

## POLICY GOALS FOR UFU RURAL ENTERPRISE COMMITTEE IN 2011

The Rural Enterprise Committee was established in 2006 with the dual aim of co-ordinating UFU policy in the establishment of a sustainable and effective Renewable sector in Northern Ireland and lobbying of the Government (local and EU) for viable opportunities for farmers to benefit from renewable energy projects. Northern Ireland farming has a dual role to play in the renewables sector by growing and supplying bioenergy feed-stocks (biomass), as well as in the generation of renewable energy, through on-farm technologies (both for consumption on-farm and also potentially to be exported onto the grid.)

The key policy goals of the UFU Rural Enterprise Committee are to ensure that the NI renewables sector is competitive and sustainable, the supply of NI renewable energy is secure; and there is an adequate infrastructure in place to support the sector.

2010 was a busy year for the Rural Enterprise Committee. The Committee chairman attended a series of meeting in Brussels; UFU representatives met with SONI (Systems Operator Northern Ireland); met with NIE to discuss Electricity Grid Connection issues; pricing and time delays and at the end of 2010, UFU participated in the organization of the CAFRE-led "On-Farm Renewables" day at Greenmount.

In addition to these meetings, the UFU has participated in several influential groupings; DETI Renewable Heat Oversight Group; SMALLEST (Solutions for Microgeneration that Allow Energy Saving Technologies) led by University of Ulster and Action Renewables.

However, a key development happened when the UFU were invited to provide written and oral Evidence to NI Assembly Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee on "Barriers to the Development of Renewable Energy Production".

On the back of this the Rural Enterprise Committee has made significant progress as highlighted below:

- **Consultation Responses** - The UFU Rural Enterprise Committee has responded to a number of consultations, including: 'A Draft Strategic Energy Framework Directive'; 'Financial Incentives for Electricity'; 'Anaerobic Digestion – A Call for Evidence' and most recently "Electricity Connection Policy to the NI Distribution System".
- **ASFRE Report** – The UFU was a principle stakeholder in the Agricultural Stakeholder Forum on Renewable Energy (ASFRE) and was involved in compiling the ASFRE Report. This report has led to the revised Renewable Energy Action Plan and subsequent Biomass Challenge Fund.
- **Enhanced NI Renewable Obligation Certificates (NIROCs)** – The UFU lobbied for enhanced incentives for Microgeneration of renewable electricity. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 DETI introduced enhanced ROCs, for example wind generation can avail of 4 NIROCs up to 250kw. Currently, there is no additional support available for AD (Anaerobic Digestion). DETI have proposed 4 NIROCs up to 500kW and the UFU provided a full response in late 2010.

- **Introduction of key Government Directives** – The Strategic Energy Framework has set target of 40% of electricity and 10% of heat to come from renewable energy sources by 2020. UFU will play a central role in meeting the targets and lobby to ensure that money is returned not just to the rural economy but to wider Northern Ireland.

There have been a number of developments and successes but much work remains to be done and the UFU Rural Enterprise have set out the following Policy goals for 2011:

- The Bioenergy Action Plan findings identified Public Procurement as a driver. The UFU will be seeking that this is pursued and implemented. This is will be essential in the creation of the market because it will help supply chains to become established, raise awareness of the role agriculture can play in meeting sustainable targets and secure new income streams for rural communities.
- Raise awareness and understanding of the potential for renewable energy among farmers/landowners in order to enhance uptake and participation.
- Establishment of a Competence Centre for NI Renewables with an on-farm focus.
- Develop links with National Non-Food Crops Centre (NNFCC) and develop their role in NI.

If we are to achieve these policy goals, barriers to the development of Renewable Energy Production need to be addressed. These barriers, which were highlighted in our presentations to the NI Assembly ETI Committee and featured in a previous Commodity Watch, as yet remain unresolved. Only once they are addressed does the UFU believe that we start to further establishing a sustainable and effective Renewables industry in Northern Ireland.