



# Vision | action plan

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## Foreword



Ian Pearson MP  
Parliamentary Under  
Secretary of State

One of the first issues I had to deal with on taking up office as Minister responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development was the Department's Modernisation programme. This was announced by my predecessor, Mrs Rodgers, in April of this year in response to a number of pressures, including the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the need for an improved interface with the rural community and the O'Hare Review of agri-food education and R&D.

A very important influence was the Vision Report produced by the Steering Group set up in May 2000 to develop a "vision" for the future of the agri-food sector. The need for such an exercise stemmed from declining farm incomes, under the impact of an appreciating exchange rate, the pressures likely to arise from the need for CAP reform in response to EU enlargement, Budgetary concerns and a new WTO deal, globalisation and pressures to produce safer food in an environmentally friendly and welfare conscious way. The Report was delivered to the Minister in October 2001 and put out to consultation immediately. The consultation period ended on 31 January 2002 by which time over 80 written responses and almost 30 requests for meetings had been received.

The accompanying Report is Government's response to this Vision exercise. You will note that almost sixty of the two hundred plus recommendations made in the Vision Report are already being implemented because they were either already planned or could be implemented within existing resources. A further twenty-five are being considered by a Sub-Group of the Rural Stakeholder Forum as they are, largely, for the industry itself to implement. I am confident

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that sufficient resources are available to implement the Action Plan in full. These will be confirmed in the Budget announcement shortly. Some activities will need to be phased and there will of course need to be satisfactory economic appraisals for each project to confirm their value for money.

Can I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mrs Rodgers for her foresight in setting up the Vision Steering Group? It is much better to try to take a co-ordinated and coherent approach to problems than to simply seek piecemeal solutions. The involvement of representatives of the various stakeholders on the Steering Group also made it clear that they had a responsibility to help in providing solutions to the problems. This is not, and cannot, be a matter for Government and the taxpayer alone.

I would also like to thank the Vision Steering Group for their work and for the report which they produced. Many of the recommendations fit in with Government's own thinking and plans – and it is significant that we have rejected very few of the recommendations.

Hopefully, we can restore devolution quickly and it will be up to a local Minister to drive the Action Plan forward. In the meanwhile, it is a real privilege to be able to undertake that task and I want to assure the agri-food sector stakeholders, consumers and those concerned with the environment, that I will always listen carefully to their views and always seek to act in their best interests.



Ian Pearson MP  
*Parliamentary Under Secretary of State*

## Introduction

A Steering Group was set up in May 2000 to establish a Vision for the future of the agri-food sector, and a strategy to enable the Vision to be realised, because it was clear that, entering the new millennium, the industry faced a range of very significant challenges. These were identified as:-

- The exchange rate between sterling and the euro and, particularly, the relative strength of sterling. There is a very close relationship between net income and the exchange rate;
- Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), partly because of the in-built mid-term review in the Agenda 2000 process and partly because of pressures to achieve a new WTO agreement and facilitate enlargement of the EU;
- Globalisation and, in particular, the way in which the major retailers and some manufacturers operate to source their supplies from wherever they can get the best deals on price, quality and service;
- Changing consumer tastes and preferences stemming partly from increasing affluence, demographic changes and an increasing awareness of the links between diet and health;
- The desire for food which is safe and seen to be safe; and
- Pressures to farm in an environmentally friendly and animal welfare conscious way.

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It was obvious that a piecemeal approach to addressing these issues would not work and that a more strategic approach was needed which would:-

- clearly identify the problems and challenges;
- develop a Vision for the agri-food sector;
- come up with a strategy to achieve that Vision.

Accordingly, a Vision Steering Group was appointed to identify the problems, and opportunities, in the rural economy over the next decade and, informed by that, to develop a Vision for the agri-food industry and to map out a strategy to meet that Vision. The Group was asked to report by March 2001 but, because of the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis, it was agreed that the launch of its Report would be postponed and that, in the meantime, a separate Sub-Group would be set up to consider the lessons to be learned from the outbreak.

