



NORTHERN IRELAND REGIONAL FOOD PROGRAMME (NIRFP) 2026-27

TRANCHE 1

FOR PROJECTS TO BE DELIVERED BETWEEN

1 May 2026 - 30 September 2026*

(Subject to budget availability)

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

* Please note that these Guidance Notes have been updated from 2025-26 to reflect changes to the NIRFP. The programme will open for two tranches (see page 2 for more information)

PROGRAMME AIMS

The Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework was published in November 2024 following agreement by the Northern Ireland Executive. The Action Plan, which should be read in conjunction with the Framework, sets out the shared long-term direction of travel for food policy in Northern Ireland. This first two-year Action Plan is aligned to the delivery period of the current Programme for Government and the mandate of Ministers and the Executive.

In recognition of the NI Executive's approval of the Food Strategy Framework and its associated Action Plan, the NIRFP will, from 2026-27, be enhanced to do more to widen participation and support a wider range of applicants and projects, all of which must contribute to the outcomes of the Food Strategy Framework (FSF) and Food Action Plan (FAP).

The enhanced programme will be delivered through two calls for applications (two tranches) to allow applicants more time to develop projects which will more closely align to the objectives of the FSF, FAP and NIRFP.

The maximum level of DAERA funding for each successful project will be capped at £70,000.

Applicants can find the Food Strategy Framework and the Food Strategy Framework Action Plan 2025-2027 at the following links:

[NI Food Strategy Framework - Food at the Heart of our Society - A Prospectus for Change](#)

[Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework Action Plan 2025 - 2027](#)

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme are:

1. To raise awareness of the importance of locally produced, nutritious food and how a healthy balanced diet can improve health outcomes and overall wellbeing.
2. To increase the environmental sustainability and resilience of local agri-food supply chains.
3. To support the development of a local agri-food sector that encourages sustainability, opportunity, innovation and prosperity.
4. To promote NI food & drink and in doing so, contribute to building a food culture and food conscious society.

Awards will be made on a competitive basis and only eligible projects that are judged to have **best met the programme objectives** will receive funding. Hence some projects which are eligible in principle may not automatically be funded.

New projects will be supported at a more favourable rate than those that have previously received support through the NIRFP, unless the application from a previously funded applicant demonstrates **significant additional development and innovation**.

PROGRAMME OPENING DATES FOR 2026-2027

The NIRFP will open in two tranches during 2026-2027 as follows:

- Tranche 1 will be open for applications between 8 – 29 April 2026 (inclusive) for projects taking place between 1 May 2026 to 30 September 2026.
- Tranche 2 will be open for applications between 20 July – 10 August 2026 (inclusive) for projects taking place between 1 October 2026 to 31 March 2027.

WHO CAN APPLY?

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Applications will be accepted from organisations whose project plans to raise the profile of NI regional food products and can conform with at least one of the categories listed below:

- Formally constituted not for profit groups who have a NI membership/remit.
- Registered Charities who have a NI membership/remit.
- Not for profit regional development agencies, e.g. Borough/District Councils who have a NI membership/remit.
- Joint, collaborative applications from not-for-profit groups and/or charities or regional development agencies who have a NI membership/remit are encouraged.

Individuals or profit-taking companies cannot apply unless they fall into one of the above categories. All applicants **must** have an associated bank account registered in the name of the applicant organisation.

PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

In making this funding available the Department will focus on supporting projects which would not ordinarily be taking place.

1. Eligible projects need to clearly be consistent with, and contribute to, the delivery of at least one of the objectives of the NIRFP.
2. Eligible projects need to have clearly identified objectives, targets and outcomes.
3. Partnerships are encouraged where this will enhance the outcomes.
4. Funding is discretionary.
5. Funding will be awarded up to a value of 40% of the total project cost.
6. DAERA funding will be capped at £70,000 per project.
7. All projects funded through Tranche 1 must be completed by 30 September 2026.
8. All projects funded through Tranche 2 must be completed by 31 March 2027.
9. A Letter of Offer must be formally accepted in advance of any expenditure on the project.

10. Funding will be paid in arrears subject to the Conditions of Offer. Applicants must submit their claim for grant payment within three months of the date of their final activity.
11. DAERA may publish details of all projects applying to and supported by the NIRFP.
12. For the purpose of this programme, the definition of NI regional food is that it **must be** grown/produced or processed in NI. It should meet at least one of the following requirements:
 - a. Exceed minimum national and EU legal requirements/ standards in relation to hygiene, traceability, animal welfare.
 - b. Adhere to quality assurance schemes which are above minimum legal requirements.
 - c. Promote the EU Protected Food Name Scheme.

To be considered eligible for support, projects must satisfy the principles underpinning government funding as outlined in 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI)' 2023.

