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Animal Disease Control & Trade Policy
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Room 714
Dundonald House
Belfast
BT4 3SD

The Northern Ireland Poultry Health Assurance Scheme (Fees) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2016

Dear Fionna,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above. The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) is the largest farming organisation in Northern Ireland representing over 11,500 farming families and as such, we would like to make the following comments;

The members of the UFU believe that the ongoing Poultry Health Assurance Scheme is important for the NI poultry sector in order to maintain our export capability. Given that fees have not been amended since 2013, we accept that a review of the current fee structure is required in order to allow DARD to achieve full cost recovery and to ensure the best value for money for the industry. The committee would however like to request a breakdown for the proposed cost increases in order to ascertain if all of the increases can be justified. To our knowledge, UK inflation has increased by 2%, 0.5% and 0.1% per year since the beginning of 2013 (Office of National Statistics). In light of this, the proposed fee increases of 8.8% for the cost of initial registration and member fees and 28.9% increase for the annual administration fee appears to be excessive.

Furthermore, we would question the department's decision to increase the fee paid for an administration officer's time by £5.88 (a 28.9% increase), whereas the fee paid for a veterinary inspectors time only increased by £3.03 (a 5.7% increase). It is the opinion of our membership that the industry values trained specialist vets higher than administrative staff. As such, we must question how DARD can justify providing a higher wage increase to administrative staff when veterinary staff are satisfied by a £3.03 (5.7% increase).

Additionally, the UFU notes that DARD has opted to maintain mileage expenses at 45p for each mile travelled. Given that fuel prices have fallen by 23.5% since early 2013 (Office of National Statistics), the UFU must question the department's logic for maintaining the current valuation.

On behalf of the members of the UFU, I trust that these comments will be considered as part of this consultation process.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Geoff Thompson

Policy Officer

Animal Health, Pigs, Poultry