BRIEFING · FOOD LIFE-CYCLE SERIES · THE BEEF LIFE CYCLE

What's the beef with Northern Ireland?

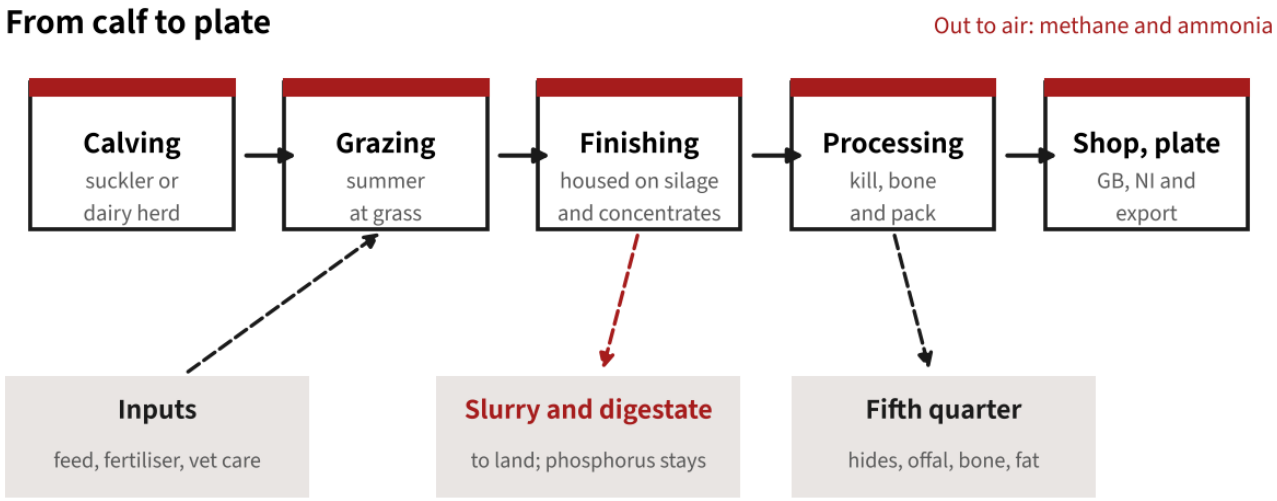
Beef supply is shifting from the suckler herd to the dairy herd. Price, retail specification and policy all reward faster finishing. Phosphorus, not only carbon, is the pressing limit. For NI the carbon question is speed and system, not grass against grain.

IN SUMMARY

- **Two herds, one supply.** 213,744 beef cows in June 2025, down 5%; a record 330,673 dairy cows, up 2% (DAERA, 11 December 2025).
- **Record prices, still below GB.** Finished cattle averaged £6.33 a kilo in 2025, up 32% (DAERA, 20 August 2026). GB steers ran about 26p a kilo above NI in late October 2026. [not verified]
- **Public money matters most on the hills.** Direct payments were £303m in 2025, 29% of total income from farming. Hill cattle and sheep farms averaged £24,298 in 2024/25; dairy farms £118,784.
- **The law sets the pace.** The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 requires a 48% cut in net emissions by 2030. Agriculture was 31.4% of NI emissions in 2024, and its sectoral plan has not yet been produced.
- **Phosphorus is the binding limit.** A surplus of 8,729 tonnes in 2024 (DAERA). Agriculture is the largest source of phosphorus reaching Lough Neagh.
- **Speed and system decide the footprint.** Faster growth and younger slaughter cut lifetime methane; how much grass is in the diet matters less than how long the animal lives.