The Report, which contains over 200 recommendations, was eventually published on 4 October 2001 and put out to consultation. The consultation period was extended to end on 31 January. Eighty-four written submissions were received and 27 meetings with stakeholders were held during this consultation period. The outcome is summarised below. A more detailed summary of the comments from consultees is available separately on the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) website, along with individual responses, except where confidentiality was requested. Hard copies of these may be obtained from Katrine Gibson, Modernisation Unit, DARD telephone: 028 9052 4093 or on the DARD textphone number: 028 9052 4420.

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On 11 March 2002, in response to the Vision Report recommendations, the then administration announced eleven measures which had broad support in the consultation process and were either already being taken forward by DARD or were capable of being implemented within existing resources. These measures, which address almost 60 of the recommendations, are: the setting up of 'focus farms'; Information and Communications Technology (ICT) training and development; re-skilling to address the issue of under-employment in agriculture; group-based learning approaches; a mid-May completion date for the Commercial Horticulture Strategic Review; enhanced controls to prevent the introduction of animal diseases; taking forward work on an all-Ireland animal and plant health policy; enhancing the resources devoted to the detection and prevention of fraud; introducing a 30 day individual animal standstill policy; setting up a Food Body Working Group; and an independent evaluation of the Erne Catchment Nutrient Management Scheme. In addition, Budget bids were made for measures covering agri-environment, strengthening the food chain, developing people, animal health, and R&D. Reference is made to allocations in the Draft Budget at appropriate points in the Action Plan and the projects for which additional resources have been provisionally allocated are listed in the Annex. The Draft Budget is under review and, until the allocations within it are confirmed, the proposals covered by the bids remain provisional. Implementation is also dependent upon economic appraisals proving satisfactory.

The Action Plan outlined below covers the Government's response to all of the recommendations, including those already being implemented. This is done by theme and in general terms. The decisions on each individual recommendation are set out in tabular form in a document available on the DARD website [www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk). For anyone who does not have a means of accessing the website, a hard copy is available

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from Katrine Gibson at the number(s) given above. The Action Plan will be available free, on request, in alternative formats including Braille disk, audio cassette, large print or other languages. Should this be required, please contact Katrine Gibson or the DARD textphone at the number(s) given above.

A significant number of the recommendations (around 25) concern the work of other Northern Ireland Departments and call for improved inter-departmental co-operation. These fall mainly within the themes of Assisting Structural Adjustment and Improving Farm Sectoral Performance, Strengthening the Rural Economy and People Development. As part of the process of assessing the Vision Report, officials have initiated discussions on these recommendations with colleagues in other Departments. While there is broad agreement in principle on many of these recommendations, further discussion is required on the best way to take them forward. A number of existing inter-departmental steering groups such as those on Rural Development and the Northern Ireland Small Business Strategy will provide suitable vehicles for this work.

However, some of the recommendations relate to policy areas for which other Departments have lead responsibility and DARD will work with the relevant Departments in taking these forward.

Where individual recommendations are referred to below, in most cases the number given to the recommendation in the Vision Report is shown in brackets.



## Consultation

On the whole there was widespread support for the Vision exercise with only two organisations expressing substantial opposition. However, some environmental and rural groups felt that the approach of the Vision Steering Group had been too narrowly focused. Not surprisingly, most organisations highlighted those recommendations and analyses of most concern to them so it would be almost impossible to claim unanimity on every recommendation.

Of the main recommendations, that for the establishment of a Food Body attracted a lot of attention. Mostly, there was support for this proposal but a number of organisations expressed concerns about how representative such a Body might be. That said, almost everyone was content for a Working Group to be set up to consider the structure, functions and funding of a Food Body. There was also support from most groups for measures to strengthen and improve relationships in the food chain, to develop the use of the DARD Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) as a business tool and for a Unified Farm Quality Assurance Scheme, although some reservations were expressed about Lifetime Quality Assurance and the direct benefits of such schemes to producers.

