

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT
UFU EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 29 JANUARY 2014**



It has been six weeks since our last Executive meeting and even with the Christmas and New Year break, the Union has been involved in a considerable amount of activity.

CAP REFORM

- Not long after our Executive finalised the UFU's position on DARD's CAP Direct Support implementation proposals on 17 December, the news emerged that there was to be no transfer of funds from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 in Northern Ireland – which comes into effect for this year.
- This decision was welcome as the Union's historic position was for no funding transfer and compared very favourably with the: Scottish 9.5%; English 12% (with a review in 2017); and Welsh 15% rates
- Our Executive had however agreed at our December meeting that some funds might need to have been transferred to fund the ANC and suckler cow support schemes which we had supported.
- A meeting of our Policy Chairs was then held at the beginning of January at which it was agreed that the Union's agreed package of proposals remained valid but that it was more important that match funding of the EU's allocation was provided by the NI Executive and also that the available funding would be prioritised to help deliver the objectives of the NI Food Strategy Board's 'Going for Growth' Report. Further funding from the NI Executive would also be necessary specifically for the Farm Business Improvement Scheme proposed by the AFSB and other NI Government Departments and local Councils must also provide separate funding for the provision of adequate services in rural areas.
- The Union very strongly believe that this can be delivered by our expected NIRDP budget and subsequently conveyed this clear message directly to DARD at two separate meetings shortly afterwards.
- The RoI Government continues to back its Agrifood industry both through significantly committing to co-financing its RDP and also confirming that the programme will prioritise Agrifood. (RoI food and drinks exports increased by a further 9% in 2012 now reaching over €10 billion and has grown by 40% since 2009).
- We have since formally submitted our response to the DARD Direct Support consultation which we also circulated to NI's politicians and wider industry organisations.
- Both myself and the Chief Executive were requested to attend a meeting of the Union's Fermanagh County Committee to specifically discuss the Union's position on CAP Direct Support reform.
- We have also now completed our series of six Presidential Area meetings attended by around 2,000 people in total at which CAP reform implementation was the key area of discussion with widespread support for the UFU's position.
- The Union has also acted to address the unjustifiable criticism directed at us during the past few weeks over our position on implementing CAP Reform.

FRESHWATER SUMMIT

- The UFU attended the NIEA Freshwater Summit, alongside the DOE Minister, where we presented the UFU's perspective on water quality.
- The UFU highlighted how farmers have risen to the challenge of the Nitrates Action Programme and, despite the complexity of the Programme, have delivered water quality results.
- We also highlighted the good work being carried out by farmers within Agri-Environment Schemes and the Manure Efficient Technology Scheme, which is also helping to improve overall water quality and stressed that farmers have invested heavily into their farm businesses over the years to improve water quality and it is important that this good work to date is recognised.

FARM SAFETY EVENT

- The UFU Leadership Team, Commodity and County Chair's, and Policy staff recently attended a farm safety event at Stormont organised by the NI Assembly Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development along with the Farm Safety Partnership (FSP).
- The event included farm safety demonstrations and an information session including a very moving personal account from a farm accident survivor.

MEETINGS WITH NI ENVIRONMENT AGENCY (NIEA) CHIEF EXECUTIVE

- At the beginning of this week the UFU hosted a series of meetings and a farm visit with NIEA's Chief Executive – Terry A'hearn.
- This gave us a great opportunity to cover a very wide range of issues on NIEA's interactions with the farming community and we are encouraged that he would prefer to deliver environmental outcomes using more of a 'partnership' type approach.

MEETINGS WITH NI MEPS

- The Union has recently met with Jim Nicholson and will be meeting with Diane Dodds tomorrow to cover a wide range of issues.

MAGHERAFELT BYPASS

- The Union was involved in a meeting earlier this week with Roads Service and affected landowners.
- In all of these cases, the Union's position is to ensure that adequate compensation is provided and that there is minimum disruption to the farming activities of the landowners involved.