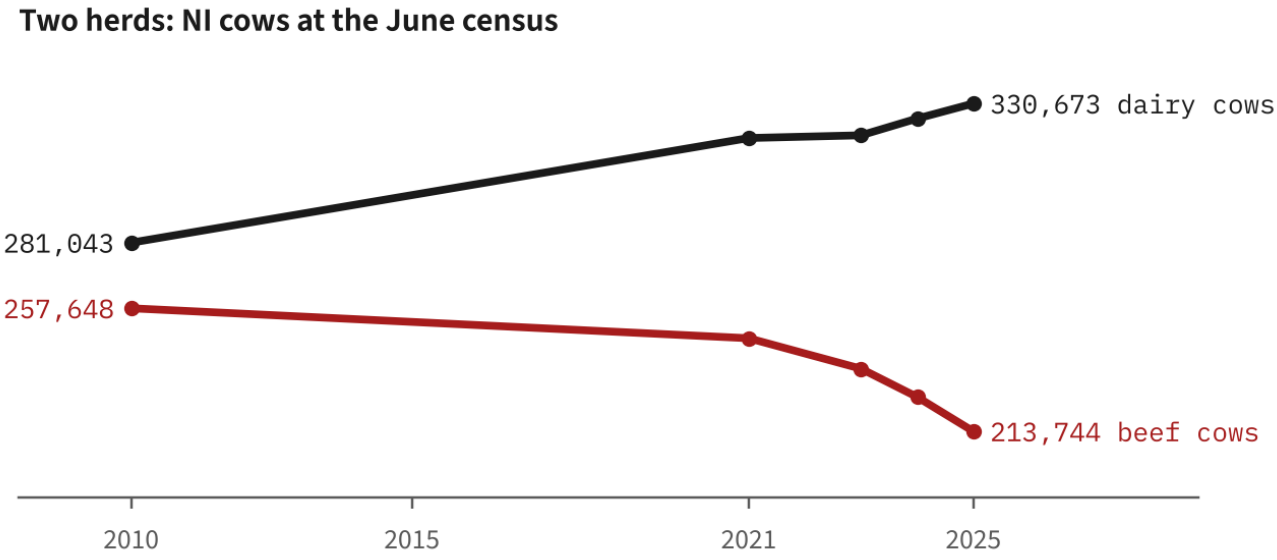
1. Key figures

Measure	Figure	Source and date
Beef (suckler) cows	213,744 (June 2025), down 5%	DAERA census results, 11 Dec 2025
Dairy cows	330,673 (June 2025), up 2%	DAERA census results, 11 Dec 2025
Finished cattle price, 2025	£6.33/kg, up 32%	DAERA farm incomes, 20 Aug 2026 (provisional)
Cattle output, 2025	£898m, up 37%	DAERA, 20 Aug 2026
Direct payments, 2025	£303m; 29% of total income from farming (£1.03bn)	DAERA, 20 Aug 2026; share calculated
Farm business income, 2024/25	Hill cattle and sheep £24,298; dairy £118,784. Forecast 2025/26: £36,787 and £122,839	DAERA, 20 Aug 2026
Bought feed, 2025	£1.19bn, 55% of gross spend	DAERA, 20 Aug 2026
Agriculture, share of NI emissions	31.4% (5.8 of 18.4 MtCO2e, 2024); methane 4.3 MtCO2e, about 74% of agriculture	NI GHG inventory, 9 Jun 2026; share calculated
Phosphorus surplus	8,729 tonnes (2024)	DAERA NAP 2027–2030 consultation, 29 Jun 2026
Bovine TB herd incidence	9.51% (June 2026); 9.62% (July)	DAERA monthly statistics
TB cost	DAERA £55.7m in 2023/24 (£36.5m compensation); farmers about £96m a year	CVO review, Nov 2024; Andersons for UFU, LMC, DCNI, Mar 2026



The beef life cycle in NI. Methane comes mainly from the rumen at grazing and finishing; ammonia mainly from slurry. Drawing: Robert J. Park.

2. Two beef systems



Source: DAERA June agricultural census; 2021 provisional. Vertical scale does not start at zero.

	Suckler beef	Dairy-bred beef
Where the calf comes from	A beef cow kept to rear one calf a year	The dairy herd: male calves and beef-sired calves from dairy cows
Scale	213,744 cows, falling; strongest on hill and less favoured land	330,673 dairy cows, rising; 49% of 2025 beef-bred calves came from dairy cows (LMC via Irish Farmers Journal) [not verified]
Carbon	The cow's whole upkeep falls on the beef: the highest footprint per kilo	The cow's upkeep is shared with milk; the answer depends on how a study splits it between milk and meat
Money	Payments larger than income in some years (DAERA, 2021/22)	Tied to the milk price and dairy expansion

