

# FACTFILE: GCE NUTRITION & FOOD SCIENCE

## SAFETY THROUGH THE FOOD CHAIN



### Safety Through the Food Chain

#### Learning outcome

Explain the work of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in relation to animal and plant health and food safety.

#### 1: About DAERA



- The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has responsibility for food, farming, environmental, fisheries, forestry and sustainability policy and the development of the rural sector in Northern Ireland.
- DAERA assists the sustainable development of the agri-food, environmental, fishing and forestry sectors of the Northern Ireland economy, having regard for the needs of the consumers, the protection of human, animal and plant health, the welfare of animals and the conservation and enhancement of the environment.
- The Department's College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) delivers training and further and higher education courses in the agri-food sector.
- DAERA provides a Knowledge Advisory Service for farmers and growers and a veterinary service for administration of animal health and welfare and oversees the application of European Union agricultural, environmental,

fisheries and rural development policy to Northern Ireland.

- DAERA works with the following bodies:-
  - Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute.
  - Farm Safety (HSENI).
  - Livestock and Meat Commission.
  - Loughs Agency.
  - Northern Ireland Environment Link.
  - Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority
  - Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

#### 2: Key Roles In Relation to Animal Health & Food Safety

Maintaining high standards of animal health, welfare and hygiene on the farm is essential for establishing consumer confidence, and helping to limit the risk of passing disease to both humans and animals.



Within the UK, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is known as the Central Competent Authority for implementing the Food Hygiene Regulations. This involves making farmers and growers aware of their legal responsibilities, providing guidance on complying with the regulations and also implementing a system of official controls such as inspections, audits and testing.

In Northern Ireland, DAERA's Agri-food Inspection Branch carries out this work on behalf of the Food Standards Agency.

### Agri-food Inspection Branch (AfIB)

Within AfIB, key roles in relation to animal health belong to the:-

#### 2.1: Milk Inspectorate



All milk businesses must comply with certain rules and regulations which govern the production of safe food. These regulations have their origins in European legislation and are designed to ensure consumers are protected by requiring food businesses adhere to them.

Within AfIB, the Milk Inspectorate team carries out inspections and provides guidance on legislation relating to milk production. They are also responsible for the enforcement of legislation on milk production holdings and in plants producing liquid milk products in Northern Ireland.

#### 2.2: Meat Inspectorate

DAERA has a central role in approved slaughter and cutting establishments through the Veterinary Public Health Programme (VPH) within Veterinary Service. The primary aim of VPH in these approved establishments is to protect the public health by ensuring the food business operator fulfils his or her obligations to produce safe food. This particular function is carried out on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The VPH also actively encourages the maintenance and improvement of animal welfare standards in slaughterhouses and maintains vigilance for animal diseases. Export capability and veterinary certification of meat is another important function of the service in meat premises.

#### 2.3: Egg Inspectorate



DAERA inspects and enforces Food Hygiene requirements on farms on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA). General Food Hygiene requirements apply to all types of food production, however, FSA has produced specific guidance for enforcers and farmers on how these requirements should be met on egg production sites. The guidance covers requirements under the following areas: birds and housing, egg collection and storage, hygiene control and personnel.

#### 2.4: Feed & Food Inspectorate

All farmers that feed animals and/or produce crops for animal feed must also ensure feed safety for food producing animals. Virtually all animal feeds inspection, sampling and enforcement work in Northern Ireland is undertaken by AfIB's Feed & Food Inspectorate (FFI).

This involves inspection of establishments producing and marketing animal feeds and feed ingredients, checks on imports of animal feed and feed ingredients and inspection of on-farm facilities for production of animal feeds (home-mixers). This Inspectorate also works on behalf of Veterinary Service in relation to Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE). The FFI Team covers Primary Production Hygiene (PPH) inspections, Cross Compliance inspections as well as fertilisers, seeds and agricultural wages legislation.

AfIB's work has proven to be an effective collaboration between DAERA and the Food Standards Agency to help maintain the integrity of the local feed food chain.

**Useful Link**

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics>

**3: Legislation****Food Hygiene Regulations (NI) 2006 for Primary Producers**

This legislation introduces a 'farm to fork' approach to ensure food safety throughout the food chain starting with primary production. From January 2006 all primary producers (farmers and growers) must comply with these regulations to control potential food hazards at farm level.

