

COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**TUESDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2015
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr William Irwin MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Joe Byrne MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson MLA
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson MLA
Mr Declan McAleer MLA
Mr Kieran McCarthy MLA
Mr Oliver McMullan MLA
Mr Ian Milne MLA
Mr Edwin Poots MLA
Mr Robin Swann MLA

In attendance: Ms Stella McArdle, Committee Clerk
Ms Lynda Conlon, Assistant Clerk
Mr Mark O'Hare, Clerical Supervisor
Ms Dagmar Walgraeve, Clerical Officer

1.38 p.m. The meeting commenced in Open Session.

1. Apologies

There are no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Delegated Powers Memorandum for the Rural Needs Bill to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for consideration.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA) to request that they encourage their members to ensure that the necessary written procedures are in

place to allow animals with a missing ear tag to be slaughtered without having to first obtain a replacement tag.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 03 November 2015

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft minutes of the meeting held on 03 November 2015.

4. Matters Arising

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister dated 03 November 2015 outlining her ongoing engagement with NIGTA and her position on the current EU legislative provisions surrounding medication in animal feeds and agreed that the letter should be forwarded to NIGTA.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister dated 04 November 2015 providing details of the first phase of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS) and agreed that the Committee should request that DARD provide an update on the scheme after the application closing date.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD dated 04 November 2015 providing details of the AFSB Food Supply Chain Forum held on 14 October 2015.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD dated 04 November 2015 providing an update on a proposal from the European Commission to provide for Member States to restrict or prohibit the sale and use of genetically modified food and feed products in all or part of their territory.

Noted: The Committee noted a Briefing Paper from the RalSe Research Officer providing an overview of the proceedings at the AFSB Food Supply Chain Forum held on 14 October 2015.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD dated 06 November 2015 providing a response to a request for further details of possible industry support measures available to farmers and their assessment of whether the support provided in Northern Ireland is on a par with that in other EU Member States.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the RalSe Research Officer conduct an initial scoping exercise to examine the feasibility of

ascertaining the level of industry support provided to farmers in each EU Member State.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from ASDA dated 06 November 2015 providing details of the prices paid to growers for carrots and turnips.

5. Oral Briefing Horticulture Forum: Industry Issues

The following representatives joined the meeting at 1.43 p.m.

Elaine Shaw, Chair, Horticulture Forum
Hamilton Loney, Chair, NI Fruit Growers Association
Pat Smyth, Member, UFU Vegetable Committee
Shane Donnelly, Member, Horticulture Forum

The representatives briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

1.49 p.m. *Mr Milne joined the meeting.*
1.49 p.m. *Mr McMullan joined the meeting.*
2.10 p.m. *Mr Byrne left the meeting.*
2.22 p.m. *Mr Poots joined the meeting.*
2.29 p.m. *Mrs Dobson joined the meeting.*
2.30 p.m. *Mr McAleer left the meeting.*
2.32 p.m. *Mr Anderson joined the meeting.*
2.42 p.m. *Mr Swann left the meeting.*

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the briefing provided by the Horticultural Forum to DARD to request that they respond to the points raised and to outline the specific support offered to the horticulture industry in NI.

2.47 p.m. *Mr Byrne rejoined the meeting.*

Agreed: The Committee agreed to raise the issue of the impact of the introduction of the National Living Wage on the horticulture sector at their meeting with the EFRA Committee on 18 November 2015.

2.50 p.m. *The Horticulture Forum representatives left the meeting.*

2.50 p.m. *Mr Anderson left the meeting.*

6. Oral Briefing UFU Pork and Bacon Committee: Industry Issues

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.50 p.m.

Ivor Ferguson, Deputy President, UFU
Jonny Cuddy, Chairman of the UFU Pork and Bacon Committee
Geoff Thompson, Policy Officer for Pigs, Poultry and Animal Health and Welfare, UFU

The representatives briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

2.52 p.m. Mr Anderson rejoined the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the need for transparency in the supply chain and the differential in price paid by processors to farmers in NI compared to those in GB at their meetings with the EFRA Committee and the Groceries Code Adjudicator on 18 November 2015.

3.12 p.m. Mr McCarthy left the meeting.