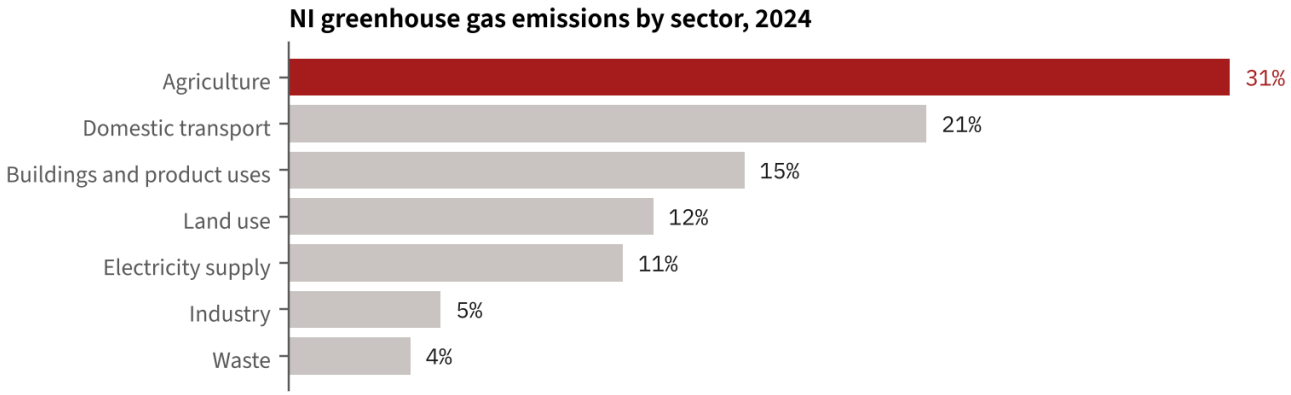
	Suckler beef	Dairy-bred beef
What it offers	Grazing of land that grows nothing else; hedges and hill farming	More beef from fewer extra animals

3. Markets, price and specification

- **Specification decides the price.** DAERA lists carcase weight (normally 280–380 kg), fat class 3 to 4+, conformation, the number of farm moves, days on the last farm, breed and Farm Quality Assurance status as key to the GB market (DAERA, Meeting market specification, updated 18 July 2024). The Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance Scheme is the gateway to most retail contracts.
- **Prices.** A record 2025. NI base quotes were 612p a kilo for U-3 steers on 30 September 2026, and GB R3 steers averaged 655.7p in the week to 24 October 2026, about 26p above NI (Irish Farmers Journal on LMC and AHDB data). [not verified]
- **Main market.** Great Britain. Beef and sheepmeat processing turned over £1.47bn in 2020, 27% of NI food processing (DAERA, 2022 report).
- **Competition.** UK beef imports from Australia rose about 150% and from New Zealand over 200% in 2025 (LMC). [not verified]

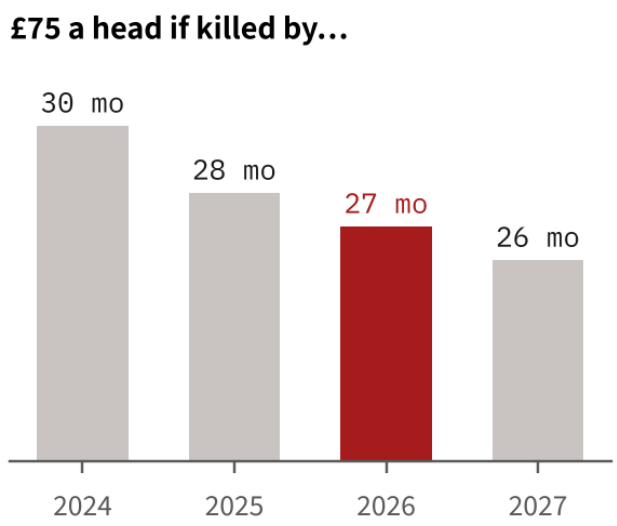
4. Climate law

- The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 requires net zero by 2050 and a 48% cut in net emissions by 2030. Carbon budgets for the first three periods were set in 2024. Methane must fall by at least 46% by 2050.
- The draft Climate Action Plan for 2023–2027 was consulted on from 19 June to 8 October 2025. The 2030 target needs cuts of about 2.8% a year against a recent average of 1.2%. The agriculture sectoral plan, which must include fully funded carbon audits, has not been produced (Assembly Research, 16 March 2026).
- **How methane is counted.** NI carbon budgets use GWP100, which counts a tonne of methane as about 28 tonnes of CO2 (the IPCC AR5 value used in UK inventories). Warming-equivalent methods (GWP*) treat a stable herd's methane as adding little new warming. The choice changes how a smaller suckler herd is scored; the law uses GWP100.

