

North South Ministerial Council  
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta  
Thuaidh Theas  
An Chomhrúnaíocht

## **PAPER NSMC AGR 1 (16) JC**

### **NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

### **AGRICULTURE MEETING**

### **NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH**

**20 JANUARY 2016**

### **JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**

1. The twenty fifth North South Ministerial Council Agriculture meeting was held in Armagh on 20 January 2016. The meeting was attended by Michelle O'Neill MLA, Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Simon Hamilton MLA, Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Agriculture Food and the Marine and Ann Phelan TD, Minister of State Environment, Community and Local Government. Minister O'Neill chaired the meeting.

#### **OPENING REMARKS**

2. Ministers discussed the recent floods and the steps being taken in both jurisdictions to deal with the problems created for farmers and rural communities.

#### **PRICE VOLATILITY**

3. Ministers discussed recent price volatility issues being experienced by all sectors of the agricultural industry and measures to help farmers and the food industry to cope with volatility.

## **PRESENTATION ON NORTH SOUTH CO-OPERATION ON DAIRY EXPORTS**

4. The NSMC welcomed the presentation by Dr McNamee, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, outlining the co-operation between both jurisdictions on dairy product certification which underpins and facilitates market access for dairy products from across the island. The North South Group, which works to deliver an approach to dairy product certification, should meet on a more formal basis.

## **REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME**

5. The Council noted the current work programme and agreed that it remains current and enables practical and effective cooperation for mutual benefit in the Agriculture sector and agreed that the work programme will be kept under review.

## **EU FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

6. The NSMC welcomed the ongoing collaboration between DARD and DAFM aimed at maximising drawdown of EU funding under Horizon 2020, Societal Challenge 2, the EU's competitive programme for research and innovation, which is seen as a means to drive economic growth and create jobs. They also welcomed the fact that a total of €16.8m in funding had been secured to date in successful applications from both jurisdictions including 3 successful collaborative applications.
7. Ministers noted that officials are also examining other opportunities for funding collaborative research projects including those under the US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership.

## **CO-OPERATION ON FARM SAFETY**

8. The Council noted that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) are united in their commitment to improve farm safety, in support of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI), with a view to minimising the risk to those working on farms and thereby reducing the incidence of injury and death on farms.
9. Ministers welcomed the significant sharing of information on farm safety which is on-going between officials from both jurisdictions and the formation of a new North South Farm Safety Group (NSFSG), on 3 September 2015, comprising of officials from both jurisdictions. The Group will meet bi-annually to discuss areas of collaboration regarding farm safety and will seek opportunities to develop new joint initiatives and continue to work together to further increase the awareness of farmers to the dangers on farms with a view to reducing fatalities and serious injury in the farming industry.
10. Ministers noted that the NSFSG has agreed to share intelligence on farm safety such as research material and grant scheme development specifications and that a very successful 'All Island Farm Safety Conference' took place on 5 November 2015 in Monaghan organised jointly by the HSA and the HSENI.

11. The Council agreed that officials will provide an update on the work of the North South Farm Safety Group and the Farm Safety Partnerships at a future NSMC Agriculture Meeting.

### **COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP) ISSUES**

12. Ministers noted the significant progress made by DARD and DAFM on the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms agreed in 2013 including the current position with regard to Rural Development Programmes which were adopted by the European Commission during Summer 2015 and the determination of DARD and DAFM to implement European Commission proposals for CAP simplification and push for further simplification where appropriate.
13. The Council also noted the continuing close contacts between officials from DARD and DAFM on the new Area of Natural Constraints (ANC) provisions and also on a range of CAP Reform implementation issues.

### **CO-OPERATION ON ANIMAL HEALTH**

14. The NSMC welcomed the continued work on the delivery of the 'All-Island Animal Health & Welfare Strategy Action Plan' since the previous NSMC Agriculture meeting, held on 25 February 2015.

Key points noted included:

- (i) The granting of Officially Brucellosis Free (OBF) status to the north by the EU Commission. Both jurisdictions now have OBF status. DARD and DAFM Ministers announced the abolition of pre-movement test requirements in September 2015. Arising from this decision, routine on-farm testing has been discontinued in the south. In the north, the age at which animals are subject to a routine test increased from 12 to 24 months in October 2015 and in November 2015 the frequency with which dairy herds are tested decreased to some 20% of herds each year for the next 5 years, although bulk milk testing will continue. Biennial testing for beef herds will continue for another two years and over the subsequent 3 years approximately a third of beef herds will be tested each year. It is hoped that changes to pre-export tests to Britain and other Member States will be introduced early this year.
- (ii) On-going co-operation continues between both jurisdictions as evidenced by the co-operation during the investigations into the BSE case in County Louth in 2015, enhanced co-operation on contingency planning for disease outbreaks, liaison on national and EU animal welfare legislation, animal identification and progress on the data sharing project.
- (iii) Agreement has recently been reached on a joint tender for CO<sub>2</sub> for whole house gassing in the event of an avian disease outbreak on any part of the island.
- (iv) The introduction of legislation from March 2016 will implement a compulsory BVD scheme in the north.

## **CO-OPERATION ON PLANT HEALTH AND PESTICIDES**

15. Ministers noted that the DARD/DAFM Plant Health Sub Group have made significant progress in the area of plant health policy review and development. The 'All Ireland Chalara Control Strategy' is being reviewed and revised by the DARD/DAFM Plant Health Sub Group in response to ongoing scientific and surveillance evidence.
16. The Council welcomed the continued significant ongoing cross-border co-operation in dealing with tree and plant health and in the regulation of the use of pesticides and the joint approach in the areas of EU funding and future sharing of science and diagnostic capability.

## **CO-OPERATION ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

17. The NSMC noted the adoption by the European Commission of DARD's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 on 25 August 2015 and of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 on 26 May 2015. These Programmes provide for investments in general rural development activities, under the social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development priority, in each jurisdiction of £80M and €250M respectively.
18. Ministers also noted the increased level of meaningful co-operation across both jurisdictions and agreed that DARD and DECLG organise a LEADER Cooperation event to be held in 2016 to encourage co-operation between Local Action Groups from all Regions of the UK and Ireland.
19. Ministers welcomed the opening of a new Social Farming Support Service in Cookstown to complement the existing Support Office in County Leitrim and noted progress on the CEDRA-funded Social Farming grant scheme.
20. The Council noted DARD's involvement in the EU Northern Periphery & Arctic Programme - The RYE Connect Project and welcomed the transnational opportunities it offers to young rural entrepreneurs in both jurisdictions who wish to start or have already started their own business.

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

21. The Council agreed to hold the next Agriculture meeting in Autumn 2016.

**Joint Secretariat**  
**20 January 2016**

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