Official DAERA stats revealed 54,000 tonnes of potato came through the ports in 2025. The UFU potato committee advises this should not be and the UFU President has issued a letter to all packers and processors encouraging them to use local first. It is understood that all official movements of potatoes landed in NI are now checked at the port by both DAERA and EU officials. However, reports suggest some movements go under the radar.

**Input costs**

The committee continues to keep this under review.

**Plant Protection Products**

DAERA ‘contracts out’ its regulatory role to HSE-CRD. New processes and procedures have been necessary for the NI supply chain and regulatory delivery. The UFU Chair, with others, continues to meet DAERA, DEFRA, CRD/HSE to ensure NI will have timely information and access to approved PPP.

The UFU Potato Chair David McElrea is the agreed DAERA contact for potato engagement in consultation with HSE, CRD and DAERA supported by UFU. This engagement brings a high level of responsibility when navigating lists of active substances, trying to decide should an active or a product containing the active be lost and what impact that withdrawal may have on the ability of the sector to produce profitable safe crops. The UFU requested a meeting with DAFM to explore and better understand how ROI operate within the EU Regulation framework and if any scope exists to assist NI. DAFAM advised that the time was not right for this meeting and in the interim all queries should be directed to DAERA first.

**MRLs**

MRL limits are set by the different regional regulators. It is important to understand that EU levels are applicable in NI. It is hoped that the UK/EU SPS negotiations will simplify the complexity of the rules.



Pictured at the Healthy Horticulture Marquee at the Balmoral Show 2025.

**National Action Plan (NAP)/Sustainable Use Directive (SUD)**

Integrated Pest Management is an integral part of the new plan. The UFU Deputy President, Glenn Cuddy, welcomed the revised document but called on DAERA and CAFRE to communicate the detail of the changes within the directive. DEFRA led the review and is currently leading the review of the Code of Practice for using plant protecting products.

**Official controls: Move from paper to electronic records**

Members noted last year that the direction of travel with EU legislation indicates that all PPP spray records must be presented to the competent authorities electronically. DAERA has met with the UFU Potato Chair to help navigate how this will be introduced and communicated to the industry. Templates are up on the DAERA website as a pilot for 2026 with no enforcement. This official control requirement is not new, but what is new is the move to electronic format. The UFU continues to liaise with DAERA and monitor progress.



**The Voluntary Initiative (VI) and NI Water Catchment Partnership (NIEA, NI Water, CAFRE, DARD and UFU)**

The Committee continues to support the Voluntary Initiative. The promotion of education, co-operation and knowledge are the principal strengths of this model. Operator Roadshows were delivered in spring 2026. Bruce Steele NI VI Agronomist champion, has attended this year’s workshops to communicate the work of the VI. The UFU Senior Policy Officer P Erwin, continues to represent the UFU as the official VI representative. The Water Catchment Partnership met recently to discuss water quality and map out activities for the year ahead.

**IFA/UFU**

The UFU continues to liaise with the IFA. The Chair, Vice, Deputy President and Senior Policy Officer met recently with IFA potato representatives. The high volume of potato in the growers’ stores north and south was discussed. The IFA advised that new scientific tests were available to test tubers for true-to-type and location produced. The IFA shared details of cost with UFU and both agreed this tool could be helpful when mischief happens in the supply chain. Access to PPPs and the ability to secure article 53 Emergency Use approval and move to electronic records were compared across the jurisdictions.



**Environmental issues**

The Committee is represented by Richard Orr who sits on the UFU Environment Committee. The committee also holds a strong view that conacre land should be allowed into the new environmental scheme as they have a high dependency of clean ground to protect high health of potato crops. Issues on the proposed Farming with Nature options for arable have been discussed and fed back to the UFU Environment Committee.

**Sustainable packaging and labelling**

Both these areas need further investigation within the supply chain going forward and are on the EU agenda.

**Inheritance tax**

The UFU potato committee supported the efforts of the UFU leadership team on inheritance tax and the impact this would have on the farm family businesses.

**Queen’s Co-centre**

UFU and Chairs have met with Queen’s representatives to better understand their role in developing a new horticulture strategy including potato. The UFU has signalled it will not be financially contributing to this work and questions the need, understanding, role of Queen’s and best use of DAERA funding within this initiative.



Chairperson: Jonny Tuft | Secretary: Kayleigh Ashton-Meek

# Poultry Policy Committee

The main issues worked on by the committee over the year have been:

## Avian influenza

The UFU continues to engage with DAERA and other industry stakeholders on the avian influenza situation across NI, GB and Europe, providing biosecurity advice and increasing awareness to backyard flock owners. The start of 2025 saw the first wild and commercial bird cases of AI for over 15 months. The UFU, along with industry stakeholders, lobbied for preventative housing orders to be pushed forward to minimise the risk to the poultry industry. Throughout the summer period, cases in GB continued to rise and NI saw four commercial cases in October 2025. Experts have been warning that the 2025/2026 season will be difficult and the UFU continues to monitor the situation.

## RSPCA Assured

RSPCA Assured is the assurance body with responsibility for eggs. At the end of 2023, the organisation revised their standards without consulting industry which would have major implications for the laying hen sector. Throughout 2025, the UFU has continued to engage with industry, along with the other UK farming unions, to work with RSPCA Assured on adapting these new standards. The UFU policy staff and Poultry Committee members sit on various working groups, which encourage RSPCA Assured to take evidence-based decisions which will benefit the sector whilst still ensuring high levels of animal welfare. To date, these groups have succeeded in making changes to the majority of these problematic standards, however, work is still ongoing and the UFU is committed to ensuring that standards are adapted to meet the needs of industry.

The UFU is continuing to push for better communication with RSPCA Assured throughout these changes.

## Red Tractor

The UFU Poultry Committee continues to push for representation on the Red Tractor Technical Advisory Group, which has had limited representation from NI broiler producers in recent years.

## Renewable Heat Incentive

The Poultry Committee, along with the Rural Enterprise Committee, had oversight over UFU negotiations and lobbying relating to the RHI closure regulations. Through cooperation with stakeholders such as RHANI, CASE and the FSB, they supported DfE in reaching closure regulations for the scheme that were fair to participants, including complex proposals surrounding load factor banding, a 2017-2019 reference period for historic heat use, significantly increased tariffs and the transition from ongoing tariff payments to a structured closure payment model. The UFU engagement focused on ensuring that farm-based and rural enterprises were not disadvantaged by averaging methodologies or banding thresholds and that the final framework reflected genuine operational heat demand while providing long-term certainty for participants and the public purse. The UFU awaits the final ratification of these proposals via secondary legislation in the NI Assembly.

## Market conditions

Throughout 2025, members from a specific sector continued to raise concerns about the performance and profitability of their enterprises. Concerns included changes to contracts which could have been detrimental for some producers in NI. The UFU continues to engage with the processor concerned and continues to stress the major impact on income and mental health of our members.

