

# Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting

Monday 14 September 2015, 7:30 pm, Portadown Rugby Club

**Chair:** Elaine Shaw

**Present:** Barclay Bell, Elaine Chapman, Barbara Erwin, Patricia Erwin, Ivor Ferguson, Kieran Hughes, Eric Long, Roy Lyttle, Robin McKee, Patrick Taggart, Doug Thomson

**Apologies:** Keith Crawford, Ian Duff, Philip Gass (resigned), Thomas Gilpin, William Montgomery, Paul Mooney

## 1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

In response to **4. EU membership referendum** Barbara circulated a Belfast Telegraph article, *We really need to think hard about the benefits of remaining in the EU*, by Angela McGowan, Chief Economist Danske Bank. Barbara confirmed that the NI Flower and Foliage Association is in favour of continued EU membership.

**Forum members to ascertain the position of their organisations on the question of continued EU membership before the next meeting.**

## 2. Rural Development Programme update

Patrick gave an update on the RDP 2014-2020.

Business Development Groups are expected to open soon. About 160 groups are planned, with about 20 members per group. Groups will meet about 8 times per year and will address: farm safety; benchmarking; and business planning etc. The groups will provide access to CAFRE Development Advisers. Business planning will help farmers access the Farm Business Investment Scheme.

The Farm Business Investment Scheme is expected to open next year. The scheme is likely to be tiered with support at up to 40%. Responses to the Whole Farm Needs Assessment Survey were used to design the scheme. The needs of the horticulture industry were well represented to those developing the scheme.

Elaine Chapman mentioned that the Agri-food Producer Co-operation Scheme, which is expected to open next year, will potentially support groups in: market research; study tours; and in working together using shared resources.

**Elaine Shaw to speak to Ian about the possibility of lobbying to hasten the opening of parts of the RDP.**

### **3. Forum's responses to problems currently facing horticultural industry**

Forum members identified three current problems: low prices; rising labour costs (National Living Wage and pension contributions); and increasing demands for improvements in quality.

UFU representatives present reported that they had had meetings with major retailers, primarily on pricing. These meetings had been positive, with Lidl and Aldi both expressing commitment to buying local produce. The UFU intends to work in concert with the other UK farming unions, as low prices are a problem throughout the UK.

Roy felt that any press articles about the problems faced by the horticulture industry should not give the impression of resentment at having to pay higher wages.

**Elaine Shaw to consult UFU about how best to respond effectively to the problems being faced by horticulture.**

### **4. Preparation for AGM**

The AGM is due in November 2015. New members will need to be nominated (or existing members re-nominated) for a period of two years.

**Patrick to email Operational Guidance to Forum members.**

**Forum members to provide nominees from their respective organisations.**

### **5. Horticulture Forum bank account**

Elaine Shaw reported that progress is being made.

**Elaine Shaw to arrange the opening of the bank account, with herself, Tim and Patrick as co-signatories.**

### **6. Review and Strategic Priorities for the Development of the Horticulture Industry, Action Plan**

Elaine Chapman gave an overview of the actions taken since 2014.

Elaine Chapman explained that the upgrade of Statistical Review information published by DARD relating to the Horticulture Sector was problematic. DARD

does not have the resources to justify detailed recording of data from small, specialist sectors. She said that the Agri-food Producer Co-operation Scheme, which is expected to open next year, will potentially support groups in market research. Barclay pointed out that the single Agri-food Marketing Organisation (Going for Growth, recommendation 1) may be able to assist with market research in sectors that are too small for DARD to monitor/research.

It was agreed that the Action Plan should be extended.

**Patrick to email Forum members, asking for ideas for the extended Action Plan.**

**Forum members to suggest Action Plan objectives by late January 2016.**

## **7. AOB**

### **NPD Toolkit**

Doug explained that the NPD Toolkit is a resource provided by Horticulture Wales. Elaine Chapman observed that the Welsh horticulture industry is similar in size to that in Northern Ireland but enjoys impressive support in terms of research and funding etc.

### **Survey on attitudes to red tape among agri-food processors**

Patrick reminded members that they have until 30 September to take part in this DETI-led survey into red tape for agri-food processors. The survey can be found here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CDT6HC7>.

### **Teleconference with farming unions**

A teleconference between the UK farming unions is planned.

**Patricia to advise Elaine Shaw of details so that she can take part representing the Forum.**

### **Year of Food 2016**

2016 has been designated the Year of Food in Northern Ireland.

**Elaine Shaw to contact Food NI to explore how the horticulture industry can benefit from the Year of Food.**

### **Horticulture Forum website**

Posting information about upcoming events on the website would be likely to generate more site traffic and interest.

**Elaine Shaw to let Patrick know of events that the Forum wants to promote via the website.**

**8. Date of next meeting**

No date was set but it was agreed to aim to hold the AGM in November.