

Minutes of the DAERAstats User Group meeting

Friday 25th November 2022 10am

Via Webex / Dundonald House

Present

SM	Seamus McErlean	DAERA Chief Agricultural Economist
PK	Paul Keatley	DAERA Economics and Evaluation Branch
NF	Nicola Fisher	NISRA
CJ	Claire Jack	AFBI
EA	Edward Adamson	National Sheep Association
CMcK	Cormac McKervey	Ulster Bank
DR	David Rankin	Agricultural Consultants Association NI
SMcC	Seamus McCormick	Danske Bank
NQ	Nigel Quinn	DAERA
PC	Paul Caskie	AFBI
MP	Myles Patton	DAERA Economics and Evaluation Branch
CMcC	Conor McCormack	DAERA/NISRA
PH	Philip Hamilton	DAERA/NISRA
CM	Carol Murphy	DAERA/NISRA
DC	Danielle Clarke	DAERA/NISRA
HMcN	Hugh McNickle	DAERA/NISRA
DM	Des Muldoon	DAERA/NISRA
SB	Sarah Brown	DAERA/NISRA (minutes)
KB	Katie Barbour	DAERA/NISRA
DF	David Finlay	DAERA/NISRA
IS	Ian Stevenson	Livestock & Meat Commission for Northern Ireland
AC	Aidan Campbell	Rural Community Network
FDP	Francesca Di Palo	Sustainable NI
JMcC	James McCluggage	Ulster Farmers Union
HB	Hannah Blair	WRAP
GG	Gill Gallagher	Northern Ireland Grain Trade Association
RB	Rodney Brown	Danske Bank
MC	Malachy Campbell	Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)
CS	Claire Shortt	Belfast City Council
CD	Conall Donnelly	NIMEA
FB	Francis Breen	DAERA – CAFRE
KO	Kehinde Olagunju	DAERA Economics and Evaluation Branch
AB	Alexander Best	DAERA Economics and Evaluation Branch

Apologies

Stephen Jess	AFBI
Adrian Gregory	NIEA
Steven Allenby	NIEA

Michael Bell
Mike Johnston
Ruth Potter
Diane Ruddock

Northern Ireland Food and Drink
Dairy Council for Northern Ireland
Countryside Services
National Trust

Agenda Item 1: Welcome and introductions

SM welcomed everyone to the meeting and attendees introduced themselves.

Agenda Item 2: Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The previous meeting was held on 27th November 2020. Minutes of the last meeting were approved by all attendees. Three actions from the previous meeting were discussed.

Agenda Item 3: Review of DAERA statistical activities since last meeting

HMcN gave a presentation on rural / environmental / climate change activity since the last meeting. He outlined the publications that have been published, across the work areas of rural, environmental and climate change statistics.

DC gave a presentation on the Farm Census / Rural Development Programme Monitoring and Evaluation / Food Processing activity since the last meeting.

- Farm Census data collection moved fully online in 2020 with focused telephone follow-up. This move has proved very successful and there has been no return to paper data collection.
- Final statistics are compiled from online survey returns augmented by administrative data where available.
- The vegetable survey was re-instated as part of the census data collection in 2021 having been paused in 2020 to reduce burden on respondents with the move to online data collection.
- All animal inventories which were postponed in 2020 have been re-instated.

PK gave a presentation on Economics and Evaluation Branch activity since the last meeting, outlining the work of his branch to produce the data and publications on Agriculture Markets, Farm Level Incomes and Performance; and Agricultural Sector Level Incomes. The Statistical Review of Northern Agriculture was also detailed.

Agenda Item 4: Forward work programme

HMcN gave a presentation on rural / environmental / climate change activity forward work programme. This included:

1. Rural statistics

- Continuing to monitor statistical and research output from across government and externally in order to broaden the S&R evidence base for policy makers.
- The 2022 Key Rural Issues is scheduled for publication on 3 February 2023.
- Continuing series of topical reports in conjunction with stakeholders.
- 2021 Census of Population data to be released at 'local geographies', to include urban/rural analysis, in summer 2023.

2. Environmental statistics

- Publications will continue to evolve to meet the needs of both internal and external users:
- 2023 CBL report will include statistics on the recently introduced 25p/bag levy.
- ESR report is constantly revised to consider new data sources and remove those no longer available. Content will be amended to reflect the status of PfG,
- The intention is to replace with Waste Tracking (UK wide) which will provide greater information on waste movements. This will require major changes to data validation and reporting processes.

3. Climate Change statistics

- Publications will continue to evolve in content:
- Greenhouse gas inventory to possibly include summary data for Republic of Ireland.
- Develop a portal for local authority GHG estimate via 'NISRA Data Portal'.
- A lot of time involved in supporting the development of the NI Climate Action Plan:
- Net Northern Ireland emissions account for the year 2050 is at least 100% lower than the baseline;
- Net Northern Ireland emissions account for the year 2030 is at least 48% lower than the baseline.

DC gave a presentation on the farm survey / Rural Development Programme Monitoring and Evaluation / food processing forward work programme. This included:

1. Agricultural and Horticultural Census

- Results from the Agricultural and Horticultural Census in Northern Ireland 2022 will be published in late 2022/early 2023.
- Since 2020 we have made significant changes to both data collection and data analysis processes. The aim for this process is to produce one timely final report each year with no need for a provisional release.

- Explore all administrative data that is held within the Department that has potential to supplement or replace some of the census questions to reduce burden on respondents and improve data quality.
- The move to online data collection allows for more flexibility in questionnaire design with the option to add temporary questions/modules to future data collections.