## Better Chicken Commitment

The UFU is monitoring processor and supply chain moves to the Better Chicken Commitment. The main policy standards of the BCC include implementation of a maximum stocking density of 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> or less, compared to the Red Tractor standard of 38kg/m<sup>2</sup>. Members of the UFU Poultry Committee are concerned about moves to the BCC standards, due to bird performance and profitability, and the UFU is closely monitoring the situation and will take members' views forward into discussions.

## EU and Defra welfare proposals

The UFU Poultry Committee continues to be part of EU welfare proposal discussions. Proposals have included animal welfare during transport, where the UFU has continued to lobby that transport time at sea should not be included in any transport time limits. Other proposals include the banning of cages for laying hens, banning or changing the use of beak tipping and replacing the killing of day-old male chicks. The UFU is

in regular communication with the British Agriculture Bureau in Brussels, and the other UKFUs to ensure that members' voices are heard.

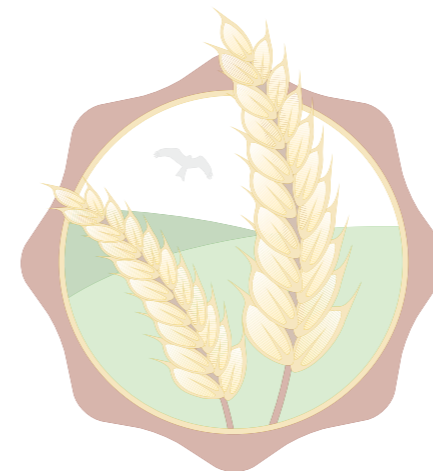
At the end of 2025, Defra announced a devolved nations consultation into the banning of cages for laying hens. The UFU Poultry Committee will be working on a response to this consultation.

## Ammonia and planning

Discussions have been held within the committee to express concerns about DAERA's NAP proposals, and the effect this could have on the already difficult situation surrounding planning permission, replacement and betterment. The UFU has been lobbying to ensure that producers can replace or improve buildings without being hit by impossible planning restrictions and have made it clear that the poultry industry has been unjustly affected by these restrictions in recent years.

## Other issues discussed by the committee throughout the year included:

- Access to veterinary medicines.
- Future agricultural support.
- Broiler NI/UK price gap.



UFU Poultry Committee Member Martyn Blair, speaking to UTV about the impact IHT will have on family farms.





Chairperson: Heather Patterson | Secretary: Kayleigh Ashton-Meek

# Rural Affairs Policy Committee

The UFU Rural Affairs Committee met on four occasions since the 2025 AGM. The main issues and topics that the committee considered during the past year included:

## Rural Support

Rural Support continues to be at the forefront in supporting the health of NI's farming community. The committee continues to support the organisation's work through their valuable services such as 'Life Beyond' and 'Plough On'. The complexity of calls to the helpline continues to increase. To meet the growing needs of the rural community, staff numbers have grown and staff regularly undertake additional training to aid them in their responses.

## Agri-education

The UFU and the Rural Affairs Committee have continued working with Twinkl NI throughout 2025. A range of ready-made resources for teachers has been developed, corresponding to all stages of primary education. They are aimed at helping primary school children understand what happens on NI farms, enhancing pupil learning, showcasing the farm to fork message and explaining how farmers work hand-in-hand with the environment to produce nutritious food for consumers. The original resources were made available in early 2025 and since then, Christmas resources have been developed and launched, and the UFU is working on further resources into 2026.

The UFU met with the Minister for Education on two occasions during 2025, where it outlined the work that the UFU has done with schools and education and future developments. The UFU is keen to work further with the Department for Education on the curriculum reforms, to ensure that agriculture, food and health are accurately represented at all levels.

## Bank of Ireland Open Farm Weekend

The BOI Open Farm Weekend once again took place over Father's Day Weekend, June 2025. This free event continues to be one of the biggest events highlighting the work of farmers and farming families with farm tours, industry stands and cookery demonstrations taking place across the country. Schools' day, which takes place annually on the Friday of OFW saw an increase in the number of attendees and the UFU/ASDA schools competition saw over 6000 entries.

Plans are in place for the 2026 BOI Open Farm Weekend, with representatives from the UFU Rural Affairs Committee continuing to sit on the steering committee and feed into the planning process.

## Women in agriculture

Last year, the committee, along with consultant Veronica Morris, developed the 'Strategic Plan to Promote Women in Farming in NI'. Alongside this, the UFU Women in Agriculture Leadership Development Programme launched as a pilot and commenced over a 10-week period with ten participants. In 2025, the participants met with DAERA Permanent Secretary, Katrina Godfrey, to highlight the work which went into the pilot programme, and to put forward a proposal for DAERA to fund the further leadership development programme.

The proposal was successful and DAERA agreed to provide £10,000 funding to the project. A joint UFU/DAERA task force has been set up to implement the leadership development programme and various industry stakeholders will be invited to take part over the coming year.

The UFU Women in Agriculture conference took place on 23rd October 2025 at CAFRE Loughry campus and was a highly successful day. The morning session included a series of talks with Nicola Wordie, a livestock farmer and social media influencer from Scotland, Emily McGowan, a mixed farmer and founder of Millbank Farm shop in County Down and Lorna Sixsmith, a dairy farmer and author from ROI. Afternoon sessions included talks with Dr Rebecca Orr on health, Samantha Gallagher from RCN on finance and Esther Skelly-Smith and Louise Skelly on Veterinary.

## Committee outing

The committee enjoyed an outing in August 2025 to both Brook Hall Estate and Brighter Gold. At Brook Hall Estate, the members were given a tour of the estate and had the opportunity to hear about the history and diversity of the land from the Gillilands. After a quick lunch, members were then given a tour of the Brighter Gold rapeseed farm and rapeseed oil pressing plant and then were able to purchase various rapeseed oil products from the on-site shop. It was a wonderful day, with lovely weather.

## IFA/UFU joint visit to Brussels

At the start of December, members of the UFU Rural Affairs Committee were kindly invited to join the Irish Farmers' Association Farm Families Committee in Brussels for a joint visit hosted by MEP Nina Carberry. Nine UFU members attended with policy officer, Kayleigh Ashton-Meek. This visit was the first time that these UFU and IFA committees have met together in Brussels and was a significant event for both organisations.

By virtue of NI's unique position aligned to aspects of the EU single market, it is essential that the UFU continues to maintain strong and constructive relationships in Brussels. Decisions taken at EU levels have a direct and practical impact on NI agriculture, from agri-food standards and trade rules to animal health and environment policy. Engagement with MEPs, EU institutions, and representative bodies ensures that the specific circumstances of NI agriculture are currently understood.



