

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

AGRICULTURE MEETING

NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH

20 JUNE 2025

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-ninth North South Ministerial Council Agriculture meeting was held at the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, on 20 June 2025. The meeting was attended by Andrew Muir MLA, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Aisling Reilly MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office, Pam Cameron MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office, Martin Heydon TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Dara Calleary TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht. Minister Muir chaired the meeting.

UPDATE ON REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME

2. The NSMC noted the implementation of the revised work programme for the Agriculture sector, as agreed by the Council in May 2024, and the ongoing engagement between both Administrations to identify areas of mutual interest and benefit in the agri-food sector, which may also be included in the work programme. The Council noted that an update paper will be provided for consideration by Ministers at the next meeting in the Agriculture sector.

COOPERATION ON ANIMAL HEALTH

3. The Council noted DAERA's intention to host a multi-agency practical exercise on Humane Slaughter contingency planning for exotic disease in October 2025, to which DAFM will be invited.
4. The NSMC acknowledged the ongoing efforts by officials from both jurisdictions to strengthen existing cooperation on animal health and welfare.
5. Ministers recognised the ongoing risk posed by exotic disease to our agri-food sectors by diseases such as Avian Influenza and Bluetongue and welcomed the ongoing engagement between both jurisdictions to protect the high animal health status on the island through coordinated protection measures.
6. The Council noted the work underway in both jurisdictions to reduce the prevalence of Bovine TB across the island and agreed that officials should engage further to fully explore how best this can be achieved.
7. The NSMC looked forward to the continuation of practical and effective cooperation on animal health and welfare, and disease control in both jurisdictions in order that the health and welfare of livestock is maintained at the highest level.

COOPERATION ON PLANT HEALTH AND PESTICIDES

8. The NSMC welcomed the ongoing commitment of DAERA and DAFM to proactively take steps to deliver the shared objective of achieving and maintaining good plant health status on the island.
9. Ministers noted the ongoing collaboration and sharing of expertise demonstrated in particular through the UK and Ireland Plant Health Co-ordination Group meeting, which was hosted by DAFM in July 2024.
10. The Council welcomed the joint DAERA/DAFM simulation exercise to test plant health contingency plans, which took place in December 2024. Ministers also welcomed the continued cooperation and the opportunities being explored for further joint research resulting from the DAERA visit to the Backweston laboratories in December 2024.
11. The NSMC welcomed the continued cooperation regarding laboratory expertise, including the recent designation of DAFM laboratories by DAERA as an official laboratory to carry out analysis, tests and diagnosis of pesticide residues in or on food.
12. The Council noted the continuing cooperation in the regulation of the placing on the market and use of pesticides through the North-South Pesticides Group.

COOPERATION ON RESEARCH AND FUNDING

13. The Council acknowledged the good collaboration between DAERA and DAFM in maximising the drawdown of EU funding under Horizon Europe and welcomed the €5.6 million secured to date in funding by successful applications from Ireland and Northern Ireland for projects in the Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment sectors under Horizon Europe.
14. Ministers noted that nine projects involving total funding of €10.12 million have been funded over the nine years of the agricultural US-Ireland R&D Partnership, and noted the progress made in funding joint projects, in both jurisdictions, under the DAFM National Competitive Calls, including €22.5 million by DAFM and £7.3 million by DAERA for 22 projects since 2021.
15. The NSMC welcomed the work underway by the Co-Centre Programme - a strategic collaborative partnership between Ireland, Great Britain and Northern Ireland, co-funded by industry, which will consolidate research activities across higher education and research institutes in co-hosted centres.
16. Ministers welcomed the announcement of a €9 million funding initiative to support the development of bioeconomy in the agriculture and marine sectors, with co-funding from the Government of Ireland's Shared Island Initiative, DAFM and DAERA, and welcomed ongoing consideration by DAFM and DAERA of further possibilities for research collaboration under existing or new measures.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY WITHIN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

17. The Council welcomed the ongoing cooperation between both Administrations on addressing climate change and loss of biodiversity within the Agriculture sector.
18. Ministers welcomed a Key Action in 'The Lough Neagh Report and Action Plan' recommending the introduction of a Fertiliser Database in Northern Ireland to record fertiliser movements along the supply chain as well as improving nutrient management and efficiency.
19. The NSMC agreed that officials from DAFM and DAERA would continue to explore the possibility of sharing design approaches and implementation, as well as lessons learned from DAFM's introduction of its National Fertiliser Database in September 2023.

COOPERATION ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

20. The Council welcomed the continued work of the North-South Rural Policy Forum, noting that the latest meeting of the Forum included discussions on policy developments being progressed by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG) and DAERA; the

PEACEPLUS Programme; voluntary and community sector supports; and updates on the Connected Hubs Feasibility Study.

21. Ministers noted the cooperation between the two jurisdictions on rural development including strong engagement on scoping a potential expansion of Connected Hubs across both jurisdictions.
22. The Council noted that officials will continue to share information and best practice on rural development and to enhance cooperation on this issue, and will bring forward updates to future NSMC Agriculture meetings.

COOPERATION ON FARM SAFETY

23. The NSMC welcomed the continuing cooperation between both Administrations and the ongoing work to improve farm safety. The Council noted the commitment of the Farm Safety Partnerships from both jurisdictions to meet at least annually and cooperate on efforts to improve farm safety.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

24. The Council agreed to hold its next Agriculture meeting in autumn 2025.

Joint Secretariat

20 June 2025

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