



**ULSTER
FARMERS'
UNION**

**UFU 2024
GENERAL ELECTION
MANIFESTO**

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**PRIORITIES FOR
FARM FAMILIES AND
THE RURAL COMMUNITY**



1. Farm Support & Development Budget

Mission Statement 'To serve its members by promoting and supporting a vibrant and sustainable rural economy where agriculture is secure and pivotal to its future.'

The Ulster Farmers' Union

Founded in 1918, the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) is the largest democratic voluntary organisation representing over 12,000 farming families in Northern Ireland (NI), across all agricultural sectors.

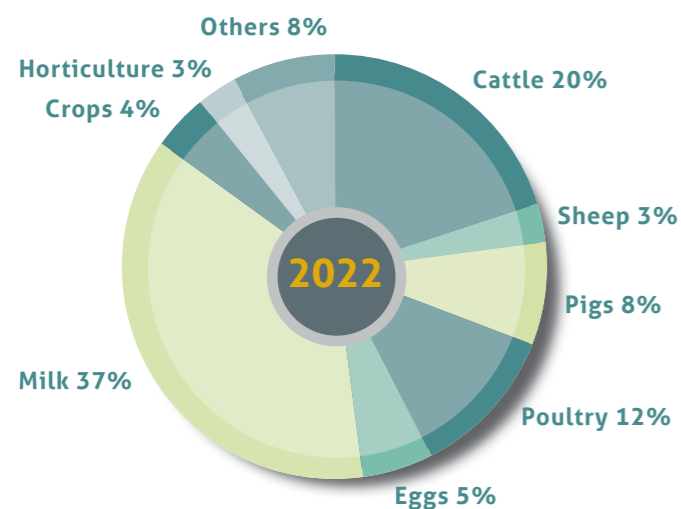
- Our central objective is to promote their interests both at home and abroad through professional lobbying.
- The UFU represents agriculture and wider rural issues, working with politicians, organisations and other groups locally, in the UK and EU to ensure that the interests of farm families and the wider rural community are advanced.

Why Agri-Food & the Rural Community Matters

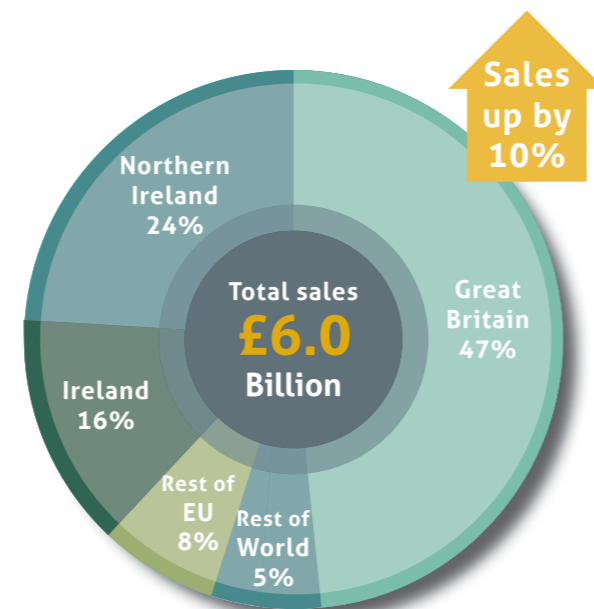
- The UFU has a vision of a sustainable, productive, profitable and progressive farming sector which can deliver for the environment; for the consumer; and the economy.
- NI has over 670,000 people, over a third (36%) of the population living in rural areas (DAERA, 2021).
- As well as growing and producing the high quality, healthy food that we all eat and enjoy, NI farmers and growers are custodians of our iconic countryside and leaders in promoting animal welfare standards.
- We underpin the food and drink industry, helping to contribute to the overall 113,000 jobs in agri-food, making a fundamental contribution to our economy while supporting rural and urban communities.

Our Ask

- That the ring-fenced annual Farm Support and Development budget for NI is increased to match inflation's current impact. Since leaving the EU in 2020, the monies provided annually to NI by HMT to replace the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was £329.4m. This has been held constant in cash terms since 2020 which by the end of 2023 would need to be £389m annually (CPI inflation calculator) to be constant in real terms compared to 2020.
- In addition, financial commitments from the UK Government are needed beyond a Parliamentary term to a minimum of 10 years that are also adjusted to match the future rate of inflation.