UFU Rural Affairs Policy Officer Kayleigh Ashton-Meek pictured with Garth Hussey, detective in the PSNI's economic crime unit at the ScamwiseNI event, November 2025.



UFU representatives travelled to Poland for the women's seminar.

## NI Food Strategy Framework

The Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework (NIFSF) sets out a long-term vision for transforming Northern Ireland's food system through three key pillars: Food and Health, Environmental Sustainability and Sustainable Economic Prosperity. The Framework is supported by the first Food Strategy Action Plan (2025-2027), which identifies 39 actions and projects to help the journey towards achieving this vision. FoodNI, has been appointed by DAERA, to raise awareness of the Framework and Action Plan, sharing knowledge across the sector and creating dialogue with key stakeholders.

The UFU Rural Affairs Committee was invited to attend a discussion on the future of Northern Ireland's Food System at Hillsborough Castle. Members discussed the new NI Food Strategy Framework, what opportunities this could provide, how the framework may address the sector's current challenges and how DAERA and FoodNI can use the framework as a tool for achieving positive change, allowing business, rural communities and natural ecosystems to thrive. The committee also linked the food strategy feedback with additional key priorities, including education, the provision of school meals and the role of local produce in human health. The committee was provided with a lovely dinner made of Northern Irish produce and the meeting ended with a tour around Hillsborough Castle by the Historic Royal Palaces Director of Palaces, which was greatly appreciated and enjoyed by all.

## Women In Business

The UFU has continued its corporate membership with WIB. The UFU full farming and student members are entitled to free WIB membership. WIB offer support to women in gaining employment, starting their own business and developing their career to rise into senior management and leadership positions through a range of programmes, training and networking events. As part of this membership, females can avail of networking opportunities, personal development webinars, profiling opportunities and discounted courses. To become a WIB member contact UFU HQ 02890 370 222.

## Other areas the committee has discussed include:

- Farm Safety.
- Farm families health checks.
- Health.
- Finance.
- Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Anti-Poverty Strategy.



Chairperson: John Watt | Secretary: Daniel Toft

# Rural Enterprise Policy Committee

## Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)

The committee had oversight over UFU negotiations and lobbying relating to the RHI closure regulations. Through cooperation with stakeholders such as RHANI, CASE and the FSB, we supported DfE in reaching closure regulations for the scheme that were fair to participants, including complex proposals surrounding load factor banding, a 2017-2019 reference period for historic heat use, significantly increased tariffs and the transition from ongoing tariff payments to a structured closure payment model. UFU engagement focused on ensuring that farm-based and rural enterprises were not disadvantaged by averaging methodologies or banding thresholds and that the final framework reflected genuine operational heat demand while providing long-term certainty for participants and the public purse. We await the final ratification of these proposals via secondary legislation in the NI Assembly.

## Decision on fairer grid connection costs

The UFU regularly highlighted the issue of electricity grid capacity and connection costs, an issue the Union has consistently identified as a major barrier to farm investment and on-farm renewable development for those who want it. UFU has long argued that the historic approach to grid connection charging unfairly penalised rural and first-mover customers, particularly where weaker rural networks triggered high and unpredictable reinforcement costs that made projects unviable.

The UFU pressed this case across government, regulatory and industry forums, engaging extensively with departments, regulators, network stakeholders and wider energy interests to demonstrate how existing arrangements constrained farm expansion, low-carbon technologies and rural economic development. This engagement fed into

wider policy reform on fairer grid connection costs, including increased socialisation of reinforcement costs and the introduction of a High-Cost Cap, aimed at reducing inequity for rural customers while maintaining appropriate safeguards for consumers overall.

The UFU continues to engage in the implementation of these reforms to ensure that policy intent translates into practical improvements for farm businesses and rural enterprises.

## North-South Interconnector

The committee has remained engaged on the North-South Interconnector issue, closely following progress. It has met with Safe Electricity Armagh Tyrone (SEAT) and SONI on the issue.

## SONI SRP27 price control advisory and challenge group

The UFU has participated in the group with other stakeholders. As SONI is approaching the end of its current price control period, it has been developing its new multi-year strategy for submission to and approval by the Utility Regulator. The UFU has contributed to this process throughout.

## Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance

The UFU engaged with the Utility Regulator's review of the Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service, highlighting the disproportionate impact of electricity outages on rural and agricultural businesses. The UFU stressed that while GSS payments provide a limited acknowledgement of disruption, priority must remain on network resilience and timely restoration, particularly during severe weather. The UFU supported stronger, inflation-linked standards aligned with Great Britain and the introduction of a dedicated severe weather restoration standard that better reflects the operational realities of farming businesses.

## Biomethane

The committee oversaw UFU engagement on biomethane policy, including work with industry stakeholders to press for the development of a dedicated biomethane framework for Northern Ireland. The UFU monitored progress on the development of the interdepartmental biomethane working group and the biomethane strategy currently under development and met with DfE and other stakeholders to highlight the role biomethane could play in supporting farm incomes, decarbonisation and energy security, while stressing the need for policy clarity and long-term certainty.

## Forestry

Forestry is an area of emerging interest for some, recognising that it may present opportunities for some farm businesses while posing challenges for others. The UFU engaged with relevant departments on their work to examine funding barriers and practical implications at their request to ensure farmers' voices are heard in these discussions.

## Utility Regulator farming sector project

The Rural Enterprise Committee oversaw UFU engagement with the Utility Regulator's farming sector project, which seeks to improve understanding of how farms interact with the energy market. Given that farm energy use is not captured within the Regulator's standard non-domestic market tracking due to its variability, a separate project is being undertaken. The UFU is supporting this work by advising on sampling, survey design and engagement processes, with the aim of strengthening broad evidence on how farmers interact with the energy market so that the sector can be more effectively protected and supported within future regulatory decisions.

## Utility Regulator Forward Work Programme

The UFU has engaged with the UR on their proposed Forward Work Programme for the upcoming year and has made practical suggestions as to amendments and its focus to ensure it is highlighting issues of relevance to agricultural and rural businesses.

## CBI NI Energy Working Group

The UFU participated in the CBI NI Energy Working Group, engaging with government officials, regulators, utilities, energy companies and wider business stakeholders.

Through this forum, UFU questioned officials on key policy and regulatory issues and focused on areas of particular relevance to agriculture and rural enterprises, to ensure that farming perspectives were reflected in wider energy policy discussions. Often departments would approach the group to discuss new policies and receive feedback, which the UFU provided regularly.

## Support for small-scale renewables

The committee continued to support the case for small-scale renewable energy generation, particularly where it can strengthen farm resilience and reduce exposure to volatile energy costs. The UFU has been considering a range of policy options and will continue to progress this work through engagement with relevant departments and stakeholders.

## End of NI Renewables Obligation

The UFU engaged with Renewables NI to discuss concerns around the managed phasing out of the NI Renewables Obligation, particularly the implications for farm-based renewable projects and the absence of clear successor arrangements.

