

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

GOING FOR GROWTH REPORT: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

Published at 5.00 pm on Thursday 16 October 2014

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development) and Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): We wish to make a written statement to the Assembly to advise Members of the publication of the Executive's Response to the Agri-Food Strategy Board's *Going for Growth* report.

Agri-food is one of our most successful industries with a proven track record for growth. With sales of over £4 billion per annum, it is our largest manufacturing sector and accounts for over 10% of private sector employment. In recognition of this, the Programme for Government includes a commitment to develop a Strategic Action Plan for the Agri-Food sector to 2020.

In response to this commitment, we appointed the Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) chaired by Tony O'Neill, to make recommendations in respect of the growth targets, strategic priorities and actions to be included in that Plan. The AFSB published its report, *Going for Growth* in May 2013, setting challenging targets for the sector to grow sales by 60% to over £7bn, create 15,000 new jobs, grow sales outside NI by 75% to £4.5bn and to increase value added to £1 billion by 2020. Central to the success of *Going for Growth* and the achievement of those targets will be delivering on the AFSB's Strategic Vision to '*grow a sustainable, profitable and integrated Agri-food supply chain, focussed on delivering the needs of the market*'.

Since the publication of *Going for Growth*, Executive Departments and Agencies have considered its targets and recommendations, their response to these and the appropriate actions to take this forward.

The Executive agreed its formal Response to *Going for Growth* on 26 June 2014 and we are delighted to now announce that the agreed Response is being published today on the [DETI](http://www.detini.gov.uk)¹ and [DARD](http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/food/going-for-growth.htm)² websites.

In its Response, the Executive commends the ambitions of *Going for Growth* and welcomes its Strategic Vision and growth targets.

The Response highlights the Executive's key commitments to supporting delivery on the aims and objectives of *Going for Growth* and also contains a detailed action plan which outlines how Departments and Agencies will address over 80 recommendations that fall to the Executive to lead on. At a strategic level, the Executive has collectively agreed to give priority support to this sector

¹ <http://www.detini.gov.uk>

² <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/food/going-for-growth.htm>

and, in particular, proposals for a 'Farm Business Improvement Scheme' worth up to £250m, as recommended by the AFSB which will be taken forward as part of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. This support is very significant given the current challenging fiscal environment that all Departments face, and demonstrates our real commitment to the long-term sustainability of the agri-food sector.

Departments have already made progress on a number of fronts including:

- launching an Agri-Food Loan Scheme aimed at improving access to bank finance;
- deferring the introduction of charges for Export Health Certificates for meat and dairy products;
- launching a review of agri-food marketing and promotional activities to identify options for improved delivery;
- opening a third tranche of the Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme;
- commencing a major review of local business regulation (including regulation of elements of the Agri-Food sector);
- establishing a new government / industry Strategic Partnership to develop a long term strategy to eradicate TB from the local cattle population;
- launching a loan scheme to support the Sustainable Use of Poultry Litter;
- launching a joint all-island Chalara control strategy; and
- appointing a contact point at AFBI to advise academics and businesses on applications to EU R&D funding programmes, and increasing the number of DARD-funded postgraduates.

In considering how to progress the recommendations made by the AFSB, we agreed that Executive Colleagues would ensure that actions are built into the day to day activities of their Departments and reflected in Departmental Business Plans, ensuring that progress can be easily monitored and managed. In addition, DETI and DARD will ensure that the Agri-Food Strategy Board receives regular reports on progress against actions and targets to assist the Board in its advisory role. DETI and DARD will also report progress on a quarterly basis in respect of the Programme for Government Commitment.

Successful delivery of the AFSB's Vision will require the Executive and Industry to work together in partnership. We would like formally to record our thanks to the Chair and Board members for their time, effort and commitment in developing *Going for Growth*.

The Executive has shown its commitment to doing all that it can to support the sector in realising its ambitions and maximising its potential to our local economy, and we sincerely hope that everyone will play their part as we move forward into what we firmly believe will be an exciting future for the sector.