Gross output of NI Agriculture



Destination of sales

- DAERA (2021). Rural Policy Framework for NI.
- Gross Output of NI agriculture 2022 graphic - NISRA (2023). Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture 2022. DAERA.
- Destination of sales graphic - NISRA (2023). Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing Report 2021.

Our Story

- NI farm families have a proud story to tell, however we do recognise the changing circumstances in which we farm.
- Farm families share the same desires of the entire communities of NI to do our utmost to farm in a responsible and sustainable way. There is a desire for agriculture to do our bit to protect the environment, including Lough Neagh.
- The proposed focus of the future NI agricultural policy on active farmers and growers is extremely positive. However, all sectors must be supported, including sheep and attractive financial incentives provided for the next generation of farm families who want to continue to farm the land.
- **We are moving in the right direction** with the intended establishment of a Sustainability body, the NI Soil Nutrient Health Scheme; the Ruminant Livestock Genetics Programme; and the NI Whole Farm Carbon Foot Printing Programme; Farming with Nature Package and new support for Horticulture.



Funding

It is essential that farmers are equipped with the right tools to become more sustainable and efficient, delivering positive outcomes and maximising returns while also protecting the environment and meeting climate change needs.

Analysis of inflation figures concludes that the current annual Farm Support and Development budget should be closer to **£389 million** than the current figure of **£330 million**.

With NI farm families providing the backbone to the rural fabric of the Northern Irish economy, the UK Treasury should view NI's allocation of the £3 billion provided to UK farm families as money well spent that provides a return on investment not only in economic terms but also through social and environmental terms.

Farm families understand the pressures of the current cost of living crisis and the general lack of UK funds. However, we do acknowledge and support the desire of environmental groups and others to see this funding significantly increased throughout the UK. A report for the RSPB, the National Trust and The Wildlife Trusts in 2023 showed that current schemes fall short of what is required and outlined that at least £4.4 billion per year is needed by the UK and devolved governments over the next decade (Rayment, 2023).

To be able to continue on this positive path we ask that a new approach is taken to the funding model.

The UK Government should commit to regularly reviewing the financial situation of the industry throughout the UK.

JUST TRANSITION FUND

- The NI Climate Change Act 2022 brought into law the need for a just transition fund to provide financial assistance and advice for the agricultural community in order to achieve legislative targets contained within the act.
- Whilst UFU supports the principles of a just transition, delivery of a just transition fund for farmers and rural communities including commitments for an additional new budget for the Just Transition fund for Agriculture must be additional to the current Farm Support and Development budget and simply not a replacement and renaming of current funds.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

- Whilst having the ability to design policies tailored to the needs of each part of the UK post the ending of monies going to farm families through the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), we have lost the security of longer-term funding that the EU policy provided.
- Through using the post-Brexit positive, funding must be committed to by the government for longer than parliamentary terms.
- Farm families make business decisions on a long-term basis, hence the need for funding to match such timescales.
- The UFU proposes this is at a very minimum 10-year inflation-proof commitment.

2. The UK's relationship with Europe

Our Ask

- That the next UK Government urgently seeks a Sanitary & Phytosanitary (SPS)/ Veterinary Agreement between the entire UK and EU, based on the principles of equivalence and alignment.

Brexit

Significant progress has been made over outstanding issues between the UK and EU post-Brexit under the agreement and rollout of the Windsor Framework. However, many Brexit issues remain unresolved, with the added threat of divergence for NI between GB and the EU now a reality for many sectors in agriculture.

Current Brexit Issues

- Access to Veterinary Medicines
- Livestock Movements NI-GB-NI
- Access to arable/horticulture seed varieties movements GB-NI

Ongoing Divergence Issues

- GB-NI= Organic Egg Regulations
- UK-EU= Precision Breeding (UK) Vs New Genomic Techniques (EU Version)
- NI-EU-GB= Plant Protection Products



Urgent priorities

Veterinary medicines

1. The Veterinary Medicine Working Group should be re-established whatever the result of the UK general election.
2. The UK and EU should urgently agree a long-term permanent solution ranging from alignment to equivalence of standards that safeguards veterinary medicine access from GB to NI for farmed and companion animals and does not increase costs for owners, NI access to the EU single market, and that respects both the goodwill and intentions of the UK Government and EU Commission.



Plant Protection Products (PPP)

1. What is needed is high level government recognition of the significant issues facing access to PPP for farmers and growers.
2. The next UK Government should provide a clear pathway to resolve this issue and conduct an impact assessment identifying EU, GB and NI PPP withdrawals and renewals is required, identifying a clear pathway for timely flow of PPP into NI.