## NIE Networks

The UFU maintained regular engagement with NIE Networks through quarterly meetings and ongoing dialogue on grid connections and wider network issues affecting farm businesses. NIE Networks also approached the UFU directly for input and ideas on various schemes and initiatives, and the UFU engaged with staff at operational, policy and senior levels through meetings and events.

## Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee

The UFU engaged with officials on proposals for a Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee, highlighting concerns that the proposed 5 MW threshold is too high and risks excluding farm-scale generation. UFU has argued for support mechanisms that better reflect farm-level projects and provide comparable certainty to larger schemes, enabling smaller renewable generators to participate on a fair and proportionate basis.

## Conferences

The UFU was represented at a wide range of energy and renewables conferences and events throughout the year. This included attendance at conferences organised by Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association in Belfast and London, the Phoenix Gas renewable gas conference, and the NI Energy Summit, among others. These events provided opportunities to engage directly with government officials, regulators, industry leaders and developers.



Chairperson: Richard Orr | Secretary: Patricia Erwin

# Seeds & Cereals Policy Committee

The Seeds & Cereals Committee supported by the Chairman, Vice-chair and Secretary has participated in committee and wider commodity meetings plus several sub-group meetings to progress committee business. The committee members and wider arable growers also had the opportunity to attend the annual arable conference in partnership with UAS and CAFRE. AHDB monitor farm workshops during 2025/6 and attend variety trials in Londonderry.

The main issues addressed over the year have been:

## NI future agriculture policy

The UFU President, William Irvine, hosted a farm visit for all UFU chairs and welcomed Minister Muir. This was a very positive, beneficial meeting and DAERA officials approached the UFU arable chairs inviting them to a meeting to discuss support for the sector going forward. Chairman Richard Orr has progressed an independent UFU working arable support document in conjunction with the UFU Seeds and Cereals Committee, and UFU Potato Committee, seeking funding to help shape a stronger sector going forward. The document is being used to help shape early discussions with DAERA officials to identify tangible, worthy support for growers. This working document is working its way through the UFU internal structures.

The committee and sub-group continue to discuss future support information, looking at the breach penalty matrix and farm sustainability standards. The UFU Policy Manager, James McCluggage, gave committees an update on structure, policy direction of travel and overall challenges for arable and horticulture sectors in December 2025. Growers were encouraged to think about new entrants/young farmer options and equipment for future DAERA farm investment support.



Grian harvest got off to a good start in late July/August. Pictured, UFU Deputy President Glenn Cuddy with Tom Wells.

## Protein Support

The Chair, Vice, Senior Policy Officer and Deputy President met with DAERA to discuss how best to take forward the Protein Support Scheme. Whilst not a perfect structure and uptake driven by planting weather conditions, the committee does see merit in keeping the initiative but with some modifications to enable uptake.

The pilot data analysis undertaken by AFBI to examine the environmental benefit of protein rotations has been requested by both the UFU and DAERA. The UFU awaits the analysis to help shape the next discussions with DAERA on the way forward.

## Plant Protection Products

The UFU continues to monitor this activity aligning EU and GB approved actives, MRL's and EMUS. These same issues continue to form the basis for meetings with DAERA, DEFRA, HSE, CRD, industry representatives and growers.

This is a complex regulatory administration system and when now coupled with the reality of market-sensitive manufacturer commercial elements the future supply of some product choices may become problematic. If manufacturers don't invest and support the new labelling requirement then this ultimately further limits the choice of product in NI. The UFU, BAB, DAERA, DEFRA, HSE, CRD and industry continue weekly to work their way through what needs to happen to ensure NI growers have access to timely approved PPP labelled for use in NI.

## UK/EU SPS negotiations

Negotiations are progressing and for NI it is critical that this is a swift and clearly communicated transition. The UFU holds a level of concern about the Anderson Croplife report on future SPS arrangements and continues to monitor. The UFU liaises with IFA and reviews how ROI as a member of the EU navigates approval of active substances for use. This work continues.

## Research update

The committee supported the need for local research but holds a level of concern regarding the resources within AFBI. The committee has indicated a need exists to sit down with AFBI and review options going forward.

## Farm Business Investment

The committee holds strong its position regarding how the scheme should be structured. It is the view of the arable sector that applications should be made on a farm business case-by-case application demonstrating the need for investment and not from a list of DAERA chosen options. This has proven a difficult discussion, mindful of low returns and the ability to find the funding to justify investment.

## CAFRE/Sustainable Development Groups

Members are currently engaging and reviewing the effectiveness of the new structures. The benchmarking element continues to cause concern.

## BREXIT NI Protocol and Windsor Framework progress

While it has become the new normal until the SPS UK/EU negotiations are settled, the sector continues to be challenged with costs, administration and forward planning requirements. DEARA and DEFRA continue to liaise with the UFU and industry to help find technical solutions as they arise. Sadly, experience shows some GB suppliers now see business within NI as a bureaucratic administrative burden on their businesses.



Harvest underway, 2025.

## Environment

The committee is represented by the immediate past Chair Chris Gill, on the UFU Environment Committee. Much work has been progressed within the committee, and feedback on a range of matters including the new Farming with Nature environmental package. FWN and direction of travel regarding arable options has raised some concerns within the committee. The committee continues to monitor and comment on the opportunities, flaws and practicalities. NAP discussions continue for UFU at a high level within the UFU Environment committee and leadership. The S&C Committee sees their sector as part of the solution to help other sectors meet any changes in NAP requirements.

## National Action Plan (NAP)/Sustainable Use Directive/PPPs

Integrated Pest Management profiles in revised NAP. DEFRA led on this review for PPPs. The UFU welcomed the revised NAP however it holds a level of concern regarding how this will be communicated. The UFU continues to monitor.

## Official Controls: Reporting of PPP

Members noted that the direction of travel with EU legislation indicates all PPP spray records must be presented to the competent authorities electronically when requested. The UFU Seeds and Cereals Chair requested a meeting with DAERA to ascertain how this transition from paper to electronic was progressing. The UFU has met several times with DAERA officials to examine how and why this transition is necessary. The UFU continues to monitor and liaise with DAERA and IFA on ROI rollout plans.

## The Voluntary Initiative (VI) and NI Water Catchment Partnership (NIEA, NI Water, CAFRE, DARD and UFU)

The committee continues to support the Voluntary Initiative. The promotion of education, co-operation and knowledge is the principal strength of this model. Operator Roadshows were delivered in spring 2026, Bruce Steele, the NI VI Agronomy champion, attended increasing the visibility of VI, highlighting both the role and relevance of the work within VI. The Water Catchment Partnership met recently and has plans to meet with VI representatives.

# Here's to our older farmers

You've been the backbone of the country's agriculture for generations. And you're still out there, night and day, in all weathers.

