

**01-01-19NM**

**New Year message from LMC CEO**

The past year has no doubt been a challenging one for the Northern Ireland beef and lamb industry and it's easy to become disheartened and frustrated by the current political turmoil, however the industry has proven its resilience to respond to disruptive events over the years and will continue to adapt to its operating environment.

Unsurprisingly, industry conversation throughout 2018 was dominated by Brexit and what the outcome of the current negotiations will mean for Northern Ireland beef and lamb. It has been difficult for local businesses to forward plan and to implement investment decisions with the uncertainty posed by future trading relationships, labour availability, agricultural support arrangements and access to markets.

Although a withdrawal agreement has still to be agreed by UK and EU politicians, Northern Ireland's food and farming sectors have collectively issued their support to the proposed withdrawal terms, which would allow for meaningful negotiations to take place on future EU/UK relationships, and avoid the alternative no-deal scenario which would devastate our local industry. Despite the uncertainty the past 12 months has caused, industry has worked hard to continue to service its many customers around the world with the high quality produce they have come to expect.

This dedication and hard work resulted in some welcome news regarding the development of new export market opportunities over the summer, which is a main priority for the industry pre and post Brexit. For the first time since 1996, the first shipment of Northern Irish beef arrived in the Philippines and after over 20 years, China lifted its BSE export ban on UK beef. Gaining access to new export markets is a major priority and something LMC, alongside other UK levy bodies and government departments, are working collectively to achieve. Considerable growth in world meat consumption is forecast in the years ahead, particularly in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa and growing exports to third countries will be a key factor in balancing UK and EU markets.

Elsewhere, the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIBL FQAS), owned and managed by LMC, also saw some changes last year. After a comprehensive review by the Standard Setting Committee, made up of various stakeholders, the scheme's new Standard and Rules went live in June 2018. In aiming to ensure our scheme continues to meet the needs of our industry customers, the review led to enhancements in four of the key areas of focus. These were namely: farm safety, animal health, responsible use of rodenticides and the use of agrochemicals and plant protection products.

We've long since known that our beef and lamb is a premium product and our FQA scheme is widely respected and is known for its quality produce. Our mission going forward is to ensure that our

scheme, coupled with our industry's high standards and reputation will go a long way to opening up further global market opportunities for our premium quality beef and lamb products.

For a number of years, LMC has devoted a large proportion of its work to educating post-primary school pupils across Northern Ireland on the merits of eating beef and lamb as part of a balanced diet. Last year 330 school cookery demonstrations were carried out and between September 2018 and March 2019, LMC are hoping to build on that success and deliver 350 demonstrations.

Aside from school pupils, we also host red meat workshops for Home Economics teachers and we have also begun working alongside PGCE students as well to help develop their confidence when cooking with beef and lamb.

Looking ahead LMC's priority will be to continue work on the development and promotion of the Northern Ireland red meat industry and to ensure that our red meat products retain their premier position as the quality protein of choice by consumers. Whilst the UK and EU will remain key markets, we will continue to pursue export certification to the widest range of worldwide markets so that our industry can add most value to every technical component of the animal which can be sold.

**ENDS**