

## LMC RESPONDS TO CONSULTATION ON FUTURE AGRICULTURAL POLICY OPTIONS

The Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) has confirmed its participation in the public consultation, linked to the recent publication of a future farm policy options paper by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on behalf of Northern Ireland's farm minister, Edwin Poots.

In so doing, the Commission has also taken the opportunity to highlight the many common themes that are contained in both the consultation document and the previously published report from the Andersons Centre, which looked at future farm policy options for the local beef and sheep sectors.

The Andersons' work was specifically commissioned by LMC, in close liaison with the main stakeholder bodies operating within Northern Ireland's red meat industry. "It's encouraging that government is pretty much in sync with those industry groups with a commitment to the livestock sector on an issue that is central to its future sustainability as a whole," confirmed LMC Chief Executive Ian Stevenson. "Given the challenge of climate change and the fast-changing world events that could impact so dramatically on our future food security, it's important that Northern Ireland's cattle and sheep sectors are put on to a sustainable trajectory. He added: "Important decisions are needed in this regard. And the sooner they are taken the better."

Commenting specifically on LMC's response to the public consultation, Ian confirmed the absolute need to put in place adequate support measures for the local sheep industry. "The DAERA proposals make only passing reference to the future needs of the sheep industry," he added. "This matter must be actively addressed in the policy development discussions that will follow this consultation. Sheep represent a major contributor to so many rural communities across Northern Ireland. "The potential to further improve efficiency levels within the sector must be realised. And this will only be achieved on the back of a targeted and specific support package."

The LMC representative believes that the introduction of a bespoke headage payment for sheep has merit. He said: "But its introduction must be linked to the attainment of greater efficiency levels within the sheep sector as a whole." Ian continued: "Sheep play a critical role in managing upland environments and habitats. If resilience payments decline over time to a level that leads to land abandonment this will have a detrimental impact on biodiversity for example. "Consideration should be given to how the sheep sector could be supported to deliver positive environmental outcomes in line with the measures proposed for the beef sector. "Sheep producers historically have engaged less in performance monitoring and genetic advancement and therefore incentives for sheep farm businesses to engage in this type of activity should be considered."

**Image 1: Sheep grazing an upland heather habitat where they play an integral role in managing ecosystem services**



### Resilience Support Payment

Turning to the issue of an envisaged resilience payment that will be made available, post the ending of the current support scheme, Ian Stevenson said that the principle had considerable merit - up to a point. "The associated proposal to increase the minimum eligible area from the current 3ha up to 10ha will exclude large numbers of small cattle and sheep producers from many future farm support measures. "Very large numbers of cattle and sheep are maintained on small farms.

Consequently, the 10ha proposal would exclude 20% of existing cattle and sheep farms from accessing resilience payments and the headage sustainability package. "This goes counter to the principle of providing a level playing field for all farmers. LMC is of the view that a smaller minimum threshold should be considered when it comes to determining eligibility for future farm support measures."

LMC agrees that the resilience payment should be conditional on meeting specific criteria that will help to improve efficiency levels within the livestock sector. These include the registration of all calf sires on the APHIS database. "If Northern Ireland is to make real progress on improving our ruminant livestock genetics then this is essential, confirmed Ian Stevenson.

Linking the future resilience payment to the establishment of a soil carbon plan and the preparation of farm nutrient management plans also gets the thumbs-up from LMC. Ian Stevenson again: However, a plan is only a piece of paper without action and resource to implement it. DAERA, working closely with industry, should consider how to incentivise positive action following the completion of the plan. "But the fundamental fact remains many farm enterprises, particularly beef and sheep farms would not be economically sustainable without some form of income support."

### Support for Suckler Production

LMC agrees that the proposed headage sustainability measure for suckler cows should be aimed at driving productivity to make the sector more efficient and environmentally sustainable. According to the Commission's chief executive, such an approach is in line with the overall desire to increase productivity and reduce the environmental impact of the suckler industry.

Given this backdrop, LMC also supports a proposed commitment to secure a reduced calving interval within the suckler sector. The principle of using the headage support measure to facilitate a beef genetics programme is worthy of further discussion, according to Ian Stevenson. He said: "One of the challenges associated with genetics programmes is that of driving adoption and uptake. So, yes, the proposed suckler headage measure represents an opportunity to incentivise producer participation in programmes of this type."