But remember farming gets riskier with age. Over half of all farm deaths in NI involve farmers aged 65 or over.\*

So, keep up the good work. But know your limitations. And get help with trickier jobs.

*A message from the Farm Safety Partnership*

For more advice on farm safety, visit [hseni.gov.uk/farmsafe](https://hseni.gov.uk/farmsafe)



\* Based on HSENI farm fatality data 2002-2020

## IFA/UFU

The UFU continues to liaise with IFA as and when necessary to explore common interests and issues. IFA and UFU representatives had a very constructive meeting looking at support mechanisms within ROI for tillage and discussed current market pressures regarding access to land, PPPs and the impact of imports and associated risks.

## Inheritance tax

The committee supported UFU leadership taking forward the lobby to help protect family farms.

## Balmoral Show: Arable exhibit

The RUAS Balmoral Show Horticulture Committee extended an invitation to the UFU Seeds and Cereals Committee welcoming them alongside UFU Potato, Apple and Vegetable growers. The committee progressed a new landscape model for 2025, which was a great success, a great source of information and a conversational opportunity to illustrate the positive steps farmers take on-farm to protect the environment whilst producing quality crops. The cereals exhibit was supported by UFU, AHDB and White's Speedicook. Early plans are progressing for a new and exciting educational piece for May 2026.

## AHDB Support NI arable sector

AHDB continues to invest and support growers in NI. Close working relationships with AHDB are facilitated by the appointment of Richard Orr who is currently sitting on the cereals and oilseed sector council. AHDB continues to support the arable sector in NI and good foundations are in place to improve co-operation and outcomes for the arable industry. The committee continues to hold concerns about the AHDB market report not publishing prices at key trading times. AHDB have given a commitment to improve and consult with NIGTA members to improve data collection, enabling price reporting going forward. The UFU participated in electronic grain passport discussions and is monitoring when, how or if this will be rolled out in GB.



The UFU Seeds and Cereals Chair Richard Orr, pictured at the bespoke farm landscape model, on display at the Healthy Horticulture Marquee at Balmoral Show 2025.

## UFU 2025 cereal competition

The UFU membership department co-ordinated the 2025 cereal competition. This was well supported by members and winners attending a celebration lunch with the sponsors and judges, celebrating excellence in cereal production.

## New: Arable June 2026 open day on-farm event

A new approach farm event will be rolled out in June. Full details will be issued over the next months. AHDB continues to support the UFU/UAS/CAFRE organising committee.

## NI Farm Quality Assured Cereal Scheme

The NI Farm Quality Assured Cereal Scheme is jointly owned by UFU and NIGTA. Fees were increased in 2025 to cover the cost of delivery. NIGTA CEO Gill Gallagher and Garth Boyd Fane Valley attended a recent meeting to discuss the direction of travel going forward.

## Consultation: Grain Supply Chain contracts

The UFU submitted an overarching response and encouraged committee members to do likewise.

## Queen's Co-centre

UFU representatives are in discussion with Prof. Mark Emmerson regarding their remit, funding and purpose.



Chairperson: John Gilpin | Secretary: Patricia Erwin

# Top Fruit/Apples Policy Committee

During the past year NI Fruit Growers' Association (NIFGA) representatives attended UFU Chairman update meetings, UFU Executive, DAERA and DEFRA meetings on plant health, plant protection products and Seasonal Agriculture Workers Scheme. The main issues progressed by the UFU and Apple industry Sub-Group representatives included:

## CAFRE fruit technologist

The CAFRE fruit technologist role is an important and valued support mechanism for the sector and growers. The industry welcomes the appointment of a CAFRE official and looks forward to working with them over the current year.

## Future agriculture support

The Top Fruit Sup-Group and apple growers received an official briefing from DAERA to explain how apple production could benefit from the recent announcement which signals a bespoke pilot program of measures with funding for horticulture, including top fruit. Top fruit struggles to identify how it fits the new model being rolled out for horticulture. Chair John Gilpin continues to attend DAERA briefings on support for production horticulture.

## The NIFGA sub-group

NIFGA sub-group continues to discuss future support information, including the proposed breach penalty matrix and farm sustainability standards. The UFU Policy Manager, James McCluggage, also gave the Arable and Horticulture committees an update on structure, policy direction of travel and overall challenges for agriculture and in particular for arable and horticulture sectors at a December meeting. Growers were encouraged to think about the support needed for young farmers and items for the farm business investment scheme.

## AFBI research

There is no change, and frustration remains high within the sub-group, continually reporting to DAERA that the complete cessation of research on apples at AFBI Loughgall, which commenced in 1952, is a considerable loss to the industry, reducing the competitiveness of local growers, many of whom rely almost entirely on apples as their main source of income.

## Plant health/rootstock movements

This work continues and NIFGA, as well as the UFU, continues to monitor the situation. Movement of trees from GB into NI remains challenging. The SPS agreement between the UK and EU may bring simplification. The UFU continues to monitor.

## NIFGA/UFU exhibit at the RUAS Balmoral Show 2025

David Johnston and John Gilpin coordinated the setting up of the Armagh Bramley exhibit within the Healthy Horticulture marquee at RUAS Balmoral. This gave growers the opportunity to help promote an extensive range of apple products to the general public, press, political representatives and wider food industry. An invitation has been received to participate in 2026, potentially showcasing a collaborative approach from the horticulture industry.

## Plant Protection Products (PPPs)

The Chair and Vice continue to join UFU representatives at meetings with DAERA, DEFRA and BAB to discuss and better understand the implications of the registration and approval process for plant protection products used in apple production in NI. The manufacturers must apply for an NI label and with a small market and limited return on investment this ultimately will limit available agronomy. The UFU continues to monitor.

## Horticulture Crop Protection

Horticulture Crop Protection Ltd (HCP) has been set up by the UK Horticultural industry to replace AHDB Horticulture. Minor use applications (EAMUs) and emergency authorisation applications remain an issue for NI. HCP Ltd operates on a 'not for profit' basis and is owned and funded by the Crop Associations. While HCP can provide the service for NI the issue is the associated costs. This model also impinges upon the UFU Vegetable Committee responsibilities and Chair, Trevor Gabbie, has asked that DAERA cover the cost for growers.

## Labour

The availability and ability to access labour continues to challenge some within the sector, with much reliance on Eastern European workers for harvest and pruning. The 2025 harvest proved challenging while the extension of the SAWS scheme is beneficial, it also brings associated increased costs.

## Orchard competition

Every year growers are encouraged to enter their best orchards into a competition organised by the Northern Ireland Fruit Growers' Association (NIFGA). Awards are keenly contested as the judges look at every aspect of growing Bramley crops including yield, freedom from pest and disease and orchard weed control, etc. The 2025 NIFGA Orchard competition was sponsored by commercial companies who are involved in the supply of agrochemicals, etc and was judged by Lori Hartman, CAFRE. NIFGA is very appreciative of the time taken by the judges and sponsors and congratulates all the winners.