An integrated set of islands

- NI finds itself in a privileged position.
- Access to the EU single market is a lifeline for NI agriculture.
- Equally our trade relation NI-GB-NI is another lifeline under pressure by the post-Brexit arrangement and divergence. The UK should undertake regular analysis of divergence in relation to agri-food between NI, England, Scotland, and Wales, producing common frameworks and action plans to mitigate divergence impact.
- Whilst NI remains outside of the EU and continues to trade into the EU single market, we will encounter problems and issues around divergence and its various forms, a reality that the UK or EU can no longer afford to ignore.
- Our members accept the principles of EU law applying in NI in order to trade into the single market. However, we do not accept the current democratic deficit. Whilst progress has been made to address the deficit, this progress is limited if an SPS/Veterinary arrangement is not agreed urgently.

The UFU position

- The UFU has a longstanding position that the UK Government should seek a Sanitary & Phytosanitary (SPS)/Veterinary Agreement between the entire UK and EU. This is the only way forward to deal with the trade and democratic deficit problems associated with NI's position with the EU post-Brexit.
- The review of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) during 2025 is the prime opportunity to seek such an arrangement, with benefits for businesses and the wider society in not only the Republic of Ireland and other EU Member States.

3. Providing food and energy for the Nation

Our Ask

- That legislative targets are introduced to safeguard current domestic food production in the UK, including NI's role in feeding over 10 million people.
- That the UK Government provides long-term goals for farm families to enable them to feed the nation through increasing UK food security by 2050 whilst achieving UK Net Zero and realising the potential for on-farm renewables to assist in providing energy for the nation.

The UFU's position



- We sadly live in a starving, uncertain and dangerous world, with global populations predicted to hit nearly 10 billion by 2050.
- UFU has always supported the need for a climate change (CC) legislation to reduce emissions across all sectors however our members are deeply concerned about the resulting NI CC Act which goes beyond the original UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) advice.
- Local farmers can and must be part of the climate change solution. However, the industry must not be decimated by poor policy and legislative decisions.
- With 7000 fewer agricultural registered businesses since 2019 in England, NI's role as a food producer for the UK becomes even more important

Legislation

Legislation must be introduced to safeguard the UK's domestic food and energy supply. Food and energy security = National security. The UK Government can achieve this through introducing FOOD & ENERGY Initiatives.

Food

1. Putting food security and achieving UK Net Zero on an equal basis, with already having a UK wide Net Zero target by 2050, so must we have food security target on the same timeframe.
2. Hold annual food security summits in Downing Street.
3. Have access to adequate labour for farmers, growers and the wider agri-food sector and promote the positives of immigration to the UK.
4. Ensure trade deals result in produce arriving in the UK is sourced only from countries with similar standards.
5. Encourage growth of local produce within domestic public procurement.

Energy

1. Accelerate NI Energy Policy, overhaul of planning policy in relation to renewables and realise the potential.
2. Introduction of a support scheme which will benefit small scale renewables.
3. Action to make available more capacity on-grid for small scale renewables.
4. Move to a shallower charging regime for grid connection on a par with that recently introduced in GB.
5. Fair and appropriate resolution for NI Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) participants.
6. Ensure the role NI land-based renewable businesses is acknowledged with a much-needed level playing field and restore our competitiveness.

Investment

1. A public and private sector resourced science fund for agriculture, to provide new solutions to agri-food's many agricultural and environmental challenges for the benefit of all UK farm families.
2. Improve the basis of land tenure, encouraging additional options to the annual 'conacre' land letting system under which approximately one-third of NI's agricultural area is farmed to provide adequate opportunities for the next generation to become the farmers of tomorrow.
3. Introduce tax exemptions for landowners to encourage longer-term leasing and rental arrangements similar to the ROI.