[Managing Public Money NI \(MPMNI\) | Department of Finance](#)

WHAT DO WE WANT DELIVERED UNDER THE 2026-27 PROGRAMME?

NIRFP 2026-27 seeks to fund projects under three categories of support:

- Regional Fairs / Exhibitions;
- Seminars / Workshops;
- Information Programmes.

1. Regional Fairs/Exhibitions: The organisation of / participation in, fairs / exhibitions that will deliver against the objectives of the NIRFP. Projects could include new and existing food-focused events, generic events and agricultural shows with a food element, trade shows (not already supported by Invest NI), and farmers markets.

Category 1: Regional Fairs/Exhibitions - Eligible expenditure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event publicity - Production and distribution of printed materials (leaflets, posters, advertisements etc) and websites/social media platforms announcing the event.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire of venue and hire of space for general display. Please note funding for in-kind support will not be considered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation fees Hire of staff and equipment for professional cookery demonstrations; provision of hospitality during event (media / food writers/ trade buyers).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel costs Media / food writers / trade buyers (grocery retailers/food service organisations).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Any branding/logos used in conjunction with regional fairs/exhibitions must be agreed in advance with the NIRFP management team.</i> • <i>Applications will not be accepted for major trade shows where Invest NI plan to support NI agri-food companies to attend.</i> • <i>Participation in the events / programmes must not be restricted to the membership of the group or organisation delivering those events / programmes.</i>

2. Seminars/Workshops: Provision of knowledge transfer activities that contribute to delivering the objectives of the NIRFP. Projects could include producer workshops, industry and stakeholder engagement events and ‘meet the buyer’ events. This could also include events to promote key themes of the NIRFP including, for example, how a healthy balanced diet can improve health outcomes and overall wellbeing.

Category 2: Seminars/ Workshops - Eligible expenditure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire of venue Please note funding for in-kind support will not be considered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising costs Examples could be the cost of external support to deliver the event, audio-visual support and PR/marketing/social media costs. Organising costs are distinct from the management fee that non-public sector organisations can claim.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of invitations



- **Compilation and distribution of educational/informational material to producers.**
Publications must be of an educational/informational nature and must not encourage economic operators or consumers to buy a particular agricultural product.
Publications must comply with the rules under Category 3 Information Programmes.
- *Any branding/logos used in conjunction with seminars and workshops must be agreed in advance with the NIRFP management team to ensure compliance with State Aid rules.*

3. Information Programmes: Projects that raise awareness of issues and associated innovative solutions which closely align to the objectives of the NIRFP. For example, projects which raise awareness of the importance of a healthy balanced diet.

Category 3: Information Programmes - Eligible expenditure

- **Production and distribution of factual information material (in print / electronic media / radio / television).**
- **Costs for the dissemination of scientific knowledge and factual information on generic agricultural products e.g. their nutritional benefits / suggested uses.**
- *Promotion campaigns must be:*
 - (a) *focused on products covered by quality schemes as defined in Appendix 1*

OR

 - (b) *generic in character and for the benefit of all producers of the type of product concerned (no mention of specific companies, brands or origin permitted).*
- *Publications must not refer to any particular undertaking, brand name or origin. This restriction does not apply to the reference to origin for products covered by*
 - (a) *quality schemes established under the EU regulations cited in Appendix 1.1 (including PDO and PGI) OR*
 - (b) *quality schemes recognised by Member States as outlined in Appendix 1.2, provided reference to origin is secondary in the message.*
- *Any branding/logos used in conjunction with information programmes must be agreed in advance with the NIRFP management team.*

Please note that the selection panel may apply a cap on the grant awarded for certain cost categories.

WHAT WILL NOT BE SUPPORTED UNDER THE PROGRAMME?

Examples of project items ineligible for support

- Entertainment.
- Insurance.
- Security.
- Fencing.
- Licences e.g. trading and alcohol.
- Travel costs and hospitality for exhibitors/producers.
- Applicant organisation running costs e.g. wages, in-kind costs.
- Contingency planning costs.
- Project items in breach of State Aid requirements (e.g. promotion campaigns bearing non-compliant logos).

Please Note: This is not an exhaustive list.

WHAT LEVEL OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT CAN YOU EXPECT?

If successful, you will receive financial assistance of up to 40% of expenditure against eligible project items. Financial assistance will not be provided for items until they have been paid in full.

You may be eligible to claim for a management fee relating solely to the project. The management fee will be up to a maximum of 10% of total eligible project costs, subject to overall budgetary constraints and provision of evidence of management fee breakdown. A management fee will not be paid to Public Sector organisations.

CONDITIONS OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

If successful, the letter of financial assistance will include conditions that apply to all government funded programmes. This will include the following:

- Participation at events / programmes must allow for inclusion.