## Fruit and Vegetable Support Scheme Review (POs)

Growers were invited to both DAERA and industry meetings to discuss the possible need for a Fruit and Vegetable Support Scheme. Initial indications signalled that the PO model would probably not fit the apple sector's needs in Northern Ireland, however that position has now changed and it is reported that some are exploring joining a new PO.

## BAB - British Agriculture Bureau

The BAB office is the central administration unit for the four UK farming unions based in Brussels. Policy areas including legislation on plant health, packaging and labelling are explored.

## Inheritance tax

The Chair, subgroup and growers were briefed by the UFU Deputy President, Glenn Cuddy, on the work of the UFU to help address the impact this proposal would have on family farm businesses.



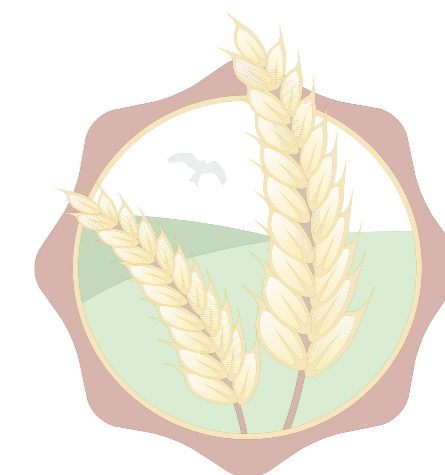
Local apples on display at the Healthy Horticulture Marquee at the Balmoral Show 2025.

## Marketing standards for Cider and Perry

Cider and Perry are back on the agenda and the UFU continues to review and input relevant views from the sector.

## Queen's Co-centre

The UFU and chairs have met with Queen's representatives to better understand their role in developing a new horticulture strategy. The UFU has signalled that they will not be financially contributing to this work and question the need, understanding, role of Queen's and best use of DAERA funding within this initiative.





Chairperson: Trevor Gabbie | Secretary: Patricia Erwin

# Vegetables Policy Committee

The UFU Vegetable Committee and Subgroup met in person and on Zoom over the past year. The Chair attended the UFU Executive and wider commodity business meetings when required. The Chair and Vice-chair also attended Zoom BAB meetings on behalf of the sector with Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

## A future agriculture policy for horticulture

DAERA announced a support package for horticulture with a plan and ambition to double the sector's output. The UFU Vegetable Chair Trevor Gabbie participated in a DAERA policy briefing meeting regarding the rollout of the Horticulture Pilot. Within the UFU and committee much work has gone into trying to shape and make this model fit for purpose. It has been challenging to get commercial grower participation. Chair, Trevor Gabbie, supported by some growers has engaged, submitted applications and actively encouraged others to do so. This is a pilot to drive a stronger horticulture industry for Northern Ireland. It is a DAERA pilot initiative facilitated/coordinated by CAFRE to illustrate and prove that horticulture has the capacity to grow and that supported investment is necessary. The desired outcome of the pilot analysis will shape the direction of future support for horticulture. UFU Policy Manager, James McCluggage, gave arable and horticulture committees an update on structure and policy direction of travel in December. All were encouraged to think about next-generation support and items for the list for the farm business investment scheme.

## Plant Protection Products (PPP)

DAERA, the competent authority, 'contracts out' their regulatory role to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Chemicals Regulation Division (CRD). New processes and procedures

are necessary for the NI supply chain and regulation delivery. This engagement with DAERA officials and work continues. The Chair, with others, continues to meet DAERA, DEFRA, CRD/HSE to try and ensure NI will have timely information and access to approved PPPs with the correct approval label for NI use. Manufacturers need to see a return on investment to make the applications for NI labels, and some have chosen not to. The UFU is monitoring the UK/EU SPS negotiations.

Industry examples of PPP products available currently in GB are forwarded to DAERA, DEFRA and BAB illustrating current divergence issues.

## MRLs

Concerns have been raised with DAERA and DEFRA regarding horticulture. The UFU has progressed much work to help improve both industry relationships and understanding within DAERA HSE/CRD. This work continues.

## Horticulture Crop Protection (HCP)

Horticulture Crop Protection Ltd (HCP) is set up by the UK horticultural industry to take over the processing of pesticide minor use applications (EAMUs) and emergency authorisation applications, following the wind-down of AHDB horticulture. HCP operates on a 'not for profit' basis and is owned and funded by the Crop Associations. The UFU and DAERA continue to meet with HCP to explore how Northern Ireland growers can avail of the service. HCP are available to help, however this necessitates contribution from NI growers. Chairman Trevor Gabbie continues to call on DAERA to cover this cost.

## Sustainable Use Directive (SUD) and National Action Plan PPPs

The UFU is monitoring the situation and calls on DAERA to communicate clearly to growers the details within NAP.

## Official Controls - Plant Protection Product: electronic register

The Chairman and the UFU has met with DAERA officials to better understand and seek clarity around why and how and establish a timetable for this requirement. The UFU is monitoring the situation.

## Official controls - DAERA PPP users register

The DAERA official control register remains open and the UFU reminds all farm businesses that use PPPs on their holding of the need to register.

## DAERA plant health

The UFU continues to liaise with DAERA officials to review and monitor all aspects of plant health, including the ability to import and notifications of any health detections in NI. Both DAERA and EU inspectors are on duty at NI ports.

## Land tenure

The Committee have discussed land tenure many times and recognised that long-term leases are ideal for those operating on a large scale, but for those on a smaller rotation, the tried and tested conacre system works for vegetable production and should continue ensuring access to the best soils for production.

## Inheritance tax

Members supported the work progressed by the UFU to address the impact on their family farms.

## Sanitary Phytosanitary and NI Plant Health Label (NIPHL)

Many DEFRA, DAERA and industry meetings continued in 2025/26 and while NI businesses continue to adopt new business arrangements for moving goods from GB into NI, complexities and lack of understanding remain for some maybe more so on the GB exporting side. DAERA, DEFRA and industry engagement continue. The new Northern Ireland Plant Health Label (NIPHL) was introduced to minimise disruption and ease movements of plants from GB into NI. It is recognised that it is not perfect and may improve as a result of the SPS UK/EU negotiations.

## IFA/UFU meetings

The Vegetables Chair and Senior Policy Officer continue to liaise with IFA colleagues and ROI growers.

## Agricultural Wages Board and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme

The UFU Vegetable Committee is represented by Vice-chair, Roy Lyttle, on AWB who actively takes forward all horticulture issues. A special high-level meeting was hosted by Trevor Gabbie to discuss issues for the sector. The UFU continues to oppose any need for the Agricultural Wages Board.

## SAWS

The Northern Ireland horticulture industry is highly dependent on manual labour for planting, harvesting and processing. The UFU continually reviews, liaises with and represents growers in these discussions.