2. Integrated Farm Survey (formerly the EU Farm Structure Survey)

- This survey has not been run since 2016. A planned run of the survey in 2020 was postponed due to the pandemic and ultimately cancelled as a result of Brexit.
- The data provided by this survey is useful in a number of areas and so it is our intention to field a version of this in the near future.
- With the absence of an EU remit there may be scope to conduct a more focused survey based on issues and concerns directly related to the NI agriculture sector whilst ensuring comparability between NI and the rest of the UK in any data collection where possible.

3. Farm Safety Partnership Survey

- Work is currently underway with HSENI and the Farm Safety Partnership to rerun the Farm Safety Partnership Survey in early 2023. This survey was previously conducted in 2015 and 2019

4. Rural Development Programme Monitoring and Evaluation

- The 2022 Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme Annual Implementation Report and Citizen's Summary is due for publication in October/November 2023.

5. Food Processing

- Preparation work for the 2021 Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Processing Report will begin in the new year and is due to publish in the summer.
- Work is already underway on experimental statistics on processing purchases by country which it is hoped will be included in the 2021 report.
- SASB will liaise closely with Invest NI to try and prevent any future issues with data sharing for this report.

PK gave a presentation on Economics and Evaluation Branch forward work programme. This included:

- Continuation of the normal work program of data collection and statistical releases.
- Review options for re-establishment of statistical releases that have been postponed for a number of years e.g. milk utilisation statistics and pig financial results.

1. Farm Level Incomes and Performance

- Completion of the 21/22 Farm Business Survey (FBS) currently behind schedule due to field staff shortages.
- Press release on Farm Incomes in 21/22 (provisional) and 22/23 (forecast) to be published in February 23.
- Northern Ireland Farm Performance Indicators 21/22 and Farm Incomes in Northern Ireland reports for 21/22 to be published once FBS data collection complete.
- Recruitment of staff and farmers to get sample numbers built up again in the Farm Business Survey to be undertaken during 2023.

2. Agricultural Sector level Incomes

- Agricultural Sector level provisional incomes for 2022 to be published in statistical release at the end of Feb 23.

3. Other Publications – Proposals

- Statistical Review of NI agriculture – to be reviewed in 2023 following feedback from ONS good practice team.
- Northern Ireland Agri-Food Sector Key Statistics report to be discontinued
- Dashboards to be developed and made available to users if feasible.

PC asked about import and export statistics, specifically recording of trade with ROI / GB / internationally and if that includes break downs of where the goods are going to / coming from, ie, farms or slaughter.

SM – DAERA report on import and export statistics for food processors but there is less data available on livestock etc... DAERA do plan to publish in more detail in the future but there is no timeline yet.

CD suggested HMRC/ TSS has data on imports/exports and suggested a formal discussion on what data is available may be useful.

IS discussed CAFRE work on carbon emissions and suggested investigating what information they have available that could be of use to DAERA.

IS asked if it is possible to have separate statistics reported on cattle and sheep, as it is difficult to get statistics on sheep alone.

PK – Income level data includes both sheep and cattle and previously work was done to separate them but was too difficult.

DR requested when completing the Farm Census, would it be possible to provide farmers with a summary at the end which they could print out to reference. SM and DC agreed to investigate.

- *Action: DC to investigate possibility of a summary print out at the end of the Farm Census to allow farmers to print out and review/retain their details/answers.*

PC queried what will be replacing the EU Structure survey. He suggested the replacement be comparable across the UK. SM and DC agreed this would be useful.

SM agreed to consult as far as possible on the EU Structure Survey replacement before implementing it.

AC requested the DAERA website be redesigned to make it more user friendly. SM agreed it needs work but that they are limited by IT restrictions. DAERA are developing dashboards that will hopefully improve accessibility and ease of use in future.

Agenda Item 5: Presentation 1: Greenhouse Gas Inventory

HMcN gave a presentation on the Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

- Presentation will be hosted on DAERA Statistics website

CS asked how soon local authority level statistics on greenhouse gases would be available. HMcN – July Greenhouse Gas Emissions publication depending on data available and should be available on the website as either a PDF or in a dashboard.

MC queried what happens if a data source is no longer available. HMcN – Indicators will be used to record emissions, the indicators may change but the data can continue to be recorded, or new data sources used.

AC asked about local authority level data, and availability of statistics at lower levels such as SOA etc... HMcN – Yes possibly depending on the NISRA portal/ IT limitations.

PC queried how indicators and new methodologies will be decided when reducing emissions. How quickly will the indicators show improvements based on the methodologies used and how will farmers know what they are doing is working and worth the cost.

SM- Some methodologies will take longer to show in the statistics but will show changes eventually. Indicators and methodologies will be monitored and changed where appropriate.

CS discussed the need for recording and testing of methodologies in order to encourage uptake and participation of farms and industries. The work of farmers and industry should be monitored and acknowledged.

CD suggested a working group be set up to ensure the inventories to monitor emissions are considered from different perspectives.

- *Action: SM to follow up on a working group for emissions inventories.*

GG suggests keeping industry involved as they will be investing in R&D and need to be included in discussions on inventories.

JMcC discussed the need to disseminate information to farmers in a relevant and timely manner. Many of their members do not understand the information released by DAERA and DAERA need to plan to explain their changes to farmers over time and not in large information dumps quickly.

- *Action: SM to raise the release and explanation of information to the public with policy colleagues.*

Agenda Item 6: Presentation 2: Farm Income and Agricultural Market Statistics

MP gave a presentation on Farm Income and Agricultural Market Statistics.

- Presentation will be hosted on DAERA Statistics website

AOB

SM no press release delays expected in December except possibly a short delay of the Farm Census.

Date of next meeting: TBC

Summary of actions:

- *DC to investigate possibility of a summary print out at the end of the Farm Census to allow farmers to print out and review/retain their details/answers.*
- *SM to follow up on a working group for emissions inventories.*
- *SM to raise the release and explanation of information to the public with policy colleagues.*