SPRAYER OPERATOR ROADSHOWS

- The 2014 Operator Roadshows 'Activity and Coverage' are already underway and are being delivered jointly by the UFU and CAFRE at a range of locations around Northern Ireland.

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- 10 NRoSO CPD points and 6 BASIS Professional Register CPD points available for these courses

HGCA FARMHOUSE BREAKFAST

- Representatives from the UFU and other agri-food industry organisations were at Greenmount recently to champion local breakfast foods at this event.
- The breakfast is a collaborative venture supported by HGCA, DARD, CAFRE, UFU and Food NI with all ingredients being provided by local suppliers and was hosted in advance of HGCA's Farmhouse Breakfast Week (26th January – 1st February 2014), which encourages people to make time for breakfast and to take advantage of excellent home grown ingredients.

ARABLE CONFERENCE SUCCESS

- The 'Agronomy and Business Management Conference' for arable growers was also recently held at Greenmount.
- The conference was a huge success with CAP Reform topping the agenda and reflects the collaborative efforts of CAFRE, the UAS and the UFU to provide a programme that was well matched to the needs of the local arable crops industry.

NI GREENHOUSE GAS PARTNERSHIP MEETING

- The UFU joined the sub group Chairmen of the 'Greenhouse Gas Implementation Partnership' at a meeting with the DOE Minister to discuss the partnership approach that the agri-food industry are using to drive improved efficiencies on farms in NI which can have both a positive impact on business and the environment.
- Both the DOE Minister and the Chair of the UK Climate Change Committee, Lord Deben, have been impressed with the proactive approach the agri-food industry here has been taking over the past two years and see it as blueprint which other industries can follow.

UK GROCERIES CODE ADJUDICATOR

- Our Chief Executive attended a meeting in London at the beginning of last week where the UK's Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) Christine Tacon briefed representatives from a number of agri-food stakeholder groups of the progress achieved by her office since being appointed as the UK's supermarket adjudicator.
- The UFU was pleased to hear that the supermarkets are taking the role of the GCA very seriously and that cases have already been taken against a number of supermarkets which the GCA and her team are currently investigating.
- While the GCA couldn't go into the details of the complaints made, a report will be issued in June detailing all aspects of the work undertaken by the GCA and her team to date.

POTATO PRICES

- The UFU has called on all producers to market remaining potato stocks strongly over the coming weeks in order to secure a fair return for their quality produce and in addition be mindful of how their actions can actually influence the market price.

- Local merchants and packers also need to remember that there are plenty of good Quality Farm Quality Assured potatoes in NI at present and they too have an obligation to be working with their retailers large and small to promote local.

SUCCESSION PLANNING MEETINGS

- The series of CAFRE/UFU Succession Planning meetings 'Protecting your Assets' are still underway.
- So far 15 of these events have been held across all parts of Northern Ireland.

ILLEGAL TYRE DISPOSAL

- The UFU met with the Department of Environment policy branch to discuss the 'Used Tyre Disposal' enquiry which was commissioned by the NI Assembly's Environment Committee.
- The UFU outlined that they did not view this as a problem being associated with agriculture rather that farmers are often victims of illegal tyre disposal in rural areas and that Government should look to target their resources towards protecting those in rural areas from this illegal activity.

RENEWABLES

- The UFU along with Down District Farmers for Renewable Energy (DFFRE) met with the NI Environment Minister to discuss the possibility of a new direction for small scale renewables.
- The Minister was briefed on DFFRE's project proposal which seeks to set up a pilot scheme, in the Bishopscourt/Ardglass (Lecale) area, which would not only provide energy and heat to the local community, but would also become a UK reference site for energy storage and micro-grid technologies.
- With the ongoing capacity problems continuing to affect grid connection for small scale renewables in NI, the UFU firmly believes that this micro-grid solution is an alternative way forward and if successful, could be rolled out to other parts of the country enabling farmers to create community energy networks for their local areas, with much needed storage and distribution solutions.