## Migration Advisory Committee

The NFU, UFU and BAB continue to liaise regarding labour shortages. Automation, technological and scientific advancements are progressing but the industry continues to report that for some sectors these new technologies are not ready for horticulture.

## CAFRE horticulture production education module

The committee lobbied and welcomes the CAFRE Greenmount decision to roll out a production horticulture module for full-time students.

## UFU Bursary for Production Horticulture

The UFU Board has signed off on presenting a UFU Bursary for Production Horticulture for 2026. The UFU Vegetable Committee Chair and Senior Policy Office aided in setting the application and selection criteria for the successful student.

## Vegetable RUAS Exhibition: Healthy Horticulture

The Committee supports horticulture at the RUAS Balmoral Show. Chairman, Trevor Gabbie, helped coordinate produce and people for the exhibit.

## Farm business investment scheme

The horticulture industry strongly disagrees with the methodology for the application and selection of the farm business investment scheme. The committee is supportive of the need for a scheme; however, it needs to be reflective of sector-specific requirements and presented as a business case for need not from a list. The horticulture sector welcomes the fact that it can tap into this scheme as well as the specific horticulture investment offering. The UFU lobbies for inclusion of secondhand equipment reflecting the cost of new equipment and the scale of local businesses.

# Here's to our older farmers

You've been the backbone of the country's agriculture for generations. And you're still out there, night and day, in all weathers.

But remember farming gets riskier with age. Over half of all farm deaths in NI involve farmers aged 65 or over.\*

So, keep up the good work. But know your limitations. And get help with trickier jobs.

*A message from the Farm Safety Partnership*



STOP AND THINK

**SAFE**

SLURRY ANIMALS FALLS EQUIPMENT

**hсени**

CONTROLLING RISK TOGETHER



Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs  
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

For more advice on farm safety, visit [hсени.gov.uk/farmsafe](https://hсени.gov.uk/farmsafe)

\* Based on HSENI farm fatality data 2002-2020

## Voluntary initiative

The UFU, in partnership with CAFRE, delivers Operator Roadshows across NI for ease of collecting necessary CPD points. NI VI Agronomy Champion, Bruce Steel, attended workshops in 2026 to help communicate and profile the work of VI.

## Environment

The vegetable committee is currently represented by Adrian McGowan on the UFU Environment Committee when discussing the current direction of travel on issues concerning the environment.

## Retail/supply chain/Red Tractor

Every year the supply chain brings challenges and also opportunities for some. The retail price has remained high and packers/processors, it is reported, have supported local growers. Quality standards are high including higher environmental standards, employee welfare and the general direction of travel towards carbon neutrality. Carbon is currently a measure within current retail supply chain arrangements for horticulture crops. The UFU reviews EU labelling and packaging legislation within the sector.

## Queen's Co-centre

The UFU and chairs have met with Queen's representatives to better understand their role in developing a new horticulture strategy. The UFU has signalled it will not be financially contributing to this work and questions the need, understanding, role of Queen's and the best use of DAERA funding within this initiative.



The UFU Deputy President, Glenn Cuddy, with CAFRE staff Leigh McClean and Robin Bolton discussing the 2026 NRoSO Operator Roadshow dates and workshop detail.





# Next Generation Forum

It has been another busy and interactive year for the UFU/YFCU Next Generation Forum as they are now into their second year.

### UK Unions Next Generation Conference

The Next Generation Committee attended a cross-UK Next Generation Conference hosted by NFU Scotland. The two-day event brought together young farmers and industry representatives from across the UK, providing a valuable platform for learning, discussion and collaboration.

Delegates heard directly from industry leaders and union representatives on key topics including agricultural policy developments across the devolved administrations, market opportunities, innovation in farming systems and farmer wellbeing.

The programme also included on-farm and educational visits, offering practical insight into climate-smart livestock production, animal health services and the growing role of research and technology in supporting productive and sustainable farm businesses. The event underscored the importance of collaboration between farming unions and highlighted the shared challenges facing young farmers across the UK.

### Engagement on Environmental policy - Nutrients Action Plan

In June 2025, members of the Next Generation Forum met with the UFU Assistant Policy Officer to discuss the UFU's position on the Nutrients Action Programme. The session provided an opportunity for open discussion on environmental regulation, practical implementation at farm level and the importance of ensuring policies are workable, proportionate and evidence based.

This engagement ensured that the views and concerns of the next generation of farmers continue to inform the UFU policy development and advocacy.

### Visit to Blakiston Houston Estates

The group visited Blakiston Houston Estates for an insightful tour of their farming and renewable energy operations.

Members explored the dairy unit and learned about the innovative Farm2Export project, which is examining how livestock slurry can be transformed into a viable feedstock for anaerobic digestion. The group also viewed the estate's wider renewable energy infrastructure, including the wind turbine and on-site anaerobic digestion plant.

The Blakiston Houston Estates team shared valuable insights into the operational challenges and economic opportunities associated with agri-renewables, providing members with a practical understanding of diversification and sustainability within a large-scale farming business.

### Developing Leaders Programme: Leadership and personal development

As part of the Developing Leaders Programme, the Next Generation Forum held two sessions with management consultant and employability coach Linzi Conway.

The sessions focused on leadership challenges in 2025, exploring different leadership styles and skillsets and examining the key differences between management and leadership. The interactive discussions encouraged participants to reflect on their own leadership approaches and personal development goals.

These sessions laid the foundations for future leadership development within the Forum.

### Agri-Finance and business planning insights

The Next Generation Forum also met with Richard Primrose, Agriculture Business Manager at Barclays Bank, for an informative session on the agri-banking landscape in Northern Ireland.

The discussion covered what banks look for when lending to farm businesses, key considerations before approaching a lender, how to prepare a SWOT analysis, and the importance of budgeting and forecasting. A lively Q&A followed, with members gaining practical insights to support future business planning and investment decisions.

### Conclusion

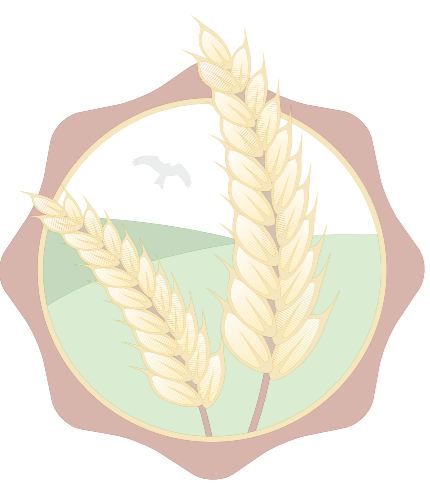
The past year has been another productive and progressive one for the UFU Next Generation Forum. Through UK-wide engagement, policy discussion, leadership development, industry visits, and practical business learning, the Forum continues to equip young farmers in Northern Ireland with the knowledge, connections and confidence needed to meet future challenges.



