Have your say – UFU to hold Brexit Meetings: The UFU will host a series of meetings to give members an opportunity to feed in their views on the future of agriculture, as the UK prepares to leave the EU. The Union will outline what it has done to date but more importantly wants to hear what our members have to say on the way forward and the meetings will be structured to allow for plenty of discussion and debate. We know CAP will end, and we need to have something ready to take its place. Already we have developed ten key principles for the future of agricultural policy around support, trade, regulation and labour availability. We are currently in the process of adding more detail on these major issues and these will act as a starting point for the debate at these meetings. The dates for UFU ‘Future of Farming’ meetings are: Monday, 24th October, Armagh City Hotel; Tuesday, 25th October, La Mon Hotel; Thursday, 27th October, Roe Park Resort; Tuesday, 1st November, Tullyglass Hotel; Wednesday, 2nd November, The Silverbirch Hotel; and Thursday, 3rd November, Killyhevlin Hotel. All meetings start at 8pm. To read the story in full visit: http://bit.ly/2dYnaXN

Secretary Of State Meeting: This week the UFU met with the Secretary of State, James Brokenshire, and Minister for Exiting the EU, Robin Walker. It was a wide ranging discussion and the UFU believe they left with an understanding about the importance of agriculture to the local rural communities and wider economy. Northern Ireland is in a unique position, as the only UK region that will share a land border with an EU member state when the UK leaves the EU. This is a major issue for farmers here, especially in terms of livestock trade and as an export market. At the meeting the UFU wanted reassurance that there will be minimal disruption to this relationship. Referring to suggestions by some of the ministers’ Conservative colleagues that leaving the EU is an opportunity for cheaper food, the UFU stressed that this should not be about undermining farmers with imports of cheap food. Instead the industry should be backed to provide high quality, traceable food at a reasonable price for consumers. Northern Ireland is already a net exporter of food. Brexit is an opportunity to develop our industry and help make the UK more self-sufficient in food. The UFU also took the opportunity to explain about Northern Ireland’s family farm structure and its importance to the rural community and economy. Northern Ireland is proud of its family farms. The UFU see these businesses as vital to the future growth of the agri-food industry. Agriculture policy post-Brexit must include support equivalent to that now provided by the EU.

Brexit: Confirmation by the Prime Minister, Theresa May that by March she will trigger the two year process for the UK to leave the EU has to act as a catalyst for a real debate on the future of agricultural support outside the CAP says the UFU. The time since the EU Referendum has been frustrating, due to the lack of engagement up to this point by the ministers at Westminster responsible for shaping a new support model. However, following this announcement there can now be no justification for delay. The sooner the debate begins in earnest the greater the chances are of this being an opportunity to create a new support model that will deliver a thriving future for farmers, the countryside and the rural economy. To read the story in full: http://bit.ly/2dNmIrn

Chancellor Phillip Hammond announcement: The UFU says the Chancellor’s announcement - guaranteeing that EU funding will continue after the UK has left the EU covers Northern Ireland’s agri-environment scheme and the wider Rural Development programme. This provides welcome reassurance that payments are secure until 2020. The focus now however is the wider issue of support for agriculture and rural development, after the UK is no longer a member of the EU. The guarantee that funding will continue until 2020 is good news, but the UFU are concentrating now on how best to support farmers after 2020. In doing this we are working closely with politicians here and at Westminster, and with other UK farm unions. Our aim is to secure support equivalent to that presently provided by the EU. The Chancellor's statement confirmed that while the UK is still a
Advance CAP payments due October: The UFU has welcomed the announcement by DAERA minister, Michelle McIlveen, that advance payments will be issued to 80 per cent of eligible farm businesses week commencing Monday 17th October with full payments being made to 95 per cent of eligible applicants by the end of the year. Given the acute cash flow pressures the industry faces these payments will be anxiously awaited by farming families across Northern Ireland and this announcement from the minister is certainly encouraging news. Under current EU rules this advance is limited to 50 per cent of the direct payment but has been allowed to be increased in previous years to help offset severe cash flow difficulties - something which we have been pushing for and we are pleased that the European Commission has agreed to increase this level to 70 per cent this year. This announcement by the Minister also reflects the move there has been towards on-line applications and we would encourage farmers to do this where possible, since this announcement confirms that doing so creates the conditions for early payments.

