LMC Livestock & Meat Commission
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Opportunity beckons for Northern Ireland's red meat sectors

The past number of weeks have seen representatives from the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) attend a number of events, the focus of which was the myriad opportunities that are fast-evolving to drive forward the consumption of high-quality beef and lamb products.

"This has both local and international dimensions," LMC Chief Executive, Colin Smith explained. "The recent Anuga Food & Beverage Trade Fair, held in Germany, provided a platform to benchmark Northern Ireland's marketing strategies against global red meat producers. I was delighted that DAERA Minister, Andrew Muir MLA, DAERA's Head of Food, Farming & Rural Affairs, Martin McKendry and a delegation from the Ulster Farmers' Union were able to join the LMC group at the event as guests. It was a valuable opportunity to demonstrate to key stakeholders how red meat is being marketed globally."

He continued, "We must not rest on our laurels. Around the world significant investment is already underway as countries seek to capitalise on any opportunity that might exist to further develop their own red meat sectors through increased access to the UK market. Uruguay is a case in point. The Uruguayan beef industry used Anuga as a precisely crafted opportunity to showcase to global buyers and opinion formers the key principles that underpin its red meat sector. These are: the optimal use of grazed grass, the predominant use of high-quality Aberdeen Angus and Hereford genetics, the attainment of the highest possible animal welfare standards and a fully proven animal traceability system that is free from hormones and antibiotics. Uruguay is only one country of many committed to this messaging. Producers across South America, Australia and New Zealand all make similar claims to those of UK companies when marketing their red meat products."

UFU Delegation in attendance at Anuga 2025.

Innovation is required to meet Consumer's needs

So, the question quickly becomes: how does the red meat sector in Northern Ireland respond to these developments in ways that deliver that all important competitive edge?

The Anuga exhibition was followed by an Invest NI-hosted conference later in October, which specifically addressed changing consumer patterns in Northern Ireland.

The conference, which was held in Londonderry, featured presentations from several organisations with specific expertise in monitoring consumer trends. These included: Mintel, dunnhumby – a global leader in consumer data science – and Lumina Intelligence.

A number of key consumer trends were revealed at the event:

Where the Gen Alpha age grouping is concerned (0 -14-year-olds), 65% of parents are worried about their children getting enough nutrients.

Attendees discussed the importance of a balanced diet when one speaker noted that significantly, 10% of children in England start primary school obese and 20% leave obese.

In the case of the Gen Z age grouping (15 – 28-year-olds), there is an increasing focus on nutrition and fitness, weight loss and optimising protein consumption. Younger age groups are interested in functional foods that meet their specific nutritional needs.

Meanwhile, 20% of Millennials (29 – 44-year-olds) have tried weight loss drugs. Within this age group, there is also strong evidence of mental health worries coming to the fore with 'mood boosting' foods doing well.

Mintel has also noted that, among UK adults aged 18-34 years who are managing their weight, 48% have either used prescription weight loss drugs in the past year or are interested in doing so.

As we progress through the ages, research indicates that Gen X consumers (46–60-year-olds) are becoming more aware of their mortality. As a consequence, they are much more considered in terms of what they eat.

And finally, the baby boomer generation, of whom there are 13 million in the UK 'hate' ultra-processed and artificial foods. In addition, they want simple, natural and wholesome food at the right price.

The Invest NI event also profiled a number of core insights for the food service sector. These included the need to deliver taste and a fair price for consumers while also utilising ingredients of the highest quality.

Colin Smith commented, "All of this is good news for Northern Ireland's beef and lamb sector, both locally and in export markets. Consumers of all ages want high quality foods that will help deliver a healthy lifestyle. And the inclusion of protein within the diet is extremely important in this context. Beef and lamb tick all these boxes: the challenge ahead centres on the development of red meat food options that clearly resonate with consumers. And making this happen will require ongoing investment of a significant scale."

He continued, "It's also important to make beef and lamb available at a price point that is acceptable to shoppers. The inflation rate for food and non-alcoholic drinks was down to 4.5% for the year to September, from 5.1% in the year to August.

This means the price shoppers pay for groceries and non-alcoholic drinks is still going up, just more slowly than before. Beef, for example, already making a significant contribution to this figure.

"So, looking ahead, it's important that red meat does not price itself out of the market. The reality is, there are other protein sources available for consumers to choose from."

The LMC's Chief Executive believes that innovative marketing strategies will be required to deliver the appropriate level of public awareness necessary to achieve enhanced beef and lamb consumption rates.

He said, "Northern Ireland's Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme is already playing a key role in this context, and it can be further developed in future. The scheme's three pillars, which reflect best practice where food safety, animal welfare, and care for the environment are concerned, already resonate strongly with the general public However, these messages can be added to in ways that further reflect consumers changing priorities."

But achieving all of this will require a strategic approach from Northern Ireland's beef and sheep sector as a whole.

Moreover, discussions must take place against the backdrop of fast-changing market conditions and industry support measures.

"And LMC can play a key role in this process," Colin Smith stressed. "We are already engaging with the different consumer generations in a very meaningful way."

A key element of LMC's education strategy is the provision of 400 beef and lamb cookery demonstrations in post primary schools across Northern Ireland.

The demonstrations are delivered by LMC's expert team of qualified demonstrators, who educate students on the nutritional importance, versatility and sustainability credentials of NIFQA beef and lamb.

"In addition, we are now providing beef and lamb cookery demonstrations in primary schools across Northern Ireland," the LMC's Chief Executive commented.

"All of this has been made possible on the back of the very strong relationship that exists between LMC and the teaching profession. It represents a tremendous opportunity for school children of all ages to learn about farm quality assured beef and lamb while also getting that all-important taste sensation, these products provide."

BBC presenter Jo Scott speaking at Invest NI's Consumer Insight Conference.

Looking to the future

There is still much more work to be done. Colin Smith points to the need for the Commission to re-evaluate the messaging it communicates courtesy of its own advertising campaigns.

He said, "Our work has to reflect changing consumer trends in the most effective way possible. The broader beef and lamb sector must also invest in innovative new products and processes that put the issue of farm quality assured red meat protein at the very heart of the consumer debate here and further afield. We must never lose sight of this being a good news story for Northern Ireland's beef and lamb sector. In many ways, the hard work has already been done. Consumers already buy into the principle of high-quality protein being at the heart of a healthy diet and lifestyle. Now it's a case of our red meat sectors confirming to the public at large that they can consistently meet this requirement as consumer's needs evolve."

Contact us:
W: www.lmcni.com
T: 028 9263 3000