### Reduced slaughter age

LMC agrees with the principles underlying the envisaged beef transformation package for Northern Ireland. These include a proposal to incentivise the slaughter of clean beef animals at a maximum age of 24 months. "This will make the sector more productive and environmentally sustainable," said Ian Stevenson.

It is envisaged that, courtesy of the scheme, maximum slaughter ages to qualify for payment will be reduced from 30 months to 24 months within a four-year period. Ian Stevenson again: "Based on the data held by LMC, which shows the average age at slaughter for price reported steers and heifers at 25.7 months for the final quarter of 2021, this is a generous approach. "This will allow farmers time to adapt to the new policy support arrangements particularly for slowly maturing breeds."

**Table 1: Steers and heifers average age and weight at slaughter Quarter 4 2021. Source: LMC deadweight cattle price reporting.**

	Heifers		Steers	
	Average Cold Weight (kg)	Average Age at Slaughter (months)	Average Cold Weight (kg)	Average Age at Slaughter (months)
2019	325.3	26.2	360.4	26.0
2020	328.9	25.9	361.8	25.5
2021	327.7	25.7	364.3	25.7

LMC is also pointing to a range of important beef and sheep related issues that have not been covered in detail by the DAERA discussion document. "There is no discussion in the document about meeting quality criteria such as farm quality assurance and other key market access specification criteria," stressed the Commission's Chief Executive. "There is also limited mention of animal health and welfare. For example, BVD eradication is within our grasp. "It is important that we reduce the losses directly through mortality or indirectly through unproductive animals as a result of sub optimal animal disease statuses."

### Carbon Reduction

LMC has generally welcomed the farming for carbon measures proposed within the DAERA discussion document. Ian Stevenson explained: "The proposals identified seem appropriate at this time. "As baselines are established and more data becomes available on current practices and opportunities for improvement then specific low carbon farming plans could be implemented. "This would then allow producers to choose from a menu of options specific to their farm." He added: "If farmers are being asked to change their approach and move away from traditional farming practices they must see a business opportunity in farming for carbon. "Policy must be science and evidence-based. It is critical that farming for carbon and sustainable livestock production are synergistic." The need to develop improved capital assistance/investment measures and further education opportunities for livestock farmers were two of the other main issues highlighted by LMC, courtesy of the organisation's response to the DAERA discussion document.

### Farm Investment

Ian Stevenson commented: "Cattle mortality in Northern Ireland is heavily influenced by the quality of the farm buildings in place at this time. "Poorly ventilated facilities, for example, can lead to significant issues with respiratory diseases. This is one example of where carefully considered investment may lead to increased productivity and sustainability. "Capital items that assist with performance monitoring may help with genetic progress such as handling and weighing equipment."

### Co-operation for Industry Advancement

Ian also addressed the necessity for open communication across the industry to make any future policy a success. He continued: "Education and knowledge transfer are going to be critical in achieving the policy outcomes set out in the discussion paper. "The livestock sectors must meet their climate change obligations going forward. Continuing professional development must be an ongoing and, perhaps, conditional element of future support policy. "In addition, continuing professional development and knowledge transfer-related initiatives must adapt with the challenges that lie ahead." He concluded: "Making this happen may involve a significant increase in the capacity of current delivery bodies. However, this will be required if farmers are to adapt to the challenges ahead. "There needs to be a cultural change in farming and if incentivised initiatives are not working consideration should be given to making specific and targeted continuing professional development mandatory in the future."

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# WEEKLY BEEF & LAMB MARKETS

## CATTLE TRADE

### NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 07/03/22	Next Week 14/03/22
<b>Prime</b>		
U-3	392 - 404p	392 - 404p
R-3	386 - 398p	386 - 398p
O+3	380 - 392p	380 - 392p
P+3	324 - 342p	324 - 342p
	Including bonus where applicable	
<b>Cows</b>		
O+3	280 - 310p	280 - 314p

Cow quotes vary depending on weight and grade. Pricing policies vary from plant to plant. Producers are advised to check pricing policies before presenting cattle for slaughter.