All farmers must take measures to:-

- prevent contamination of food arising from air, soil, water, feed, veterinary medicines, plant protection products, waste, animals, pests etc.;
- keep facilities/equipment used in connection with primary production clean;
- prevent the introduction and spread of contagious diseases transmissible to humans;
- take account of results of any tests carried out that may affect human health; and
- use plant protection products and biocides correctly.

Farmers must also keep and retain accurate records relevant to food safety, including:

- traceability of inputs purchased (i.e. food, feed, food producing animals and substances incorporated into food/feed);
- traceability of outputs sold (i.e. food, feed and food producing animals);
- veterinary products administered to animals including dates of administration and withdrawal;
- the occurrence of disease or pests that may affect food safety;
- any use of plant protection products and biocides; and
- results of any relevant tests carried out.

Inspections under these Regulations commenced in February 2007 and are carried out by DAERA's AfIB on behalf of the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland. Inspection frequencies are risk based. Farms with membership to an assurance scheme will be identified as lower risk resulting in a reduced inspection frequency.

**Useful Link**

Food Standards Agency <https://www.food.gov.uk/>

**4: Key Roles in Relation to Animal Welfare**

The welfare of animals, including farmed and non-farmed animals, is protected by the Welfare of Animals Act NI (2011).



The key benefits of the Act include:-

- a duty of care for all protected animals;
- it allows action to be taken to prevent suffering as opposed to waiting until suffering has occurred;
- it provides robust powers to deal with animal fighting, including dog fights; and
- it provides tough fines and penalties for serious animal welfare offences.

NB. A person is responsible for an animal if they own it or have responsibility for its day to day care.

**Enforcement**

The Welfare of Animals Act NI (2011) is enforced by DAERA, NI Councils and the PSNI.

DAERA is responsible for farmed animals (any animal bred or kept for the production of food, wool or skin or for other farming purposes). The Department also licenses riding establishments, boarding kennels, pet shops and zoos.

NI Councils are responsible for enforcement in respect of non-farmed animals i.e. domestic pets and equines (e.g. horses and donkeys etc.) The PSNI is responsible for incidents involving wild animals and animal fighting.

**Useful Link**

Welfare of Animals Act NI (2011) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/16/contents>



## 5: Key Roles in relation to Plant Health



DAERA's Plant Health Inspection Branch has responsibility for the implementation of Plant Health legislation for non-arable plants and trees. This involves surveillance for quarantine plant pests and diseases at all stages of the supply chain from import to retail, and in the wider environment, the registration and inspection of businesses issuing plant passports, implementation of statutory measures in the event of quarantine pest/disease outbreaks, and export certification.

### Plant and Tree Health Legislation

DAERA implements the Plant Health Order NI (2018) in Northern Ireland. This includes:-

- approval of businesses for passporting;
- surveys for non-indigenous pests and diseases.
- import inspections;
- inspections of nurseries, garden centres and other horticulture businesses for quarantine pests and diseases; and
- implementation of emergency measures in the event of a serious Plant Health Incident.

### Useful Link

Plant Health Order NI (2018) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2018/184/contents/made>

## 6: Education and Training in relation to Animal and Plant Health and Food Safety

The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) is an integral part of DAERA's Food and Farming Group. As well as offering a wide range of courses in agriculture, food and land-based sectors to post-GCSE and A-Level pupils that cover aspects of animal and plant health and food safety, CAFRE supports the Agri-Food sector through

industry training, knowledge & technology transfer, benchmarking and business development planning.



Examples of CAFRE programs related to ensuring animal and plant health and food safety throughout the food chain include:-

### 6.1: Business Development Groups

Business Development Groups (BDG) scheme was launched in November 2015 and today there are over 150 groups in operation across Northern Ireland. This scheme uses a 'group learning' approach of around 20 like-minded farmers who will meet up to eight times a year to focus on topics related to technical efficiency of the business and farm sustainability. It offers participants the opportunity to gain a Level 3 agriculture-related qualification. Farm Family Key Skills

### 6.2: Farm Family Key Skills

The Farm Family Key Skills (FFKS) aim is to increase the levels of knowledge and awareness in agricultural and commercial horticulture businesses with a desire to help Northern Ireland farmers and growers with their business decision making in the key areas of Animal Health, Business Planning, Health & Safety and ICT.

### 6.3 Food Technology Development Branch

The Food Technology Development Branch (FTDB) based at Loughry Campus assists the food manufacturing sector through the provision of technology support services and has dedicated teams devoted to food business development, innovation, energy and waste management and food safety training programmes.

### Useful Link

<https://www.cafre.ac.uk/>