The proposed New Entrants Scheme also attracted a large degree of support, although some groups pressed for a Farmer Retirement Facilitation Scheme (advice on retirement) as well. Others suggested that an Early Retirement Scheme (retirement pensions) should be put in place. A few organisations, however, expressed doubts about the benefits of such schemes. There was also a significant level of interest in planning and land tenure. Opinion was divided on moving to area-based support payments and concentrating on low-cost, low-labour input



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systems of production. Some organisations felt that profitability could be greater in some cases with higher-input systems. There was, however, wholehearted support for the equine, arable crops and horticulture recommendations. There appeared to be some misunderstanding of the recommendation (C32) that DARD should concentrate primarily on supporting the development of business competence in the potato sector, with some respondents feeling that this implied a reduction in technical input.

Virtually all of the animal health recommendations were commended. Those regarding stricter import controls, an animal standstill policy and an all-Ireland approach to animal and plant health drew the most favourable comments. However, while individual animal identification was generally supported, some concern was expressed about the cost to individual farmers and the impracticality for managers of hill sheep flocks.

There was considerable support for measures to strengthen the rural economy such as rural proofing, rural tourism, reducing “red tape” and alternative employment opportunities. Most of the environmental recommendations also attracted widespread support, particularly those relating to capital grants schemes, the biodiversity strategy, organic farming and renewable energy systems. Localisation, organic food and GM-free food issues were raised in some of the bi-lateral meetings and in some written responses during the consultation process.

On the theme of People Development, reskilling, Lifelong Learning, “Challenge” programmes and benchmarking were widely supported. However, while most groups also agreed with the proposal for model units as a means of improving on-farm performance, the preferred name for these was “focus” or “demonstration” farms to avoid the impression that such units were perfect. However, some groups questioned the effectiveness of this approach.

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There was also general agreement with the recommendations on targeting R&D and investment in ICT infrastructure and training, although there were occasionally conflicting views on e-learning.

There was support for full payment of agri-money compensation, as well as the posting of a DARD representative to Brussels.

During the consultation process, a number of substantive suggestions were put forward. These include:-

- a co-ordinated approach to environmental and farm support through systems such as the French Land Management Contracts or the Welsh “Farming Connect” system;
- the restructuring of DARD in response to Vision;
- strategic studies of the Northern Ireland dairy and sheep sectors;
- the setting up of an Animal Health Steering Group;
- a “one-stop shop” and web-based service.

All of these proposals are being considered, particularly that on restructuring of DARD, on which a separate announcement is being made today. However, it is far from clear what strategic studies of the dairy and sheep sectors would achieve in advance of decisions being taken on the significant reform proposals put forward by the EU Commission in the context of the mid-term review of the CAP.

One of the changes implemented by Government since publication of the Vision Report is the setting up of a Rural Stakeholder Forum. The purpose is to bring together those individuals and organisations with an interest in the agri-food industry, and the wider rural economy, to consider the main strategic issues. The remit of the Forum is broad so as

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not to constrain its deliberations. It has a dual structure, with a core group of about a dozen organisations drawn from the areas of farming, input supply, food processing, marketing, the environment and rural development; this group will meet three times a year. A wider group, open to a broader range of interests, will meet once a year, in the context of a Conference. The first such Conference was held at Loughry College on 4 October. Sub-Groups have been, and will be, established to consider particular issues. Sub-Groups of the Forum have already been formed to take on board Rural Development issues and those Vision recommendations which are for the industry to implement. The former Group is examining the Welsh Farming Connect system, as well as their approach to a “Broad and Shallow” agri-environmental scheme, and will monitor progress by the Scottish Executive on “Land Management Contracts”.

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### Theme A:

#### *Focusing on the evolving demands of the market*

The main recommendation under this theme is that a Food Body, funded by Government and the industry, should be set up. It is recommended that it be responsible for providing leadership by co-ordinating and streamlining existing industry initiatives and programmes, developing and co-ordinating a long-term strategy, targeting new markets and promoting the development of the agri-food industry. However, the Vision Report is not specific about the functions of such a Body and recommends that a Working Group be set up to consider the precise structure, responsibilities and functions of the Body.

