

Ulster Farmers' Union *UPDATE*

THIS WEEK

12 February 2016

Renewable Heat Incentive: UFU says it is 'angry and frustrated' by a decision to suspend the RHI this based on a 'flawed' consultation process, and that the suspension and imminent closure will leave in disarray the plans and considerable resource commitments already made by many farmers who were expecting support. There was no consultation on this closure. And UFU say a limit should have been placed on the RHI budget. DETI had two opportunities to introduce a phased closure which would have avoided the sudden ending of the scheme. The UFU recognise that it is fair to close the RHI scheme to new projects, but those who can show they have invested in expectation of support should be allowed time to complete projects before the scheme ends. The NI Assembly will debate this issue next week.

Banks: The UFU has used a DARD crisis summit to call for 'fresh and radical' thinking by all banks and other finance houses. UFU warned that the crisis went beyond the dairy sector to all of agriculture – and that there was no evidence it would be solved quickly or easily. There is no magic bullet to solve problems like volatility but what we can do is tackle a financial crisis that is getting deeper by the day – and the solution, in the short term, lies with the banks. The UFU wants banks and other lenders to be more open about capital holidays to get through the crisis. In the longer term it wants capital repayments linked to the profitability of the sector the enterprise is in, and it is pressing for a change of approach to how money is lent to agriculture. We need to take that pressure off with a two year repayment break. We also need to change funding to a longer term base – more akin to a mortgage than working capital, and with an interest rate that reflects that approach. The UFU welcomed the crisis meeting held by Michelle O'Neill to focus on the dairy sector, saying that it was clear that only an industry-wide approach involving DARD, the banks and suppliers to agriculture was going to find a way through the current problems. For the full story visit: <http://bit.ly/1Rs9LTs>

Business Development Groups: The UFU says that the decision to offer all 3,225 eligible applicants who applied to the first tranche of the Business Development Groups (BDG) a place in a local BDG is a great opportunity for farmers to learn from each other by sharing ideas and improving skills in business management, new technologies and innovative ways of working. In these challenging times, this new programme will help farmers acquire the skills necessary to help make the best decisions about their businesses. The UFU says it is important that those who were not able to commit to the Business Discussion Groups understand that they have not been forgotten. Farm Family Key Skills (FFKS) training events will deliver short courses in business planning, animal health, health and safety and DARD IT systems and these will be rolled out in the Spring. For further info see: <http://bit.ly/1SilbcI>

Food Standards Agency Event: UFU representatives recently attended a major Food Standards Agency event. This examined how FSA will deliver its 2015-2020 'Food We Can Trust' strategy. The event brought together consumers, businesses, regulators and other key organisations, such as the UFU, from across the UK. This was an ideal opportunity for UFU to push its case for fresh thinking on official controls and inspections. UFU has said more recognition must be given to existing independently accredited industry schemes, which are generally at higher levels than statutory requirements. Duplication must be avoided and unnecessary additional costs stripped out. Also discussed was the importance of food authenticity and transparent labelling. The UFU will continue working with the FSA and others to help shape future regulations and enforcement. To read the full story visit: <http://bit.ly/1KHRLD4>

Avian Influenza: Trade restrictions put in place following an outbreak of Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI) in Fife, Scotland have now been lifted reinstating the following general licences:

- DARD/GEN/16/01 - Poultry and hatching eggs from Great Britain
- DARD/GEN/16/02 - Racing pigeons from Great Britain
- DARD/GEN/16/03 - Ornamental fowl and Captive birds (other than poultry covered by EC Directive 2009/158/EEC) from Great Britain

As a result, importers of all live poultry, ornamental fowl, captive birds and racing pigeons from Great Britain no longer need to apply to DARD to obtain a specific import licence before they can import any of these consignments into Northern Ireland from Great Britain. Whilst the restrictions on movement of poultry are being relaxed, UFU has said that maintenance of good bio-security measures by all poultry keepers remains critically important.