- The capture of sales data at events.
- The capture of consumer impressions.
- The use of promotional material to acknowledge the NIRFP support.
- The submission of paid invoices.
- The evaluation of the objectives, targets and outcomes of the funded activity.
- Adherence to procurement guidelines **including correct tendering procedures** as outlined:

Total Value of Procurement	Action & Minimum Number of Quotations/Tenders
Up to £10,000	Provide evidence that 2 price checks have been sought to ensure value for money has been achieved.
£10,000 to £50,000	Minimum of 3 tenders / written quotations .
Over £50,000	Public advertisement for open or restricted tender competition.

Requirements in addition to procurement information
✓ Original invoices
✓ Bank statements (these must be on headed paper and have the bank details clearly visible)
✓ Copy of cheque if paid in this way

STATE AID

Categories 1 to 3 of the Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme provides aid for:

1. knowledge exchange and information actions in compliance with Article 21 of Commission Regulation (EU) 702/2014 [OJEC L 193, 1.7.2014, pages 1 -73]; and
2. promotion measures in favour of agricultural products in Northern Ireland in accordance with Article 24 of Commission Regulation (EU) 702/2014. In accordance with Articles 21(5) and 24(6)(a) the aid will be granted in kind by means of subsidised services and will be paid direct to the applicant (service

provider). The Scheme does not involve direct payments of money to producers. The aid to be provided for the items listed as eligible for financial assistance above will be within the limits prescribed by Articles 21(8) and 24(8).

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment will be based solely on the information submitted. Therefore, it is important to consider the points below and include as much information as possible.

Applications will be assessed following the process below:

1. Applications will be reviewed to ensure they meet the eligibility requirements.
2. Technical Assessments will focus on:
 - a. Does the project have clearly defined objectives, targets and outcomes?
 - b. Do the objectives, targets and outcomes deliver against the objectives of the NIRFP?
 - c. What will be the impact of the project and how strong is the plan to measure and report outcomes?
 - d. Does the project involve collaboration across groups to increase the scale of the achievable outcomes?
 - e. Do the costs represent value for money?

If your application is unsuccessful, you can ask for feedback.

You may also request a review of your unsuccessful application if you consider:

- The outcome was unreasonable, or
- An error has been made during the processing of your application.

These are the only grounds on which a request for review will be considered. A request for review must be submitted in writing within 14 days of notification of the outcome of your application and clearly indicate the grounds on which your request is made.

Although DAERA funding is capped at £70,000 per project, the assessment panel may impose a maximum limit of funding on projects in line with the available budget.

HOW TO APPLY

Please complete the application form that accompanies this guidance note and can be found at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-regional-food-programme>

Applications must be for project activities to be completed between **1 May 2026 to 30 September 2026**. A separate application form should be completed for each project. Projects may include more than one programme category.

Application forms should be submitted electronically by email to:

agrifoodsupportbranch@daera-ni.gov.uk

Applications must be received by the NIRFP management team no later than **4.00pm on 29 April 2026**.

Applications received after this date will NOT be accepted.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Once submitted, your application will be checked for eligibility and completeness. Should any further information be required, the NIRFP team will contact you. Eligible projects will be assessed by a selection panel, and the outcome will be communicated to you.

For queries relating to NIRFP please contact the NIRFP management team on 028 9052 4497.

APPENDIX 1 – QUALITY SCHEMES

‘Quality Schemes’ are defined by Article 20 of Commission Regulation (EU) 702/2014 as follows:

1.1 quality schemes established under the following EU Regulations

- (i) Part II, Title II, Chapter I, Section 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 as concerns wine;
- (ii) Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012¹;
- (iii) Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007;
- (iv) Regulation (EC) No 110/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council²;
- (v) Regulation (EU) No 251/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council;

1.2 (a) quality schemes, including farm certification schemes, for agricultural products recognised by the Member States as complying with the following criteria:

- (i) the specificity of the final product produced under such quality schemes must be derived from a clear obligations to guarantee:
 - specific product characteristics, or
 - specific farming or production methods, or
 - the quality of the final product that goes significantly beyond the commercial commodity standards as regards public, animal or plant health, animal welfare or environmental protection;
- (ii) the quality scheme must be open to all producers;
- (iii) the quality scheme must involve binding final product specifications and compliance with those specifications must be verified by public authorities or by an independent inspection body;
- (iv) the quality scheme must be transparent and assure complete traceability of agricultural products;

1.2 (b) voluntary agricultural product certification schemes recognised by the Member State concerned as meeting the requirements laid down in the Commission Communication - EU best practice guidelines for voluntary certification schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs.

¹ This regulation has been repealed and replaced with [EU Regulation 2024/1143](#).

² This regulation has been repealed and replaced with [EU Regulation 2019/787](#).