## Deadweight Cattle Trade

THE deadweight cattle trade remained steady this week with base quotes from the major NI plants for in spec U-3 grade prime cattle ranging from 392-404p/kg. Quotes for good quality O+3 grade cows this week strengthened ranging from 280-314p/kg across the plants. Similar quotes are expected for all types of cattle early next week.

Prime cattle throughput in NI last week fell by 88 head to 7,582 head. This takes the prime cattle year to date throughput to 65,881 head, up from the 59,260 prime cattle slaughtered in same period in 2021. Meanwhile a total of 2,290 cows were killed in NI last week, 129 head more than the 2,161 cows killed during the previous week. This takes the year to date throughput of cows to 20,012 up 2,864 head from the 17,148 cows slaughtered in the corresponding period in 2021.

Imports of prime cattle from ROI for direct slaughter in NI plants last week consisted of 203 prime cattle and 124 cows, while no cattle were imported from GB for direct slaughter. Exports of cattle out of NI for direct slaughter to ROI last week consisted of nine prime cattle and 103 cows, while a total of 35 prime cattle and six cows made the journey from NI to GB for direct slaughter.

The deadweight prime cattle trade improved in NI last week. The average steer price last week was 401.7p/kg while the R3 steer price increased 2.5p/kg to 410.9p/kg. The average heifer price in NI last week was up 2.7p/kg to 402.3p/kg while the R3 heifer price was up 1.8p/kg to 411.3p/kg. The average NI young bull price last week came back 1p/kg from the previous week to 380.9p/kg while the R3 young bull price recorded an increase of 5.8p/kg to 398.2p/kg. The NI cow trade strengthened last week with the average cow price up 3.1p/kg to 291.4p/kg, with the O3 cow price recording an increase of 2.3p/kg to 316p/kg.

In GB last week the deadweight prime cattle also strengthened across the majority of grades. The average steer price was up by just over a penny to 409.2p/kg while the average R3 steer price was up marginally to 415.6p/kg. This narrowed the differential in R3 steer prices last week between NI and GB to 4.7p/kg or £16.45 on a 350kg carcass. The average heifer price in GB last week was up 2.7p/kg to 409.6p/kg while the average R3 heifer price rose 1.2p/kg to 416.3p/kg. The differential in R3 heifer prices last week between NI and the GB average narrowed to 5p/kg or £16.00 on a 320kg carcass. The cow trade in GB strengthened with the O3 cow price in GB reporting a notable increase of 10.2p/kg to 329.9p/kg, almost 14p above the O3 cow price in NI.

In ROI last week the R3 steer price was the equivalent of 382.6p/kg up by 4.2p/kg from the previous week while the R3 heifer price was up 5.1p/kg to 386.4p/kg. The O3 cow price also rose last week by the equivalent of 5.4p/kg to 323.1p/kg, 7.1p/kg ahead of NI.

## LAST WEEK'S DEADWEIGHT CATTLE PRICES (UK / ROI)

W/E 05/03/22	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	415.4	390.0	409.9	419.6	423.0	417.8
	R3	410.9	382.6	412.1	417.5	416.5	415.6
	R4	408.8	383.9	411.8	421.4	413.8	417.6
	AVG	401.7	-	408.5	412.5	406.7	409.2
Heifers	U3	418.0	396.2	420.1	423.2	429.2	424.3
	R3	411.3	386.4	415.4	416.0	417.5	416.3
	R4	408.0	388.4	417.0	419.7	418.1	417.6
	AVG	399.0	379.3	408.2	395.8	395.2	393.0
Young Bulls	U3	399.0	374.9	406.0	416.0	402.8	409.6
	R3	398.2	368.0	397.6	406.4	402.9	404.2
	O3	383.5	354.4	376.9	379.5	388.2	383.5
	AVG	380.9	-	391.5	395.4	391.3	392.3
Prime Cattle Price Reported	6,466	-	6,789	6,995	6,452	5,211	25,447
Cows	O3	316.0	323.1	330.5	329.6	330.2	329.9
	O4	320.1	322.3	334.2	332.1	330.7	331.2
	P2	277.1	294.5	291.0	287.3	292.1	291.1
	P3	298.1	311.8	305.7	304.6	303.6	305.2
AVG	291.4	-	322.7	314.9	306.7	303.4	309.7