On 11 March, the then Minister announced that she had accepted the recommendation to set up a Working Group (A3). It met for the first time on 14 March 2002 and reported on 27 September. The Group had representatives from the main stakeholders, including the General Consumer Council and had an independent Chairman. As the Vision Report is not explicit on the rationale for a Food Body, and the consultation process indicated some nervousness in parts of the industry about the need for such a Body, the need for a Food Body was added to the Group's terms of reference. The full Terms of Reference were:-

*Taking account of the recommendations in the Report of the Vision Steering Group, in particular those under Key Theme A: Focusing on the Evolving Demands of the Market, and the results of the consultation exercise on the Report, consider who might benefit from a Food Body and advise on whether there is a case for the establishment of such a Body;*

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*If the action proposed in the Vision Report is supported, make recommendations on the precise structure, responsibilities and functions of the proposed Body. Particular attention should be paid to funding arrangements and the balance between Government and industry funding, drawing a distinction between "pump priming" and ongoing subvention;*

*Make recommendations on the extent to which any Food Body should subsume the activities of existing organisations and bodies;*

*Make such other recommendations as the Working Group feel are necessary.*

The Working Group's Report recommends the setting up of a Food Body, chaired by a senior industry figure, to examine supply chain issues and to co-ordinate marketing activities. The cost is estimated at £450,000 per annum. The Report is being put out for consultation, including the issue of rationalisation of existing structures and will be available on the DARD website [www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk). No decisions will be taken until after the consultation period is over.

Most of the recommendations under this Theme are for the proposed Food Body to consider and are not addressed individually in this Plan. If a Body is not set up as recommended by the Group, then clearly the industry and Government will have to find some way of taking forward the many valuable recommendations in this section of the Vision Report. This will be addressed in consultation with the industry, if the situation arises, through the mechanism of the Rural Stakeholder Forum and its Vision Implementation Sub-Group. The Draft Budget does not include any resources for the Food Body nor for the other recommendations in this section of the Report.

### Action plan

#### Theme B:

### *Strengthening the Food Chain*

Again, most of the recommendations in this Theme are for the proposed Food Body to consider and, if appropriate, to implement. However, the recommendations on a Unified Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (B8 and A27) and on APHIS (B10, C18, C21, D19 and I7) will be considered in depth by a Working Party within DARD. This Working Party will review the current APHIS system, consider the future needs of the Department and the industry, put forward proposals for necessary changes to the current system and make recommendations on financial responsibility. There will be full consultation with key industry stakeholders.

The recommendation on establishing up to 100 focus farming units is being implemented and, as part of this initiative, farmers will be trained and supported financially to demonstrate best practice and provide mentoring to at least 3000 other farmers. These “Focus Farms”, combined with group-based learning programmes, will help develop a more collaborative approach to business and people development. By extending this facilitated group-based learning approach to food and allied businesses, including associated travel to see best practice at locations both inside and outside Northern Ireland, through the implementation of recommendations B6, B7 (in association with C26 and G7), communication and understanding will be improved throughout the supply chain. Resources have been allocated for this action in the Draft Budget.

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One recommendation under this Theme which the Government has not accepted is that concerning the appointment of a Director of Food Safety in DARD (B9). Primary responsibility for food safety within Government lies with the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The Government is concerned that the appointment of a Director of Food Safety in DARD would serve only to confuse perceptions of responsibilities and lead to the industry looking to DARD rather than the FSA. The industry has already established links with the FSA and the Government wishes to encourage further development of these.



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#### Theme C:

### *Assisting structural adjustment and improving Farm Sectoral Performance*

Three of the major recommendations within this theme concern the impact of planning regulations, conacre and inheritance tax (C1) and the setting up of a new entrants scheme (C3 and C4). The potential economic impact of the latter was assessed in a research project on early retirement and new entrants schemes commissioned last year from Queen's University, Belfast and University College, Dublin. The report on this project was received on 16 September 2002 and the research findings indicate that the economic costs of an early retirement scheme are likely to outweigh the benefits. However, the researchers concluded that a new entrants scheme, based on an interest rate subsidy, could have a positive economic impact. A draft scheme is currently being prepared and will be put out for consultation. However, before any scheme can be introduced, a full economic appraisal will be required, as will the approval of Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Any EU State Aids requirements will also have to be satisfied. The question of a "farmer retirement facilitation scheme" (C2) is being considered.