3.13 p.m. Mr Byrne left the meeting.

3.14 p.m. Mr McCarthy rejoined the meeting.

3.15 p.m. Mr Poots left the meeting.

3.15 p.m. Mr McAleer rejoined the meeting.

3.19 p.m. Mr Swann rejoined the meeting.

3.28 p.m. Mr Milne left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the issue of gaining access to the Chinese market at their meeting with the EFRA Committee on 18 November 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to encourage producers and retailers to meet with pig farmers to discuss the prices paid for their product.

3.36 p.m. The UFU representatives left the meeting.

7. Oral Briefing DARD: Increasing Maximum Penalties for Offences Committed under the Welfare of Animals Act 2011

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 3.36 p.m.

Jackie Robinson, Head of Animal Identification Legislation and Welfare Branch

John McConnell, Deputy Principal, Animal Identification Legislation and Welfare Branch
Andy McKnight, Department of Justice

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

3.37 p.m. *Mrs Dobson left the meeting.*
3.38 p.m. *Mr McAleer left the meeting.*
3.40 p.m. *Mr Milne rejoined the meeting.*
3.47 p.m. *Mr Poots rejoined the meeting.*

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DARD to request that they give consideration to banning the keeping of animals on land owned by individuals who have been convicted of an offence under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011.

3.58 p.m. *Mr Swann left the meeting.*

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DARD to request statistics on the number of cases taken under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 by DARD, the PSNI and the councils from April 2012 to date; the number of convictions secured; and the number of prison sentences imposed.

4.04 p.m. *Mr McCarthy left the meeting.*
4.06 p.m. *Mr McCarthy rejoined the meeting.*
4.06 p.m. *Mr McCarthy left the meeting.*
4.08 p.m. *Mr McCarthy rejoined the meeting.*
4.22 p.m. *Mr McMullen left the meeting.*
4.24 p.m. *The officials left the meeting.*

8. Oral Briefing DARD: Labelling

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 4.24 p.m.

Elaine McCrory, Assistant Director Agri-food Policy
Alan McCartney, Agricultural Inspector Grade I, Agri-food Inspection Branch
Sharon Gilmour, Food Standards Agency
Michael Jackson, Food Standards Agency

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

- 4.26 p.m. Mr Swann rejoined the meeting.
4.26 p.m. Mr McMullen rejoined the meeting.
4.33 p.m. Mrs Dobson rejoined the meeting.
4.34 p.m. Mr Anderson left the meeting.

Mrs Dobson declared an interest that her husband is a beef and cereal farmer.

- 4.47 p.m. Mr Anderson rejoined the meeting.
4.52 p.m. The officials left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Hansard of the briefing provided by DARD and DOJ officials on the increase in penalties under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 to the Committee for Justice, emphasising that while Members welcomed the increase in penalties, they had ongoing concerns about enforcement, the possibility that some individuals may be circumventing the Act, and the need to keep a register of those with disqualification or deprivation orders under the Act.

Agreed: The Committee approved the draft Press Release on the briefing provided by DARD and DOJ officials on the increase in penalties under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 to the Committee for Justice.

9. Written Brief DARD: November Monitoring Round

The Committee noted the paper from DARD on the November Monitoring Round, expressing concern that no additional bid was submitted for hardship funds for farmers currently experiencing financial difficulty as a result of the ongoing crisis.

10. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Department provide a summary of responses when the public consultation on the use of online as the primary channel for communicating and transacting between DARD and its customers is complete.

Noted: The Committee noted the second session of the European Parliament Office 'Meet your MEP' events on 13 November 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the written evidence submitted to the EFRA Committee Inquiry into Farmgate Prices in response to a call for evidence by the House of Lords EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee Inquiry into the Responses to Price Volatility.

11. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee approved the draft Press Release for the visit to London to meet with the Chair of the EFRA Committee and the Groceries Code Adjudicator.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

12. AOB

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DARD to request a briefing on the Young Farmers Scheme and the Department's decision to reject applications from those farmers using an accountant who is not a member of the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies.

13. Date and time of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development will take place on Tuesday 24 November 2015 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

5.03 p.m. Mr McMullan left the meeting.

5.04 p.m. The meeting adjourned.

William Irwin, Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Date

