

Minutes of the DARDstats User Group meeting

Monday 20th April 2015

2nd Floor Conference Room Dundonald House

Present

EB	Elliot Bell	UFU (Ulster Farmers Union)
PC	Paul Caskie	DARD (Farm Surveys Branch)
ID	Ian Duff	UAS (Ulster Arable Society)
NF	Norman Fulton	DARD (Head of Profession)
JG	Jennifer Gilmour	DARD (Resource Economics Branch)
JH	John Henning	Danske Bank
VH	Victoria Hill	DARD (Agricultural Economy Branch)
RI	Robin Irvin	NI Grain Trade Association
PK	Paul Keatley	DARD (Farm Surveys Branch)
IMC	Ian McCluggage	CAFRE
CMC	Conor McCormack (secretary)	DARD (Farm Surveys Branch)
SME	Seamus McErlean	DARD (Agricultural Economy Branch)
CMK	Cormack McKervey	Ulster Bank
KMM	Kieran McManus (Minutes)	DARD (Farm Surveys Branch)
TM	Tom Morrow	Irish Farmers Journal
MP	Myles Patton	AFBI (Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute)
TP	Tracy Power (Chair)	NISRA (Director of Analysis)
SP	Sharon Proctor	Countryside Services Ltd
NQ	Nigel Quinn	DARD (Sustainable Rural Communities)
HS	Heather Stewart	YFCU (Young Farmer's Clubs of Ulster)
WT	William Taylor	DARD (Agricultural Economy Branch)

Apologies

Edward Adamson	National Sheep Association
Michael Bell	NIFDA (NI food and Drinks Association)
Ken Bishop	NILGA (NI Local Government Association)

Teresa Canavan	RDC (Rural Development Council)
Kate Clifford	RCN (Rural Community Network
Shaun Irvine	Livestock Auctioneers Association NI
Hilary Kirkpatrick	CNCC (Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside)
Ruth McAreavey	Queens University Belfast
James O' Boyle	CAFRE
Sally Shortall	Queens University Belfast
David Rankin	NIACA (NI Agricultural Consultants Assoc)
Diane Ruddock	National Trust

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the 2015 DARDstats meeting and encouraged everyone to contribute to the discussions. Apologies were recorded (as above).

Agenda Item 2 – Minutes of Previous Meeting

Action points from the previous Meeting.

Action: CMC to provide analysis type of farmers responding online.

CMC said that analysis of online returns showed that people who are more active online with other areas of their farm business are more likely to respond to the Census online also. Approximately 9% of census forms received were online in 2014. Dairy farmers were more likely to respond online (15% response rate) as they generally have more experience of other online services such as APHIS. Top Fruit producers and horticulturists who do not regularly interface with DARD online were less likely to respond via this route.

Action: PC to follow up with TC/RDC on farm safety training survey linkage.

Paul Caskie had discussions with Teresa Canavan on a range of farm safety survey issues during the year. No further action was taken on linking survey results in advance of the main Farm Safety Partnership Survey (conducted in Spring 2015).

Action: Publish Farm Census questionnaire online.

Form published at the following link: www.dardni.gov.uk/agricultural-census-ni

Agenda Item 3 – Review of DARD statistics 2013 -2014

CMC gave a presentation on the major postal surveys undertaken within Farm Surveys Branch in 2014. He provided an overview of the June Census, December Survey, Pig, Sheep and Bird inventories, Potato Survey, Cereal Survey, Farm Safety Survey and the Farm Business Survey. Information on surveys/outputs completed by Agricultural Economy Branch were also outlined.

CMC advised that all reports and press releases are available from the DARD website at www.dardni.gov.uk/statistics or via <https://twitter.com/DARDstats>

Forthcoming releases are notified at: www.statistics.gov.uk while interactive charts and maps are available at NINIS www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk

SME described a recent change to the publication of the monthly 'Pig Financial' figures. He explained that because of staffing pressures it was now only feasible to release the figures quarterly – though the quarterly report would contain monthly figures. He asked for comments and IMC was concerned that users would not have up to date access to the average pig prices available within the 'Pig Financials' statistical notice. SME explained that average pig prices were still available to stakeholders in the weekly 'Market Report' produced by DARD. He added that if anybody required data from the 'Pig Financials' statistical report prior to the quarterly publication coming out that his team could be contacted directly for the figures. No other concerns were raised on this issue.