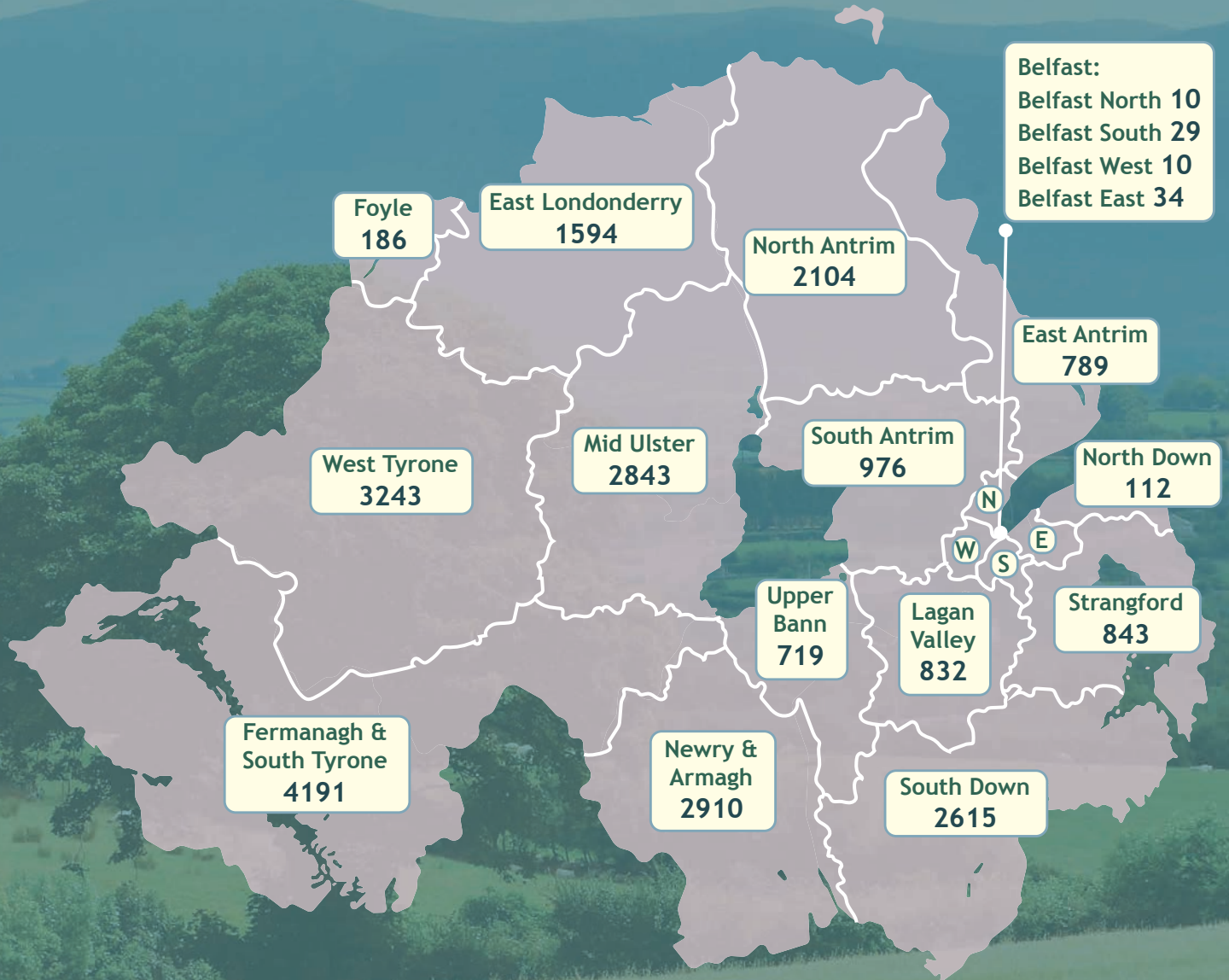
Devolved government

The role of devolved government is also essential in delivering this UFU request. If elected NI MPs should also lobby and encourage political colleagues in the NI Executive and Assembly who hold the power to legislate on key matters that will aid the effort of NI farm families to produce food and energy for the nation.

The NI Executive and Assembly:




1. **Must legislate to introduce meaningful wildlife intervention without delay.** It is recognised that the strategy for eradicating Bovine TB in NI must change to address this persistent and costly disease. Fundamental to this is the need to tackle the disease in all hosts.
2. **Deliver a balanced Ammonia Strategy that allows farmers to develop their businesses and deliver ammonia reductions** otherwise, agri-businesses, consumers, the rural economy and communities, will be severely affected. Any steps taken to tackle ammonia emissions in NI must not, however, threaten the sustainability of the agricultural sector in NI.
3. **Must back our calls to at least maintain the current level of agricultural output in NI by improving production efficiencies and reject forced livestock cuts.**

2023 BPS claimants by Parliamentary Constituency in NI



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