Clarity on Slurry Spreading: This week the UFU welcomed clarity from Agriculture Minister Michelle McIlveen in relation to spreading slurry after the 15th October closed period deadline. The UFU is urging farmers to use the ‘reasonable excuse’ clause with caution, stressing that spreading slurry during the closed period must be a last resort. Farmers must be able to prove they the exhausted all other options for emptying tanks and they must have all their nitrates paperwork in order. Having photos or videos of ground conditions and rainfall data would also be beneficial. The UFU has created a template members can use to record the necessary information to help back up their case. This is available from UFU HQ or local group offices. It is also advisable that members contact either their technical officer or the UFU’s environmental policy officer before spreading.

Grassland grazing: There have been reports that some farmers are experiencing shortages of grassland for grazing. The UFU has welcomed clarification from the minister for landowners who have surplus grass, with regard to others being permitted to graze land. The minister said this should not threaten direct payments or ANC payments if it was on a short term basis, for up to eight weeks. However she has said this may not be the case if a farmer with surplus grass carried out little or no agricultural activity in 2016. The advice again is to keep records to be in a position to show that agricultural activity took place, so that any questions over the validity of claims can be challenged.

Dairy: The UFU says the current fall in milk production has been coming for some time, and will continue into the New Year. This claim is based on an analysis of global trends, and it says that while the EU voluntary milk production reduction programme may have some impact, it is global events that are driving a better balance between supply and demand and that these were in place before the Commission scheme was implemented. The UFU says the reduction in production here and globally is a normal reaction to poor prices. It says it reflects changes to feeding strategies and culling plans in response to pressure on profitability. There is a however critical level of milk reduction that is practical. Once you get beyond this you may have made irreversible decisions in relation to your herd. As a result you may well have sacrificed the opportunity to benefit from a price recovery this was why, when the voluntary reduction scheme was announced, the UFU said the decision had to be based on individual farm circumstances – for example whether a producer could alter calving patterns. To read this story in full visit: http://bit.ly/2dwilt3V Also this week, the UFU were invited to give a presentation to the Cookstown Dairy Discussion Group meeting at the Royal Hotel. This will be the first in a series of meetings with Dairy Discussion Groups throughout the Province. The presentation focused on the UFU MPI, current production levels and the dairy market outlook.
BSE Negligible Risk Status: The UFU has welcomed Farm Minister, Michelle McIlveens application to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to seek official BSE negligible risk (BSE NR) status. The UFU have been pressing DARD, now DAERA, since December of last year to prioritise this application, seeing it as a way to dismantle costly BSE controls that are no longer proportionate to the risk. Northern Ireland has the right credentials to apply for ‘BSE negligible risk status’ and it is hoped the outcome will be positive at the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) annual congress in Paris, May 2017.

UFU/IFA Rural Crime Meeting: The UFU met with IFA to discuss Rural Crime which is of growing concern within each organisation. It was clear that there was allot of mutual issues and it was agreed that IFA/UFU would develop a joint campaign to lobby both jurisdictions. The UFU were also informed about ‘Theft Stop’, a membership service developed by IFA for its members to help prevent incidents of crime.

Agricultural Wages Board: The UFU represented the Employer side at the first meeting of Agricultural Wages Board for the 2016/2017 wage negotiations. The UFU provided a presentation on the state of the farming industry in Northern Ireland. This will help form the backdrop for settling the wage levels and terms and conditions in January 2017.

NEXT WEEK
- Utility Regulator Consultation on Power NI Price Control 2017: Rural Enterprise Policy Officer
- Flavour of the North Event: UFU President and Deputy President IF
- Beef event-Brussels: UFU Beef and Lamb Chair and Hill Farming Vice Chair
- Lough Neagh Management Plan: Policy Officer
- NI Pig Health Initiative - Technical Committee: Pork and Bacon Policy Officer
- NIE Meeting: UFU President and Legislation Policy Officer
- Poultry Meeting: Poultry Policy Officer
- Year of Food and Drink Meeting: Communications Officer
- BIPA Committee C - Economic Affairs in Belfast: UFU President and Chief Executive
- Animal Health and Welfare NI Meeting: Policy Officer
- DUP Meeting: UFU President and Chief Executive
- Committee Meetings: Animal Health and Welfare

Land Mobility Scheme
The UFU and YFCU are encouraging farmers to get in touch and register their interest in the Land Mobility Scheme for Northern Ireland. The aim of this scheme will be to try and match young farmers keen to enter the industry with older farmers with no succession plans in place. You can register your initial interest by contacting: Angela Scott at UFU on 028 9037 0222 or email angela@ufuhq.com or Heather Stewart at YFCU on 028 9037 0713 or email heather.stewart@yfcu.org

UFU MEMBERSHIP SERVICES
→ For up to date fuel prices for UFU members using the UFU Maxol Fuel Card visit the new UFU website http://www.ufuni.org/membership/services