

## **Minutes of the Horticulture Forum meeting**

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013, Greenmount Campus**

**Chair:** Robin McKee

**Present:** Hamilton Loney, John Beggs, Kieran Hughes, Ian Duff, Doug Thomson, Elaine Shaw, Roy Lyttle, Lyn Sherriff, Patricia Erwin, Barclay Bell, Eric Long, Elaine Chapman (minutes)

**Apologies:** Sam MacNeice, Thomas Gilpin, Keith Crawford, William Montgomery

### **1. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

### **2. Future roles and structure of the Forum**

As agreed at the meeting on 25 March, Ian had forwarded a document entitled 'Horticulture Forum – Future Roles and Activity' to Forum members for their comments in April 2013. Ian summarised the responses from the organisations represented on the Forum and listed all the comments received within a summary document (attached).

It was accepted by members present that the structural proposals circulated and which had been unanimously agreed by those responding, should be adopted. Kieran Hughes expressed concern that Hughes Mushrooms should have been consulted, in addition to Northway Mushrooms, to give the packers/processors perspective. It was agreed to add Kieran's name as a consultee representing the mushroom sector.

Representative organisations indicated that they would contribute £50 to £100 annually to help provide some publicity for the forum. Growers NI have yet to respond on this issue. They will discuss proposal when they next meet. The UFU has agreed to provide £100 on behalf of both the UFU Vegetables and Top fruit committees.

A number of members expressed concern that this amount of funding was insufficient to allow the Horticulture Forum to carry out any significant initiatives or work. A number of comments were made by members with regard to funding of the Horticulture Forum:

- The small annual payment proposed was originally seen as seed corn to help to create some commitment and ownership of the organisation. The thinking was that it could be used to carry out a small amount of PR with

the Horticulture Forum developing and driving ideas for initiatives while accessing other organisations and/or commercial sponsorship to carry out work required.

- Only groups that provide the annual contribution should be allowed to sit on the Forum and there should be a common contribution for everyone.
- There should be some means by which commercial companies can support the work of the Forum.
- If the annual payment is too high, smaller organisations will be excluded and this puts the concept of the Forum representing the interests of the whole industry at risk.
- A number of members felt the suggested levy was much too low to allow any meaningful PR work to be completed. Figures of several thousand pounds per year were suggested as required by other organisations. The forum needs to be clear what it wants to do. Kieran Hughes offered to contribute £500 to support the forum.
- Members agreed that the issue of funding required further discussion and given the time constraints of this meeting warranted a further meeting.

### **3. Supply Chain Development Programme (SCDP) Group Feedback**

A review of the SCDP is being carried out by DARD staff to provide input to the new Rural Development Plan. The Horticulture Forum has been asked to provide their input. *Elaine Chapman to forward the template and related questions to members for comments. Elaine to collate comments for members to discuss at the next meeting before forwarding to Julie-Ann Moorhead in DARD.*

### **4. Going for Growth – Agri-Food Strategy Report**

Eric Long stressed the importance of the Horticulture Forum Strategy report in shaping the considerable horticulture input to the Going for Growth document. The Forum strategy has helped horticulture ‘punch above its weight’ within the wider agri-food industry report. As the report contains a very wide range of recommendations Ministers are still giving the Going for Growth report their consideration.

### **5. Review of apprenticeship framework for NI**

Lantra wish to review the current apprenticeship framework in consultation with horticulture industry representatives. The Horticulture Forum has been asked to send a representative to a meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June at 2:00pm at Greenmount Campus. The Horticulture Forum expressed concern that apprenticeships currently applied more to the amenity sector rather than commercial production. *Robin McKee to attend the meeting and to stress the need for apprenticeship opportunities within production horticulture. ALCI will also send a representative.*

## **6. CAP Greening letter**

The Ulster Arable Society (UAS) has prepared a letter highlighting members concerns about greening issues within the current CAP reform. This letter has been forwarded to local MEPs to encourage them to carefully consider the Three Crop Rule and Environmental Focus Areas. The UAS has asked the Horticulture Forum to support them and endorse their letter. *Ian Duff to draft a letter to send to MEPs.*

## **7. Horticulture Matters**

The Royal Horticulture society (RHS), in conjunction with other high profile horticulture organisations has produced the Horticulture Matters report to highlight the need for recruitment and skills development within the horticulture industry. Members were provided with a copy of this report. Doug Thomson proposed this report be raised with local ministers.

## **8. Presentation by Leigh Morris**

Leigh is the current President of the Institute of Horticulture (IOH) and the Associate Director of Horticulture at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. In his presentation, Leigh highlighted the work of the IOH and discussed the IOH Grow website that provides a one stop shop for careers, courses and jobs in horticulture. Owen Doyle, Irish President of the IOH, also attended. Both encouraged members to become involved with the IOH and stressed the importance of working together for the good of the industry.

## **9. Date of next meeting**

The proposed date for the next meeting is Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2013 at 8:00pm in the Rugby Club, Portadown. *Elaine Chapman to confirm.* Topics from the agenda to be carried forward to this meeting are:

- Structure and funding of Horticulture Forum
- Process for monitoring progress with implementation of the Horticulture Forum Strategy
- SCDP Review
- Easter Sunday trading
- Ombudsman visit to NI
- Horticulture Matters report