

Agriculture

The Progressive Unionist Party recognises the significant role agriculture plays in sustaining Northern Ireland's economy. It is important that Agriculture and the agri-food industries remain a core source of employment and industry for Northern Ireland. A comprehensive policy will sustain and develop these industries ensuring we support farmers, exporters, communities and the environment in harmony with one another.

According to the Agricultural Census published by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development: "despite showing an increase of 3 per cent in 2015, the number of farms has been in long-term decline." In 2014 there were 24,200 active farms in Northern Ireland. This was a significant decrease from the 31,000 farms present fifteen years ago. "This is a result of economic drivers that make off-farm work more financially attractive while simultaneously encouraging the formation of larger scale production units to minimise costs and maintain farm income."

We believe the Northern Ireland Assembly should:

- (I)** Seek to assist the Northern Irish Dairy industry promote its brand globally and generate more demand in export across International Markets.
- (II)** Seek to establish a single marketing body for the agri-food industry in Northern Ireland, complimented by a food promotion strategy.
- (III)** Subject to satisfactory compliance with the food safety controls set out by the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Assembly should move to obtain Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy BSE 'negligible risk' status from the World Organisation for Animal Health. Such a move would give Northern Ireland trade advantage ahead of the rest of the U.K whilst reducing disposal costs.
- (IV)** Maintain funding provisions for the Farm Safety Partnership, which is a successful initiative that has heightened awareness of safety at work within farming communities, with a notable decline in annual incident reports. With plans to expand the industry it is imperative the partnership remains active, for continuity and community.
- (V)** Ensure a robust scientific base for the measurement of greenhouse gas emissions to promote Northern Ireland as a low carbon location for food production within Europe.
- (VI)** Commission research into the associated costs, environmental impact and economic growth of the agri-Food industry in Northern Ireland should we opt to a fast-track a solution for poultry waste into energy.
- (VII)** Agricultural education and training must be made available at an earlier stage in the Northern Ireland curriculum to meet the growing opportunities that exist within the agri-food industry. Furthermore it is essential that government seek to introduce vocational training to the sector on essential skills and capacity building in ICT, Literacy and Funding applications as Northern Ireland moves to a digital trading and administrative environment.