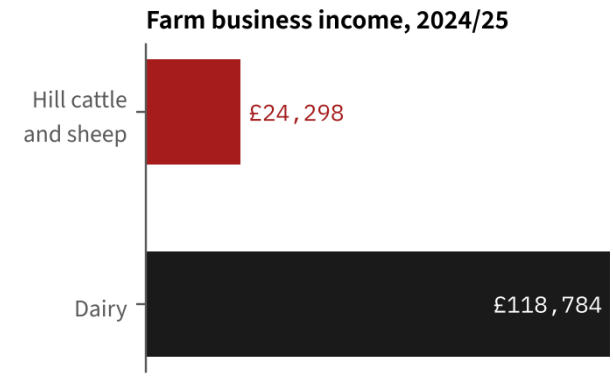


Source: DAERA, NI greenhouse gas inventory 1990–2024, 9 June 2026. Shares of net emissions, rounded.

5. Schemes and subsidy



Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme age limits (DAERA).

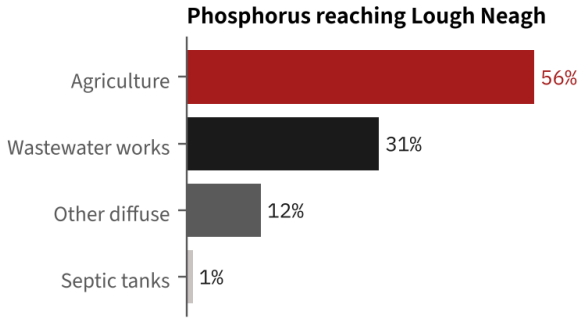


Average farm business income (DAERA, 20 August 2026).

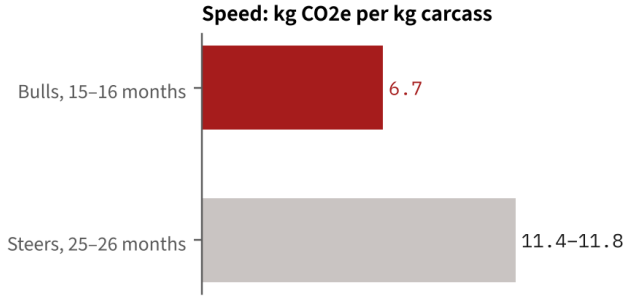
Scheme	Terms	Evidence
Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme	£75 a head for prime cattle killed at or under an age limit: 30 months in 2024, 28 in 2025, 27 in 2026, 26 in 2027. Four-year scheme; nothing published beyond year 4.	£19.6m paid on 262,132 animals in year 2 (DAERA, 9 Mar 2026). Saving put at 43.1 ktCO2e by the Minister.
Suckler Cow Scheme	£100 per qualifying calving, up to 222,000 a year. Started 1 April 2025. Targets for 2026/27: calving interval of 405 days and first calving at 32 months or under.	First payments 25 June 2026 (DAERA). About 1,600 businesses had not opted in, leaving some 9,200 calvings unpaid (UFU, 26 June 2026).
How they are paid for	DAERA redirected 9% of the Basic Payment budget in 2024 (27 Feb 2024).	The Ulster Farmers' Union puts the cut at 17% now and is lobbying to extend the schemes beyond 2027. [not verified]
Hedges	No cutting from 1 March to 31 August; no removal without DAERA permission and 110% replacement (Farm Sustainability Standards 2 and 3, from 1 January 2026).	NI pays £6.49 a metre for new hedges only; England pays £13 per 100 m per side a year to manage them.

