

IN CONFIDENCE

COVID19 DAERA Meeting With Industry Representatives

Via Conference Call – 27 January 2021 at 12:30pm

Chaired by Brian Doherty (DAERA)

Industry and Associated Stakeholders: (not exclusively) Dairy; Beef; Poultry; Fisheries; Pork; Retail; Food Standards Agency; NI Food and Drink Association; NI Grain Trade Association; NI Meat Exporters Association; Dairy UK; Manufacturing; Freight; Invest NI; NIAPA; UFU; LMC; DAERA Officials

Information from the meeting should be treated as in confidence.

Actions Update:

AP1 6/1/21 – DAERA reported that DfI had extended Driver working hours up to 12 Feb 2021.

AP2 6/1/21 – DAERA reported that the livestock movement issues raised at the previous meeting had been relayed to VSAGH colleagues and work is ongoing.

AP3 6/1/21 – DAERA reported they are engaging with DoH and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC London) on the UK rollout of Lateral Flow Testing and are keen to support it in NI. They will discuss this further with stakeholders and are considering a meeting next week with them and DoH officials. DAERA will also disseminate information on webinars being run by DHSC (London).

Action Point: DAERA to circulate information on DHSC Lateral Flow Testing webinars.

AP4 6/1/21 – NIFDA reported that a meeting took place with FSA regarding EFSA the EFSA standards issue and discussion is ongoing. Stated that there is a need to get clarity and resolve any conflict between UK and EU standards in the longer term.

Action Point: NIFDA/FSA to bring forward an update on the EFSA standards issue in 4-6 weeks.

Summary of main live issues (as raised at previous meetings):

1. Live issues covered in Action Points above.

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Summary of new points raised:

1. **NIAPA – Covid19** – Reported members concern regarding the level of COVID19 in the community, and in particular the Mid Ulster area which has one of the highest rates in the UK. Also noted concern regarding increasing costs for farmers for supplies, including feed and steel. Noted positive comments regarding the farm gate prices for produce, including beef, sheep and dairy, although this is impacted by the high cost of feed.

EU Exit – Raised continuing concern regarding movement of livestock from GB to NI and requested an update on the current position. Also requested an update on the current position regarding use of foreign labour.

Action point: DAERA to request an update from VSAGH regarding livestock movement from GB to NI.

Action point: DAERA to provide an update regarding migrant labour.

2. **NIMEA: COVID19** – Welcomed the update on Lateral Flow Testing and noted there is some interest within the meat processing sector in participating.

EU Exit - Reported that they had been involved in a meeting with DAERA officials providing an update on livestock movement issues. Reported concerns regarding cattle potentially having to be retagged and freeze-branded which could have a detrimental impact on traceability and animal welfare. Also noted that cattle coming into NI from GB would have to be tested for TSE and sheep for scrapie.

3. **NI Pork and Bacon: COVID19** – Reported that the sector is managing well in relation to COVID19 cases and keeping plants operating, although noted concern regarding the high rate of infection in the areas where processing plants are located. Noted that meat plants in ROI and UK are seeing more cases among employees. Reported that one plant in Scotland has closed temporarily as a result of an outbreak which could also have an impact upon culled sows. Noted that in general the current situation is wearing on people, with some feeling isolated but paid tribute to processing plants for keeping going. Also welcomed the update on Lateral Flow testing and will consider further communications on it.

EU Exit – In relation to haulage raised concerns regarding journey times into France and Holland which have increased from 3-4 days to 5-6 days as a result of teething problems with new border import requirements.

4. **UFU: COVID19** – Reported that produce is moving well off farm but concern in relation to the build-up of culled sows on farm. In relation to the Potato COVID19 support scheme, reported concerns from some growers who increased their acreage of crops last year, were unable to claim for the increase due to the scheme rules capping claims based on sales receipts in previous years. Also reported concerns of potato growers regarding the closure of the schools and service sector at present which could give rise to similarly reduced demand for produce in the

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year ahead. Reported on the continuing request from the wool sector for financial support towards 2020 losses and noted that a meeting with the Minister has been arranged for next week (1 Feb) to discuss the issue further.

Reported that farm gate prices across beef, sheep and dairy were good but that increases in other expenses, including feedstuffs and labour as a result of having to bring workers in to cover COVID19 cases. Reported that farmers are not seeing the benefit of increased farm gate prices due to the increasing production costs.

EU Exit – Reported concern that suppliers of second hand farm equipment will not supply NI due to the new requirements and gave an example of where this is likely to result in the closure a local business. Reported continuing concern regarding movement of pedigree livestock from GB to NI, commenting that if ID tags have to be removed and replaced it will impact on the traceability of animals and lead to extra costs for producers.

5. **NIGTA: COVID19** – Reported that it is still a struggle to keep plants staffed and maintain production levels as normal. Noted appreciation for the support in securing the Drivers Hours extension but commented that it will need to be reviewed with a further extension request likely. DAERA stated that DfI will only consider requests submitted using the template previously submitted.

Action point: NIGTA/DAERA to revise and resubmit Drivers Working Hours extension request to DfI.

Noted that feed prices have been an issue recently but were hopeful that some logistical issues will be resolved in the next few weeks. However noted there will be ongoing issues for some time to come for which there will be no quick solution.

6. **DAIRY: COVID19** – Reported that since the last meeting absenteeism in the sector has improved and levels are now similar to normal levels. Noted that product is moving well both off farm and from processing plants.
7. **LMC: COVID19** – Reported concerns regarding the ongoing closure of the food service sector. Also reported that the cattle kill in the ROI for the year is expected to be lower than the previous year. Prices are steady but there are a lot of variables that could affect it. Noted that ongoing communications are key and highlighted that the livestock movement issue could have an impact on the sector.
8. **NIFDA: COVID19** – Welcomed the update on Lateral Flow Testing. Also reported on an announcement from the Welsh Assembly of a Capital Grants Scheme for Food processors and noted concern that there is currently no similar support available within NI.
9. **NI Environment Link: COVID19** – Reported that some of the usual impacts of COVID19 on the environment sector continue and noted concerns regarding the delay to the UK Environment Bill.

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10. **Retail NI: COVID19** – Noted that with the current COVID restrictions members in the food supply sector are once again in the frontline and it continues to be a challenge for retailers. Reported that they have raised with FM/DFM the possibility of frontline food supply workers being prioritised within the vaccination programme when they are considering the next priorities.

EU Exit – Reported that the current situation is a challenge and they are working through the problems as they arise. Reported that there are less empty shelves in shops but there are still a lot of technical questions regarding some products. Reported that the range of products available has reduced by 5-10% due to some delays in supply chain but stock levels remain high. Noted concern regarding the end of the grace period at the end of March and that there would be challenges to deal with.

DAERA noted that it was positive that products were still flowing and stated that officials would continue to engage with the sector.

AOB

11. **DAERA COVID19 Update** - DAERA noted that the Minister has already made a case for prioritisation of Agri-Food Sector workers within the vaccination programme and will continue to do so.
12. **Next Meeting:** Scheduled for Wednesday 10 February 2021 (12.30pm).

ACTIONS:

1. **DAERA to circulate information on DHSC Lateral Flow Testing webinars.**
2. **NIFDA/FSA to bring forward an update on the EFSA standards issue in 4-6 weeks.**
3. **DAERA to request an update from VSAGH regarding livestock movement from GB to NI.**
4. **DAERA to provide an update regarding migrant labour.**
5. **NIGTA/DAERA to revise and resubmit Drivers Working Hours extension request to DfI.**

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