



Manx National Farmers' Union
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Press statement by Manx NFU – April 2016

In the light of another navel-gazing, inward-looking, deck chair-moving consultation by DEFA at a time when agriculture is facing a huge crisis ([Provisional figures indicate that the 'Total Income from Farming' \(TIFF\) in Northern Ireland fell by 41% in 2015 \(42% in real terms\)](#)), it is time for the Manx NFU to speak out on behalf of its members.

DEFA has launched a “consultation” on its proposals for an integrated Agriculture and Fisheries Grant Scheme, which appears to offer nothing more than provide DEFA with the opportunity to distribute monies allocated for investment in agricultural businesses to other sectors and potentially to non-residents of the Island.

The Scope of Government seeks to encourage the stakeholders of any Strategies/Schemes to be the masters of their own destiny and get involved rather than potentially increasing the activities of Government unnecessarily – yet here we have a proposal which appears to be a job creation scheme for civil servants and has had no input from industry representatives. There has been no mention made of any intention to change the existing Agricultural schemes in either the Industry Advisory Committee meeting on 5th February or our Joint Liaison Meeting on 25th February. We are very concerned that these proposals move the specific Tynwald agreed targeted schemes in to a broad, less accountable, subjective scheme which is distributed on the whim of a civil servant.

Increasingly the Department's Minister and officers have narrowed their focus on to a very few niche food producers and products to the exclusion of mainstream agriculture. Whilst the Union supports the work to invigorate artisan food on Island, it is vital that DEFA works with the industry to identify and ring fence the needs of commercial agriculture which is surely the foundation from which everything else stems.



DEFA is not listening to the farmers who are actively trying to survive in the industry which is facing very challenging times/crisis. Most sectors are currently receiving returns which are below the costs of production. The Department does not recognise that agriculture delivers so much more than a few niche food products – management and maintenance of the landscape and wildlife habitat as recognised by the recent awarding of UNESCO Biosphere status and which attracts so many visitors to our unique Island, growing alternative crops for fuel/ energy, for medicines, for furniture oil (linseed), seed crops etc

On several occasions over many months DEFA have been both formally and informally requested to facilitate or implement actions which could potentially provide new opportunities for Manx agriculture; Seed Legislation (went to Tynwald Feb 2015) still not in place, to provide political/Government contacts in Norway agriculture/meat trade, green energy production opportunities, alternative crop opportunities, joint meetings with lime suppliers, legislation changes to allow production of raw milk, implementation of EID and BVD –free.....

We are extremely critical of Minister Ronan who purported to be the promoter of indigenous industries, yet through lack of knowledge, understanding, commitment and direction appears to be destroying Manx agriculture.

It is a sad indictment of a so-called Agriculture department that this “consultation” is launched at one of the busiest times of the year in the farming calendar for livestock and cereal farmers – perhaps further highlighting the disconnect between the Department and farming.

In summary we are faced with a Department which continues to plough it’s own lonely furrow, ignoring consultation feedback, avoiding meeting with industry representatives and continuously failing to facilitate requests for opening market opportunities which may provide viable, not to say profitable, income streams to Manx farms.

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