6. Nutrients and Lough Neagh

- NI farming ran a phosphorus surplus of 8,729 tonnes in 2024. The Nutrients Action Programme 2027–2030 was consulted on from 29 June to 7 September 2026; the final rules are not yet published.
- Phosphorus reaching Lough Neagh: agriculture 56%, wastewater works 31% (DAERA provisional model, July 2024). A later DAERA model for 2021 is reported to give agriculture 61% and wastewater 29% (via FactCheckNI). [not verified]
- The Lough Neagh Report and Action Plan (23 July 2024) sets 37 actions. Phosphorus already in soils and lough sediment will keep feeding blooms for years after inputs fall.
- Ammonia: 97% from agriculture, cattle about 62% of that, dairy and beef together (DAERA). A digester makes gas; every kilogram of phosphorus stays in the digestate unless it is stripped out and exported.



Provisional model; DAERA, July 2024. A 2021 model is reported at 61% agriculture.



Dairy-origin beef; AFBI Hillsborough (Dawson). Killing younger halves the footprint.

7. Speed, system and carbon: what the research says

Most NI cattle finish on grass silage plus concentrates, so the useful comparison is speed and system. Studies use different units and boundaries; this is not a league table.

Where	Study	Finding
NI	AFBI Hillsborough, dairy-origin beef (Dawson, c. 2010)	Bulls 6.7 kg CO2e per kg carcass against 11.4–11.8 for steers, killed at 15–16 against 25–26 months. More forage changed little.
England	Rothamsted, North Wyke (2025)	Per kg of weight gain: white clover −12%, manure digestion up to −26%. Halving stocking density raised it 24.5%.
Ireland	Teagasc	Grain finishing lower if soil carbon is steady; grass silage lower once carbon lost by ploughing grassland is counted. [not verified]
Wales	Bangor for Hybu Cig Cymru (2020; industry-funded)	Net 11–16 kg CO2e per kg after soil, woodland and hedge carbon. From press reports; report not seen. [not verified]
USA	Eshel et al., PNAS (2025)	Grass-fed 10–25% higher per kg of protein than feedlot without soil credit; with it, no lower.
USA	Hayek and Garrett (2018)	All-grass supply needs 30% more cattle; current pasture supports 27% of supply.
USA	Stanley et al. (2018)	Finishing phase only: 9.62 to −6.65 kg CO2e per kg carcass with four years of soil carbon at one site.
Australia	Integrity Ag for MLA (2022)	Grass-finished 13.3, grain-finished 10.7 kg CO2e per kg liveweight in WA supply chains; soil carbon not counted.
Brazil	Cardoso et al. (2016)	From degraded pasture to improved pasture with a 75-day feedlot finish: 58.3 to 29.4 kg CO2e per kg carcass.
Brazil	Cederberg et al. (2011)	Beef from newly cleared Amazon land: over 700 kg CO2e per kg carcass, clearance spread over 20 years.
Global	Grazed and Confused, Oxford (2017)	At best, better grazing offsets 20–60% of grass-fed emissions; time-limited and reversible.

8. Feed and soy

- Cattle took 112.7 of the 220.0 thousand tonnes of feed delivered in May 2026: dairy 79.1, beef 26.1, calf 7.2 (DAERA, Animal Feed Statistics May 2026; category sums ours). May is the start of grazing.
- NI compound feed used 824.5 thousand tonnes of raw materials in Q1 2026, the peak housing quarter: maize 181.9, wheat 172.5, soya meal 101.5, soya hulls 43.9, palm kernels 8.7. DAERA does not split raw materials by

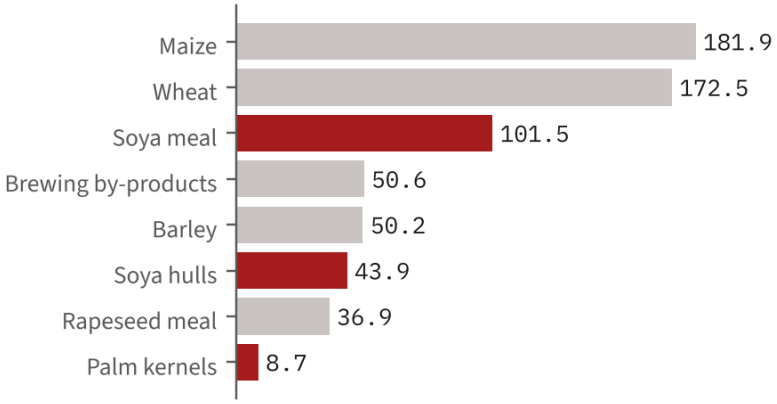
livestock type, and beef rations carry less soya than dairy, pig or poultry rations, so no beef figure is given.