The UFU Next Generation member Jonny Campbell, pictured at NI Farm Family Day 2025, with his daughter.



Next Generation Forum members, gained invaluable insights from management consultant Linzi Conway KTS Consultants at the Dunsilly Hotel.





YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2025

## Income & expenditure Account

	2025 £	2024 £
<b>Turnover</b>		
Members' subscriptions	1,612,400	1,550,532
Donations and contributions from other organisations	645,000	621,000
Dividends and interest	91,696	64,891
Rental income	8,900	8,900
Sundry income	289,367	172,069
Profit on sale of investments	96,989	24,741
Dividend receivable – Countryside Services Limited	20,000	–
	<b>2,764,352</b>	<b>2,442,133</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Staff costs	1,686,311	1,581,043
Administration	327,628	292,434
Legal, accountancy and other professional fees	101,292	72,219
Travelling and out of pocket expenses	173,109	145,092
Members' services	268,084	235,203
Establishment	61,638	61,371
Contributions to representative bodies	109,741	95,497
Finance costs	35,343	31,003
	<b>2,763,146</b>	<b>2,513,862</b>
<b>Net operating surplus/(deficit) before fair value movement on investments</b>	<b>1,206</b>	<b>(71,729)</b>
Fair value movement on investments	401,086	347,973
<b>Net operating surplus/(deficit) after fair value movement on investments</b>	<b>402,292</b>	<b>276,244</b>
Taxation	(121,412)	(92,592)
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<b>280,880</b>	<b>183,652</b>

All activities in the current and prior year derive from continuing operations.  
There were no recognised gains or losses for the current period other than as stated above.  
Accordingly no statement of comprehensive income is required.



AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2025

## Balance Sheet

	2025 £	2024 £
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Tangible assets	278,840	302,027
Share in Group Undertaking	2	2
Investments	5,054,343	4,513,533
	<b>5,333,185</b>	<b>4,815,562</b>
<b>Current assets</b>		
Debtors	247,722	222,814
Cash at bank and in hand	134,928	229,746
	<b>382,650</b>	<b>452,560</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Creditors - amounts falling due within one year	(314,133)	(206,406)
<b>Net current assets</b>	<b>68,517</b>	<b>246,154</b>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>	<b>5,401,702</b>	<b>5,061,716</b>
<b>Provision for liabilities</b>	<b>(302,777)</b>	<b>(243,671)</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>5,098,925</b>	<b>4,818,045</b>
<b>Reserves</b>	<b>5,098,925</b>	<b>4,818,045</b>

The financial statements of the Ulster Farmers' Union were approved by the Executive Committee on 30 April 2026.

Signed on behalf of the Executive Committee

*William Irvine*

President

*Conall Donnelly*

Chief executive



# Acronyms Glossary

## Agri organisations

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UFU	Ulster Farmers' Union
YFCU	Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster
NFU	National Farmers' Union
IFA	Irish Farmers' Association
CSL	Countryside Services Ltd
NIGTA	Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association
NIMEA	Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association
LMC	Livestock and Meat Commission
DCNI	Dairy Council for Northern Ireland
UAS	Ulster Arable Society
NIFGA	Northern Ireland Fruit Growers Association
AHWNl	Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland
APHA	Animal and Plant Health Agency
AFBI	Agri-Food Biosciences Institute
RUAS	Royal Ulster Agricultural Society
AHDB	Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board
UKCSP	UK Cattle Sustainability Platform
RABDF	Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers
ICOS	Irish Co-operative Organisation Society
BAB	Brussels Agriculture Bureau

## Public/other organisations

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DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
NIFCC	Northern Ireland Food Chain Certification
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
DfE	Department for the Economy
DfI	Department for Infrastructure
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
CAFRE	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
HSENI	Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland
CRD	Chemicals Regulation Division
OEP	Office of Environmental Protection
NIRVA	Northern Irish Rural Valuers Association
CAAV	Central Association of Agricultural Valuers
NHS	National Health Service
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland

HMRC	His Majesty's Revenue and Customs
SONI	System Operator for Northern Ireland
CASE	Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
NILCA	NI Local Government Association
WIB	Women in Business

## Political parties

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SF	Sinn Fein
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
APNI	Alliance Party of NI
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
TUV	Traditional Unionist Voice

## Committees/groups

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AERA	Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
NIBBWG	Northern Ireland Business Brexit Working Group
CCC	Climate Change Committee
FSP	Farm Safety Partnership
UK LCAG	UK Livestock Chain Advisory Group
CAWTG	Carbon Auditing Technical Working Group
RGLG	Renewable Grid Liaison Group
HCP	Horticulture Crop Protection
HWG	Horticulture Working Group
TBPSG	bTB Partnership Steering Group
VMWG	Veterinary Medicine Working Group

## Schemes/initiatives/policy plans

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IHT	Inheritance Tax
APR	Agricultural Property Relief
BPR	Business Property Relief
A5WTC	A5 Western Transport Corridor
SAWS	Seasonal Agriculture Workers Scheme
NIBLFQAS	Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme
NIFQACS	Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured Cereals Scheme
ELEMS	Environmental Land Management Scheme
SNHS	Soil Nutrient Health Scheme
FwN	Farming with Nature
CAP	Climate Action Plan
NAP	Nutrients Action Programme
CMP	Conservation Management Plans
ETS	Emissions Trading Scheme

MAS	Movement Assistance Scheme
RHI	Renewable Heat Incentive
EBRS	NI Energy Bill Relief Scheme
ETII	Energy and Trade Intensive Industry Scheme
IETF	Industrial Energy Transformation Fund
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WCP	Water Catchment Partnership
CRD	Chemicals Regulation Division
SUD	Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive
VI	Voluntary initiative
BOIOFW	Bank of Ireland Open Farm Weekend

## Agri terms

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WIA	Women in Agriculture
PGI	Protected Geographical Indicator
LESSE	Low emissions slurry spreading equipment
TB	Bovine tuberculosis
BVD	Bovine viral diarrhoea
BVDPI	Bovine virus diarrhoea positive animals
BVDU	Bovine virus diarrhoea untested
AI	Avian influenza
HPAI	Highly pathogenic avian Influenza
ASF	African swine fever
MV	Maedi visna
BTV	Bluetongue
NIPHL	Northern Ireland Plant Health Label
SPS	Sanitary and phytosanitary
PPP	Plant protection products
EAMU	Extensions of authorisation for minor use
MRL	Minimal risk levels
GHG	Greenhouse gas
LCA	Life cycle assessment
AD	Aerobic digestion

## General

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NI	Northern Ireland
UK	United Kingdom
ROI	Republic of Ireland
EU	European Union
Q&A	Question-and-answer
CEO	Chief executive
AGM	Annual general meeting
HQ	Head quarters