Rural Crime: UFU deputy president, Barclay Bell has accompanied PSNI officers from County Armagh on a police operation to tackle criminality in rural areas. This was a joint operation between four neighbouring PSNI policing districts, DARD, Garda, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and Road Safety Authority (RSA) Ireland. The operation included various checkpoints including one at the border in Middletown. This was a good to experience first-hand the PSNI and the other organisations working together. The operation highlighted how the presence and co-ordinated efforts of the PSNI was central to any crack down on theft in rural areas. The UFU believes a joined-up approach is needed and Mr Bell said this operation was a good example of how the PSNI can work well with other

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organisations to tackle crimes that are a big source of frustration and economic loss for farmers. To read the full story visit: <http://bit.ly/20qhGB7>

Non-Domestic Rating Consultation: The UFU says it 'broadly supports' the plans outlined in the review of Northern Ireland's non-domestic rating system. In particular it has welcomed the continued rates exemption for agricultural land and buildings. The agricultural industry is the largest rural stakeholder and employer so it is imperative it is protected to help sustain rural communities. UFU also welcome the recommendation not to introduce a system of Land Value Tax. It feels this would be unworkable and unfair and would ultimately have a negative effect on industry and consumers. The UFU has highlighted concerns about the closure of businesses in towns and villages and wants the Department of Finance and Personnel to work closely with district councils to drive the revitalisation of once vibrant rural areas. Another point raised was banking services, and people finding they are inconvenienced by the centralisation of services. To read the full story visit: <http://bit.ly/23Wye8H>

UFU Meeting with AFBI: Earlier this week Dr Elaine Groom and Dr Lisa Black presented opportunities to the UFU Seeds and Cereals Policy Committee on the EU framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon 2020.

Future Events / Issues

BVD Information Evenings: Animal Health and Welfare NI will be carrying out public information evenings on the upcoming BVD eradication programme on 1st March 2016. Please note all meetings start at 8pm. The dates are as follows: Derry/Londonderry, Tuesday 16th February at the Roe Valley Hotel, Limavady, Tyrone, Wednesday 17th February at the Glenavon Hotel, Cookstown, Fermanagh, Thursday 18th February at the Killyhevlin Hotel, Enniskillen, Down, Tuesday 23rd February at the Millbrook Lodge Hotel, Ballynahinch, Armagh, Wednesday 24th February at the Armagh City Hotel, Antrim, Thursday 25th February at the Tullyglass Hotel, Ballymena.

Rush Control Meeting: UFU has organised an information meeting on Tuesday 23rd February at 8pm in the Downshire Hotel, Hilltown and would like to extend a warm welcome to all farmers in the surrounding areas to attend. The focus of the meeting will be on rush control and also animal health on beef and sheep farms as we come into the main season for lambing and calving. Graeme Campbell from CAFRE will be providing an overview of rush control techniques which are best suited to land in Northern Ireland. In recent times CAFRE has been conducting trials on a variety of techniques for controlling rushes with the objective of trying to assist farmers to identify the most cost-effective measure for their farms. This is particularly important given the need to keep land productive as well as maintain the eligibility of the land for the purposes of the new Basic Payment Scheme. The UFU will also welcome local vet Martin Fitzpatrick from the Castle Veterinary Practice, Castlewella, to speak on animal health issues for beef and sheep farms.

Reseeding Records: As part of a recently DARD funded project AFBI are looking for agricultural grasslands which have a detailed history of management in particular in relation to reseeded. They would like to select, within the same farm, a number of grasslands which have been reseeded at different frequencies. For example, some grasslands would have been reseeded many times (5-6 times?) over the last 20 years whereas other grasslands would have not (and some perhaps would have not been reseeded for >40 years). It is AFBI's intention to collect few soil samples to be analysed for carbon content. We would like to know whether the intensity or frequency of reseeded is actually affecting soil carbon sequestration. Anyone with reseeded history of your farm could you get in contact with David at UFUHQ.

Mighty Spud Awards: Chef Paula McIntyre is leading the search for the best potato dishes that Northern Ireland has to offer in the inaugural Mighty Spud Awards 2016. UFU would like to remind members that there is still time to nominate Mightiest Chip, Mightiest Mash, Mightiest Potato Innovation and Mightiest Healthy Potato Dish. To find out more about the awards and for info on how to nominate your favourite restaurants see: <http://mightyspud.com/awards> Please note the deadline for nominations is midnight 14 February.

2016 VI Operators Roadshows: Due to high demand the 2016 NRoSo workshops delivered jointly by the UFU and CAFRE at various locations around Northern Ireland are now fully booked. UFU are placing interested members on a reserve list. If you would like to be included on the reserve list for the next upcoming VI operator road show – date to be confirmed, please contact Angela Scott at UFU HQ on 028 9037 0222.

BOI Open Farm Weekend: Planning is underway for BOI Open Farm Weekend 2016 and UFU are encouraging farmers across Northern Ireland to consider taking part in this year's event. The UFU led initiative, principally supported by the Bank of Ireland, has been running since 2012 and has attracted almost 60,000 people throughout that time. If you are a farmer interested in opening your gates this year you can register your interest by emailing info@openfarmweekend.com or call 028 9037 0222. For more information, visit the website www.openfarmweekend.com

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