Notes: (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro=83.06p Stg  
(ii) Shading indicates a lower price than the previous week.  
(iii) AVG is the average of all grades in the category, not just those listed

## LATEST LIVEWEIGHT CATTLE MART PRICES NI

W/E 05/03/22	1st QUALITY			2nd QUALITY		
	From	To	Avg	From	To	Avg
<b>Finished Cattle (p/kg)</b>						
Steers	250	273	258	210	249	228
Friesians	191	205	197	150	190	170
Heifers	234	256	240	190	233	210
Beef Cows	200	255	214	150	199	170
Dairy Cows	145	181	155	110	144	125
<b>Store Cattle (p/kg)</b>						
Bullocks up to 400kg	275	323	285	220	274	240
Bullocks 400kg - 500kg	250	313	272	220	249	232
Bullocks over 500kg	225	261	240	180	224	200
Heifers up to 450kg	255	303	275	200	254	227
Heifers over 450kg	230	300	250	180	229	205
<b>Dropped Calves (£/head)</b>						
Continental Bulls	425	575	450	300	420	350
Continental Heifers	300	415	350	195	295	250
Friesian Bulls	120	160	140	40	115	75
Holstein Bulls	100	150	125	2	95	55

## REPORTED NI CATTLE PRICES - P/KG

W/E 05/03/22	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	415.4	417.9	399.0
R3	409.2	410.3	398.2
O+3	400.5	402.8	391.1

\*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

## REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 05/03/22	Weight Bands			
	<220kg	220-250kg	250-280kg	>280kg
P1	212.2	235.7	246.2	264.6
P2	235.1	255.6	275.4	291.5
P3	261.3	273.0	295.8	303.1
O3	-	-	305.0	316.5
O4	-	318.0	332.1	319.5
R3	-	-	336.0	337.1

# SHEEP TRADE

## NI SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 07/03/22	Next Week 14/03/22
R3 Hoggets up to 22kg	545-550p/kg	550-560p/kg

## REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 19/02/22	W/E 26/02/22	W/E 05/03/22
NI L/W Hoggets	491.2	497.7	507.8
NI D/W Hoggets	530.8	533.7	537.4
GB D/W Hoggets	586.0	570.9	574.4
ROI D/W	562.2	561.3	559.5

## Deadweight Sheep Trade

**B**ASE quotes from the main NI processors strengthened by 10-15p/kg mid-week for R3 grade hoggets with quotes this week ranging from 550-560p/kg up to 22kg. Similar quotes are expected for early next week. A total of 7,808 hoggets were killed in NI last week taking the year to date hogget throughput to 65,314 head. A further 6,256 hoggets were exported to ROI for direct slaughter last week, taking exports for the year to date to 47,221, an increase of 3433 head when compared to the same period last year. The average deadweight hogget price in NI last week increased by 3.7p/kg to 537.4p/kg while the average ROI hogget price was back 1.8p/kg to 559.5p/kg.

## Liveweight Sheep Trade

**M**ANY of the marts have reported similar numbers passing through the sale rings this week compared to previous weeks with an improved trade reported. In Omagh last Saturday 583 hoggets sold from 489-562p/kg compared to 409 hoggets the previous week selling from 474-538p/kg. In Massereene on Monday 429 hoggets sold from 504-523p/kg compared to 574 hoggets last week selling from 494-527p/kg. In Rathfriland on Tuesday 410 hoggets sold from 482-563p/kg (avg 505p/kg) compared to last week when 306 hoggets sold from 480-561p/kg (avg 505p/kg). In Ballymena on Wednesday 1,605 hoggets sold to an average of 510p/kg compared to 1,075 hoggets last week selling to an average of 500p/kg. Top reported prices for first quality fat ewes ranged from £158-256 across the marts.

## LATEST SHEEP MARTS (P/KG LW)

From: 05/03/22		Hoggets			
To: 10/03/22		No	From	To	Avg
Saturday	Omagh	583	489	562	-
	Swatragh	950	427	535	-
Monday	Kilrea	500	506	532	-
	Massereene	429	504	523	-
Tuesday	Saintfield	405	455	529	-
	Rathfriland	410	482	563	505
Wednesday	Ballymena	1605	480	560	510
	Enniskillen	738	505	548	-
	Arroy	346	500	558	-
	Markethill	930	520	568	-

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