In relation to the recommendation on planning, conacre and inheritance tax, the Government is not convinced that there is a problem. However, officials have been asked to bear the issue in mind in discussions on policy and to bring forward recommendations if it appears that there is indeed a problem.

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A programme to support agri-food industry stakeholders to travel abroad to assess the opposition, identify innovation and report back on opportunities (C10) is something which might be taken up by the proposed Food Body .

The recommendation covering electronic identification of livestock and the progression of a traceability system (C11) is accepted in principle and resources have been allocated in the Draft Budget for a related project.

As regards lobbying to replace support based on grazing livestock numbers with an area-based support mechanism (C13), the Commission has now put forward its preliminary Mid-Term Review proposals and under these, support to agriculture would be “de-coupled” from production but in a way which links payments to land.

A number of the recommendations within the individual commodity sections are for the industry itself to implement. Action on these is being taken forward through the Rural Stakeholder Forum.

There are several recommendations within the beef, sheep and dairy sectors which call for the development and adoption of low-cost, grass-based systems. In the past, DARD has undertaken much work on the development of low-cost systems but there does not appear to be widespread agreement that the adoption of such systems by the industry is the way forward. Further consideration is being given to this matter by the Rural Stakeholder Forum. In any case, changes are being introduced in the way in which research is commissioned and delivered.

The Government accepts the recommendations (C15 and C16) that call for improvement in cattle and carcase quality and for funding to

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stimulate the production and retention of top quality female replacements from within the suckler herd. The latter recommendation is being implemented as part of the 'Beef Quality Initiative'. Increasing attention is rightly being paid to ensuring that the eating quality of Northern Ireland Beef allows the industry to take advantage of the best markets available and to differentiate its products. A joint departmental and industry group is considering what needs to be done in this area and the Draft Budget contains an allocation of funds to help develop a system for improving the eating quality of Northern Ireland Beef.

The Government has decided to reject the recommendation (C20) to transfer the classification of meat from the Livestock and Meat Commission to the meat companies. It believes that there must be a measure of independence in this process.

The Government agrees in principle with many of the remaining recommendations within the sheep, dairying, intensive livestock, arable crops and horticulture sections of the report. They will be taken into account by the Advisory Body on R&D being announced separately today.

The Government accepts in principle the two recommendations relating to the equine sector involving the role of DARD in facilitating the establishment of more unified structures to represent the key equine industry interests and the development of an equine strategy. The resources currently devoted to equine issues within DARD are being reviewed and the various organisations concerned will be consulted on the best way to take forward consideration of the recommendations. As regards designation of the horse as an agricultural animal, there are wider issues to consider, and other Departments have an interest, and these will be discussed with the industry in due course.

### Action plan

#### Theme D:

### *Protecting and Enhancing our Animal Health Status*

Virtually all of the recommendations on animal health are accepted and a number are either being implemented or have had Draft Budget allocations made for them. Those being implemented include the individual animal standstill policy, enhanced port controls, enhanced resources devoted to fraud and the taking forward of an all-Ireland animal health policy. Allocations have been made in the Draft Budget in respect of recommendations D3, D15 and D25 on Northern Ireland's animal health status, pig identification and the review of animal health legislation.

On the VAT system in the Republic of Ireland (D14), the problem has been raised with the authorities in Dublin. On the enforcement of existing legislation (D26), this is a matter for the Courts.

