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TIME TO GET BEHIND FQAS

In light of the well documented incidents of horsemeat presence in some beef consignments and products across the British Isles in recent weeks the Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC) is urging local agri-food industry stakeholders including consumers, retailers, meat processors and farmers to throw their full weight behind the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS).

LMC Chief Executive, Ian Stevenson said: "It is now more than ever that we need supply chain partners to get behind FQAS. The scheme which was first established in 1991 has continuously developed to give consumers assurances about the farm end of the production chain. The Scheme also extends beyond the farm gate to include livestock transporters, auction marts, meat processors and retailers. Operators in the supply chain, who are members of the Scheme, must operate to designated standards and comply with the rules of the Scheme to be eligible to display the FQAS logo (or the equivalent Red Tractor logo) on their products. LMC has been independently managing the scheme on behalf of industry for over 20 years and we are confident that we can deliver consumers necessary assurances about where their food comes from and a product produced to quality standards they can trust"

The scheme requires farms to be independently inspected against a designated list of product standards focussing on three main pillars of food safety, animal welfare and environmental protection. Transporters of livestock and livestock markets must be inspected and assured to specified standards and meat processors must adhere to standards that meet and exceed statutory requirements and be independently certified, including; 1) British Retail Consortium Global Standard for Food Safety, 2) Red Tractor Assurance for Meat Processing Scheme and 3), Beef Labelling Verification.

Mr Stevenson added: "Compliance with such robust standards is an additional cost to industry but this is a small price worth paying to produce a wholesome Northern Ireland FQAS product that consumers can trust. Buyers in the supply chain must not be tempted to compromise on standards and should get behind locally sourced assured produce. Farmers, processors, retailers and consumers all benefit from the assurances provided by FQAS."

FQAS is important, not only for the local market but for the export market too. FQAS is owned by LMC on behalf of the Northern Ireland beef and sheep meat industry. An FQAS Industry Board comprising representatives from LMC, NIMEA,

UFU, NBA, NSA, DARD and NIAPA advises the LMC Board on the commercial management of FQAS. All members of the FQAS Industry Board are in no doubt how important FQAS is to the beef and sheep meat industry in Northern Ireland. FQAS is a prerequisite for servicing the vast majority of our markets in Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and mainland Europe. Some of the customers in these countries may choose not to identify logos such as FQAS or Red Tractor on their products but there is absolutely no doubt that industry participation in FQAS is at the top of the list of essential requirements needed to do business with them.

Mr Stevenson concluded, "Now is the time to get behind FQAS. LMC has commissioned an advertising campaign that will be aired on television and radio from Monday 11th February 2013. This will encourage consumers to look for the FQAS logo as an indication of quality and a product they can trust. Recent incidents have only served to strengthen the importance of FQAS both on the home market and further afield".

ENDS.

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Notes to Editors

More information on FQAS can be found at <http://www.lmcni.com/fqas/>

