

Introduction

1 What is your name?

Name:

[REDACTED]

2 What is your email address?

Email:

[REDACTED]

3 If you are providing a submission on behalf of an organisation or business please state its name

Name of organisation or business :

Commercial Mushroom Growers (UK) Ltd

4 The Committee for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs would like your permission to publish your response as part of the survey results. Please indicate your preference.

Publish response

Agriculture Bill

Clause 1 – Aid in the fruit and vegetables sector (FVAS): amendment of CMO Regulation

5 Do you agree with the power's provided in this clause to allow the Department to continue with the FVAS on a discretionary basis only and to remove the current requirement for all eligible claims to be funded?

No

If no, please explain:

CMG do not agree with the proposal to continue with the FVAS on a discretionary basis and removing the current requirement for all eligible claims to be funded. As advised by DAERA, the review of the FVAS scheme is on-going and no decision has been made on its future. The above cannot happen until the review is complete and there is a clear plan laid out by DAERA on the future of Horticulture in Northern Ireland. Currently there is no plan, particularly for the mushroom sector and all indications are that existing funding could be removed from Horticulture and given to other sectors. CMG have been directed towards 3 new schemes "Sustainable Sector Growth Groups, Innovation Driver and Support and New Growers Academy" which are currently in development. Initial briefing on these 3 schemes suggests that they are of limited value to the mushroom sector and it has to be said, were developed with no consultation with the mushroom sector. Any decision taken on the above should only be made when the review of the existing FVAS scheme has been complete. It is also critical that full details of the 3 new schemes is provided to industry and a clear plan for Horticulture in Northern Ireland is development with industry. CMG want the term "discretionary" removed. This term means that future funding for horticulture will not be ring fenced, which is totally unacceptable. As stated many times, we are competing with the EU for market share and given the level of support they receive, to then remove the only support mechanism we have, will have a detrimental effect on the mushroom sector.

Clause 2 – Aid in the fruit and vegetables sector: power to modify

6 Do you agree with the power being conferred on the Department by Clause 2 to make regulations as described above?

No

If no, please explain further:

CMG does not agree with giving the Department the power to amend, repeal, or revoke legislation at this time. As advised by DAERA, the review of the FVAS scheme is on-going and no decision has been made on its future. The above power cannot be given until the review is complete and there is a clear plan laid out by DAERA on the future of Horticulture in Northern Ireland. Assurances need to be given on future funding levels and support for horticulture and as a minimum existing funding levels need to be ring fenced. Currently there is no plan, particularly for the mushroom sector and all indications are that existing funding could be removed from Horticulture and given to other sectors.

Clause 3 – Information provision and promotion measures: power to modify

7 Do you agree with the power being conferred on the Department by Clause 3?

No

If no, please explain further:

CMG are not familiar with this scheme, however would have the same concerns with this as we do with FVAS scheme as outlined above. The review of this scheme needs to be complete by DAERA and a clear plan laid out for the future use of this funding. A better understanding of this scheme needs to be provided and how it fits into the Food Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Clause 4 – Regulations

8 Do you agree that the regulations made under this Bill may contain the above wide-range of provision's?

No

If no, please explain further:

CMG do not agree with this as we have no detailed information on what "supplementary, incidental, consequential, transitional, transitory or saving provisions, and that such provision includes modification of any statutory provision" will be or how they will effect the mushroom and wider horticultural sector.

9 This clause also provides that regulations under the Bill can only be made following approval by the Assembly. Do you agree that the regulations in this Bill can only be made following approval by the Assembly?

Yes

If no, please explain further:

CMG do not agree with the regulation changes outlined, however agree that any changes to them requires approval by the assembly. This is to make sure that horticulture in Northern Ireland remains protected and that any proposed changes are fully debated and analysed in advance.

Clause 5 – Interpretation

10 This clause provides interpretation of terms used in the Bill, including that "modify" includes amend, repeal or revoke. Do you agree with the term 'modify' as interpreted in the Bill?

No

If no, please explain further:

CMG does not agree with term "modify" being included in the bill. CMG have questions over the bill and until such time the full review of the F&V scheme is complete, no power to modify can be given until there is a clear plan laid out by DAERA on the future of Horticulture in Northern Ireland. Assurances need to be given on future funding levels and support for horticulture and as a minimum existing funding levels need to be ring fenced. Currently there is no plan, particularly for the mushroom sector and all indications are that existing funding could be removed from horticulture and given to other sectors.

General

11 Do you feel that the Bill if enacted will have any direct costs to you or your organisation?

Yes

If yes, please explain further:

CMG believe that this bill will have direct costs for our company and it has already affected staffing within our organisation and some planned investments. It has created a level of uncertainty within the mushroom sector and as of 14/02/2025, we are no clearer to knowing if there will be an FAVS in Northern Ireland in 2026, or if the level of funding currently in place will be ring fenced. There is a real possibility that the proposed changes could reduce the level of funding to zero and as we have highlighted many times the 3 schemes we have been directed towards are not sufficient for the mushroom sector. It has to be said that while all this uncertainty is ongoing in Northern Ireland, our main competitors, some of which live only miles away have a restructured vibrant scheme that encourages investment and growth.

Producer Organisations (PO)

12 Are you or your organisation currently a member of a Producer Organisation (PO)?

Yes

13 If no, have you ever been a member?

Not Answered

If yes, please explain why you or your organisation left the PO :

N/A

14 If no, would you ever consider becoming a member of a PO?

Not Answered

If no, please explain your reasons :

N/A