SMC explained that changes may need to be made to the Milk Utilisation Survey with respect to the way the results were presented. The problem was that the number of firms contributing data to each product category had recently fallen below the threshold set where the risk of disclosure becomes high. Scotland was having similar problems and have decided not to publish Scotland-specific figures though if the other devolved regions continue publishing their figures along with UK level figures then the Scottish figures could be derived (discussion are ongoing on this issue). With regard to the problem in NI, three solutions were being considered: a) some milk products being amalgamated; b) change rule re the number of firms below which disclosure becomes an issue: and, c) ask firms if they content for figures to continue being published. After discussion the consensus of the DARDstats group was for option c.

TP paused to check if anyone had any questions. She explained that the NINIS Website has a range of statistics including agriculture and that it is accessed from a link on the DARD website. It was agreed an additional link could be added to the June Agricultural Census section of the DARD website to help direct people to NINIS. [NINIS interactive Agricultural maps](#)

Action – CMC to create NINIS link on Census publication online page.

ID asked why there was so few statistics on the Horticultural Sector. PC explained that while some sections of the horticultural industry were adequately covered by survey activity, small specialist niches were more difficult to reach, especially as these growers were not on the main DARD databases. IMC suggested that it would be useful to contact the Horticultural Forum as members

could help identify specialist growers and assist in getting the cooperation of the industry in surveys needed to enhance statistical outputs.

Action – PC to contact Horticultural Forum via DARD Secretariat.

JH suggested that users would be interested in statistics from the historical datasets held in the DARD library – ‘throwback Thursday’. It would be good to tweet some interesting historical agricultural statistics possibly once a week under the throw back Thursday tag.

Action – DARD to consider an historical tweet series.

RI queried a gap in the published statistics on feed production. It was explained that because raw material for feed manufacturing and for direct feed use were being imported into NI for use both here and in the Republic of Ireland, that it was difficult to keep track of feed production. SME said he was aware of this issue and had been in discussion with NIGTA and hoped to move action on this issue up the work agenda of AEB.

MP enquired why there was a fertiliser survey conducted in GB but not in NI. PC explained that in GB there is a dedicated British Survey of Fertiliser Practices, but in Northern Ireland usage for grassland and the main arable crops was estimated from the Farm Business Survey and validated with reference to data on fertiliser deliveries.

Agenda item 4 – Farm Incomes and Costs of Production for Beef and Milk

Paul Keatley gave a presentation on farm incomes and costs of production for beef and milk.

CMK asked if there were any farm level income figures for poultry farms. PK indicated that due to the vertically integrated nature of the sector it was difficult to recruit poultry farmers into the survey due to commercial sensitivities around cost of production. PC added that poultry were included within of the calculation of aggregate level indicator (TIFF) and that if the commercial sensitivity issues could be overcome then farm level incomes could be produced in the future.

SME asked if any analysis had been completed on the distribution of costs around the mean. PK indicated that this hadn't been completed to date. He also stated that the methodology employed for calculating beef production costs made the calculation of standard errors difficult. He also said that there were concerns around how useful the distribution would be and its potential misuse. For example, if there is a farm with low depreciation costs, is this just because the farm hasn't invested for a long time and therefore such stand alone results could lead to incorrect inferences being made.

It was explained that forage costs includes the cost of fertiliser as well as contractor costs.

The dairy results indicated that in the five year period between 2009 & 2013; concentrate usage increased by 0.4 tonnes/cow as farmers are using greater amounts for better yields.

CMK queried if the presentations would be made available. PC advised that they will be published on the DARDstats section of the DARD website. www.dardni.gov.uk/dardstats-user-group

Action – CMC to publish 2015 DARDstats presentations online and circulate link to all.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – Rural development: Statistics and Analytical Support

Paul Caskie outlined how statistics have been collected from other Northern Ireland departments, disaggregated into Urban and Rural areas and are now published in a rural statistics section on the DARD website.

www.dardni.gov.uk/rural-statistics

In response to a question from ID on per capita food consumption data, NF explained that the Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS) for Northern Ireland was discontinued from 2006. The Family Resources Survey (FRS) is available through NISRA for information on family expenditure on food (but not consumption levels).

The following link directs to the latest available FRS information:

www.dsdni.gov.uk/family_resources_survey

TP explained that NISRA has been working with different government bodies to link different data for research purposes through the ADRC-NI.

www.adrn.ac.uk/about/research-centre-n-ireland

AOB

SME wished to draw attention to the DARD twitter account which has 530 followers. Any feedback on the account is appreciated.

<https://twitter.com/DARDstats>

TP enquired if the group were happy with the current format and welcomed any suggestions for alternative formats. She thanked those attending and gave an open invitation for members of the group to make a relevant presentation in forthcoming DARDstats meetings.