

ULSTER FARMERS' UNION NEWS RELEASE**Date: 24 June 2010****Cyclo No: PR97/10****UFU welcomes announcement of Renewable Energy Action Plan**

The Ulster Farmers' Union has welcomed the announcement by DARD of the Renewable Energy Action Plan, which is to include a £3million Biomass Processing Challenge Fund (BPCF). The plan was developed following receipt of the Agricultural Stakeholder Forum for Renewable Energy (ASFRE) report, "A Way Forward", of which the UFU was an integral member.

The BPCF is a capital grant scheme, offering a rate of 40% of eligible costs to a maximum of €400,000 per project. Its aim is to address the high level of capital costs required to establish and set up biomass-fuelled renewable energy capacity on-farm. The BPCF is part financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme.

UFU Deputy President Harry Sinclair said; "This is a positive step in establishing a competitive and sustainable biomass industry here in Northern Ireland. This fund will help encourage agricultural businesses to install small scale biomass-fuelled renewable energy capacity. BPCF will be directed towards projects where the majority of energy produced must be used to carry out or directly support agriculture activities on farm."

DARD has advised that all applications must be supported by a full business case containing a set up minimum criteria including for example technical/commercial/economic objectives of the project.

Mr Sinclair adds; "Projects must also have the appropriate planning approvals and permissions in place before it will be considered for a grant award. Therefore, if applicants are unsure if their project requires planning permission, they should check with the equipment manufacturer.

"The closing date for the BPCF is **19th August 2010** so there is a very small window of opportunity to apply and applicants should bear in mind the detailed information, as well as planning requirements required in the application process."

ENDS//...**Media Contact: Michelle Ferguson 028 9037 0222**