## *Strengthening the Rural Economy*

Most of the recommendations in this section are accepted. That on rural proofing has already been implemented and work has started on a rural baseline. The Rural Development Council has recently launched a report of their pilot Rural Baseline study. The report provides a useful and informative compendium of rural statistics and will complement work on Neighbourhood Statistics which is being taken forward by the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency. However, a number of recommendations need co-ordination with other Government Departments and officials are taking this forward. Action is being taken on re-skilling and employability within the “Obtaining Alternative Employment” Measure of the PEACE II programme. This will include the counselling of farm families to help them identify opportunities through which they may secure alternative income and overcome barriers to re-training.

A good example of joined-up Government working in practice is the Natural Resource Rural Tourism Initiative. This Initiative is being promoted jointly by DARD, DoE’s Environment and Heritage Service and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and is being funded jointly by these three bodies through the PEACE II Programme.

Several recommendations supported a change of land use towards forestry and management of forests. These recommendations were the subject of public stakeholder consultation by the Forest Service through the issue in June of its paper “Forestry in Northern Ireland”. Comments received from those representing economic, social and environmental

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forestry interests by the 23 September closing date all indicated widespread support for a significantly greater rate of forest expansion in Northern Ireland. The specific recommendations will be considered in more depth as the policy review progresses.

The Government appreciates that there is considerable confusion in the farming community between the Rural Development Plan (RDP), which is exclusive to agriculture, and the Rural Development Programme which is open to the wider rural community. Partly, this is because of EU Rules which require the Programme and the Plan to be set up and implemented separately. However, a Sub-Group of the Rural Stakeholder Forum is reviewing the ways in which DARD presents these measures and delivers the support available under them.

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#### Theme F:

### *Safeguarding our Land-based Heritage and Rural Environment*

Many of the recommendations in this section are accepted and resources have been allocated to them in the Draft Budget. To achieve and sustain a green, clean image for Northern Ireland, it will be necessary for farmers to understand and have the skills necessary to meet current requirements and impending environmental legislation. Subjects covered include point source pollution, nutrient management and Good Farming Practice as referenced in recommendations F1, F2, F4 and F6.

Commitments on biodiversity (F7) continue to feature in DARD's forward Business Plans as well as those for its Forest Service and Fisheries Division. DARD is also currently reviewing its Countryside Management Strategy and this will include specific actions concerned with biodiversity.

The forestry recommendations are being taken forward in the Forest Policy Review (see above). Renewable energy policies are also under review within DARD and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), the lead Northern Ireland Department on energy issues. While DETI will take the lead in energy strategy and policy, DARD could potentially play an important complementary role in encouraging and supporting rural diversification. Factors to be taken into consideration include the outcome of the Forest Policy Review and DETI's proposed Energy Bill. DARD will continue to liaise closely with DETI, and other interested parties, on developments in this important area.



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### Theme G:

#### *Developing People*

The Vision Group recognised the importance of education, training and lifelong learning programmes. At UK level it is identified that an educated and skilled labour force is critical to achieving sustained prosperity and to drive increases in business competitiveness. The recently published report “Farmers and Farm Families in Northern Ireland” indicates the level of general educational achievement among farmers and business partners lags significantly behind that of all employed adults in Northern Ireland. Achievement of business and vocational qualifications by people working in the agri-food industry also falls far below the levels recommended in Vision. Resources have been allocated in the Draft Budget for the implementation of recommendations (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G7, G8, G10, G12, G15, G16, G23 in association with H5, H7, I1, I2, I3, I6 and I14) to extend lifelong learning programme provision and their accessibility to people working in the industry. It is not only important that the agri-food industry recruits highly competent people, but also that those already in the industry should continually develop themselves.

Although the recommendations within this Theme are accepted, the arrangements by which education, research & development services are developed and delivered in agriculture and food science were included in the Review of Education and R&D (O'Hare Report) and the response to this is being announced separately today.

The recommendation on free movement of labour into Northern Ireland (G14) has been noted. However, this is a matter for the Home Office and, in any case, there is freedom of movement within the EU.

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#### Theme H:

### *The Targeting of Research & Development and Technology Transfer*

Again, while the Government recognises, and accepts, many of the recommendations within this theme, the O'Hare Review has changed the context within which these recommendations need to be considered. This will be discussed with the Rural Stakeholder Forum.

