



21<sup>st</sup> February 2020

Dear Declan,

We would like to put on record our thanks to you and the Committee for the invitation to give evidence on the future Agricultural Bill and in particular to afford time to discuss how and where Rural Development fits within this policy.

We wish to reiterate a few key messages and would welcome the opportunity to engage further with the Committee at a future date in relation to the progression of a new Rural Development policy and programme for Northern Ireland.

Key Messages: -

- Rural Development Programmes (RDP) have, for nearly 30 years, contributed extensively to the economic and social wellbeing of rural communities. These programmes have provided invaluable financial support to farmers, farm families, businesses and communities. They have benefitted from a ring-fenced budget, multi annual funding package and have fully embraced the 'bottom up' approach to engaging local people in the decision-making process.
- The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) framework provides a model of good practice in terms of working with other departments and in the piloting and testing of solutions to rural challenges. It does have limitations in terms of budget and operates on an annual basis which can make delivery very challenging.

We believe that opportunity now exists to shape a new Rural Framework for Northern Ireland drawing on the best practice and learning from both these programmes. We would also seek to ensure that we arrive at an ambitious, comprehensive and adequately resourced programme (at a minimum in line with the current RDP).

Thanks again for the opportunity to participate in discussions and we look forward to working with you and the Committee in the future.

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