

Transcript Details					
Ref:		Author:			
Broadcast Details					
Date:	22-08-14	Time:	06:44	Duration:	6 minutes
Channel/Station:	BBC Radio Ulster	Programme:	Good Morning Ulster		
Alert Summary					
<p>Headline: Farming News</p> <p>Summary: Connecting a small scale generator is a bit more complicated than solar panels on the roof. The result is that for hundreds of farmers have been told that they will not be able to connect to their own generators to the grid. Up to a thousand of them had applied for connection but those connections depended on whether the network was upgraded.</p> <p>Presenters: Conor Bradford and Paddy O'Flaherty</p>					

Conor Bradford (Presenter): Now, Paddy O'Flaherty is here and we are getting what, a small-scale generator being hooked up to the grid, Paddy, apparently is not just as simple as pushing in a plug?

Paddy O'Flaherty (Presenter): Indeed, it's not. A very, very good morning. If you put a few solar panels on your roof, well, that will give you something perhaps between four and six kilowatts. What we're talking about here is installing a system that will produce 25 kilowatts and upwards and as you say, connecting a small-scale generator is a bit more complicated than the solar panels on the roof. The result is that hundreds of farmers have been told that they will not be able to connect their own generators to the grid. Up to 1,000 of them had applied for connection but those connections depended on whether the network was upgraded and now hundreds of them are receiving letters saying that this is not going to happen. I've been hearing more from the Ulster Farmers Union's Senior Policy Officer, Chris Osborne.

Chris Osborne (Senior Policy Officer, Ulster Farmers Union): Up until this letter was issued they were sitting in a state of limbo which was created by the conditionality of these grid connection applications.

PO'F: And why were they being told that their application was conditional?

CO: They were being told it was conditional on the basis that the grid was actually over-saturated by the numbers of people who were wanting to apply to join the grid.

PO'F: Is that because we simply don't have the physical structure that's needed to accommodate all the proposed small installations?

CO: By its very nature that's correct. If you have say for example on paper 1,000 individual applications wanting to join the grid at any one time, it creates saturation.

PO'F: So what does this mean then to farmers who had hoped to start generating their own electricity?

CO: Well, this statement that's been made by NIE and the withdrawal of these connection offers actually creates an element of certainty because farmers will know one way or another whether or not they are going to be able to connect their units to the electricity grid.

PO'F: So for how long has there been this element of uncertainty in the situation?

CO: It's been 18 months to two years and the UFU as an organisation have lobbied both stakeholders, government bodies, NIE on trying to get this situation resolved.

PO'F: And was NIE to blame for the fact that the uncertainty existed?

CO: No, they certainly weren't. The situation arose as the reasons that we have just discussed in relation to the nature of the grid and also the number of applications that were coming onto the system.

PO'F: Too many people applying?

CO: That would be correct.

CB: So what happens now then, Paddy?

PO'F: Well, it's not the end of the road, at least not entirely, for many farmers. The letters being sent out by NIE are offering options. One is withdraw your application entirely or stay in the system. And Chris says that they have been given an assurance that people who stay in the system will

not lose their places in the queue while they are working on an alternative way of getting connected, of connecting small-scale generators to the grid. The alternative system they are working on now is known as "Project 40". It'll be, I'm told, what's called a "managed non-firm connection". The big question now of course is how long will it be before it's known if the alternative connection system will work?

CO: That will be an ongoing consultation process. We have been informed that it will be finalised by the end of 2015 but in the run-up to this NIE are working on what is known as a heat map which shows congestion in itemised areas of Northern Ireland, which will help farmers know whether or not any future projects could be viable.

PO'F: And will that give farmers a good indication of whether they have any chance of getting into the system in the future?

CO: Well, that's what it has been designed to do, so yes.

PO'F: Chris Osborne, from the Ulster Farmers Union.

ENDS