### Action plan

#### Theme I:

### *Exploiting the opportunities offered by ICT*

Overall, the agri-food industry in Northern Ireland sector has been slow to exploit the potential benefits of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and all of the recommendations within this Theme not already covered are agreed. Some, such as those on Internet trading are for the industry to implement. The ICT training measure within PEACE II will help farmers gain initial training in the use of computers and provide some financial assistance to enable them to obtain and effectively use suitable hardware/software in the business. The training will be delivered by locally based providers and be contextualised to ensure direct relevance to participants in the programme. This initial training will be built on through industry specific ICT training provided by the DARD Colleges. The provision of electronic services by DARD will encourage increased use of this technology.

There is potential for the use of ICT to overcome the communication barriers associated with isolated micro-businesses such as farms, thus improving linkages in the supply chain between producers and processors. Resources have been allocated in the Draft Budget for the implementation of recommendations I4, I8 and I9 to address this issue.

In the future, ICT-based developments within Government, such as the development of the Rural Portal, will go some way to help reduce the considerable administrative burden on those within the agri-food industry and assist them to comply with regulatory requirements and to access Government forms, information and services which can be used to enhance the sustainability of their businesses.

### *Furthering the interests of Northern Ireland*

Some of these recommendations are statements which ask for commitment to the agri-food industry. The Government remains committed to the maintenance and development of an industry which contributes significantly to the regional economy, produces safe and wholesome food and provides public goods, such as the landscape and countryside.

A number of recommendations have effectively been overtaken by events. In relation to agri-monetary compensation, the Government, while not making full use of the system because of the costs to the UK Exchequer, did claim £77 million in respect of Northern Ireland over the period 1997 to 2001. The agri-monetary system is no longer in existence. It would be almost impossible to re-introduce it given that most EU member states no longer have any interest in such a system.

As regards beef exports, changes have been negotiated to the detailed rules of the Date Based Export Scheme (DBES) to allow plants to part-dedicate their facilities to slaughtering cattle for export and DARD will be reviewing the scope for further relaxation of the Beef Export Ban subject to the outcome of ongoing surveillance testing. In relation to other individual recommendations, the need for a DARD presence in Brussels (J3) is accepted and a post devoted to agri-food and related issues will shortly be filled in the Northern Ireland Executive Office.

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The results of all relevant economic modelling analyses (J11) will be made available and an annual review of all Government support measures available in Northern Ireland (J10) will be conducted and published. However, making comparisons with other areas is very difficult and DARD will have to consider how far it can go in this. Certainly it is likely to be limited to Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

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### Involvement of industry

Twenty-five of the recommendations are exhortations to the industry or are for the industry itself to implement. This is being taken forward by a Sub-Group of the Rural Stakeholder Forum which held its first meeting on 3 October.

### Economic Assessment/Equality Impact and New Targeting Social Need

The Government believes that all of the recommendations accepted for implementation are consistent with New Targeting Social Need. Further, all measures are, or will be, subject to economic assessment and all have been, or will be, screened for any equality impact and, where appropriate, Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out.

### Detailed Recommendations

The response to each recommendation is given in a document which is being released today on the DARD website [www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk).

## Annex

### *Projects to be implemented*

#### Environmental

Environmental training and advice  
Advice on point source pollution  
Nutrient management planning  
Environmental capital grant schemes: - *Biodiversity*  
- *Point source pollution*  
- *E-Plans*  
  
Good Farming Practice extension  
Organic farming  
Economics of agri-environment interactions

#### Strengthening the Food Chain

Communication  
Application of ICT  
R&D on eating quality  
Genetics

#### Developing People

Challenge programmes, technology, distance learning  
On-line learning

#### Animal Health and Veterinary Science

Bill Team (new Animal Health Bill)  
Identification of pigs  
Animal health status  
Livestock traceability

#### Other Bids:

Accessing technological developments  
Agri-food post in NI Executive Office