- **Scale of the soy question:** each 100,000 tonnes of soya meal carries about 16,000, 200,000 or 1,200,000 tonnes CO2e at the low, average and high footprints of a WWF literature review. Origin matters more than quantity.
- **Whose emissions.** Land-clearance emissions count in the growing country's national inventory, not NI's. They do count in product footprints and supply-chain (Scope 3) reporting, which is what GB retailers ask processors for.

Feed delivered, May 2026 (kt of 220.0)



Raw materials, Q1 2026 (kt)



Source: DAERA, Animal Feed Statistics May 2026, Tables 1 and 2; category sums ours. Soya and palm in red: commodities under the EU Deforestation Regulation.

9. The whole animal

The whole animal



Typical shares; carcass yield varies with breed, sex and fat class.

- Carcass is usually 50–60% of liveweight. By-products are sorted by risk under Regulation (EC) 1069/2009, applied in NI through SR 2015/332.
- Hide values have fallen about 60% in five years (Quality Meat Scotland); small abattoirs now pay to dispose of hides. Offal credit has shrunk (Ireland: 34c of a €6.95 a kilo steer price, March 2026). [not verified]
- NI has had negligible BSE risk since 2017; GB since 29 May 2025 (EU recognition 4 November 2025). From negligible-risk areas the vertebral column is no longer specified risk material at any age (FSA, 21 November 2025).

10. Methane

- Methane was 29.5% of all NI greenhouse gas emissions in 2024 (NI GHG inventory, 9 June 2026). Of agriculture's 5.8 MtCO2e, 4.3 was methane: most from cattle rumens (enteric fermentation), the rest from manure.
- DAERA has said ruminant methane rose since 1990 because the herd shifted from sucklers to dairy cows, whose enteric emissions are much larger (Irish Farmers Journal). [not verified]
- **Feed additives.** 3-NOP (Bovaer) is authorised in the EU, and so in NI, for dairy cows and cows for reproduction (Regulation (EU) 2022/565, 7 April 2022; amended since). GB authorised it in late 2023. Its effect is greatest on

housed cattle fed a mixed ration, which limits its use on grazing beef. *Check whether the amended authorisation now covers finishing cattle.*

- **The cheapest lever** remains fewer days to slaughter and fewer unproductive days in the cow's life: the logic of both beef schemes.

11. Grass

- Grass is NI's main crop. On GrassCheck farms (AgriSearch, AFBI and CAFRE, co-funded by DAERA) 2025 growth was the highest in six years, from 10.8 t of dry matter a hectare in Armagh to 12.9 t in Fermanagh, 10 March to 13 October (Irish Farmers Journal on GrassCheck data). [not verified]
- 2026 was drier: growth to mid-July averaged 6.5 t DM/ha, about 9% below 2025, with dairy farms growing 7.0 t and beef and sheep farms 5.9 t. [not verified]
- Grazed grass is the cheapest feed, and better grazing (paddocks, measured covers, reseeding, clover) is the main way a beef farm cuts bought feed. Beef and sheep farms grow less grass than dairy farms, often on poorer land.

12. Animal husbandry

- **Identification.** Every calf is double tagged with DAERA-approved ear tags: within 36 hours of birth in dairy herds and 20 days in other herds, one tag sampling for BVD. Births must be notified within 27 days (DAERA). New tags have carried the "XI" prefix since 30 June 2025.
- **Procedures.** Under the Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (NI) 2012: castration by rubber ring only up to 7 days old, by other means before 2 months; disbudding by chemical cautery only up to 7 days, otherwise with anaesthetic; dehorning only with anaesthetic.
- **The law.** The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 makes causing unnecessary suffering an offence and supports codes of practice for cattle.
- **The year.** Spring or autumn calving; summer at grass; winter housing on silage, usually from October or November to March or April; weaning at 6 to 9 months on suckler farms; finishing at 18 to 26 months, earlier for bulls.



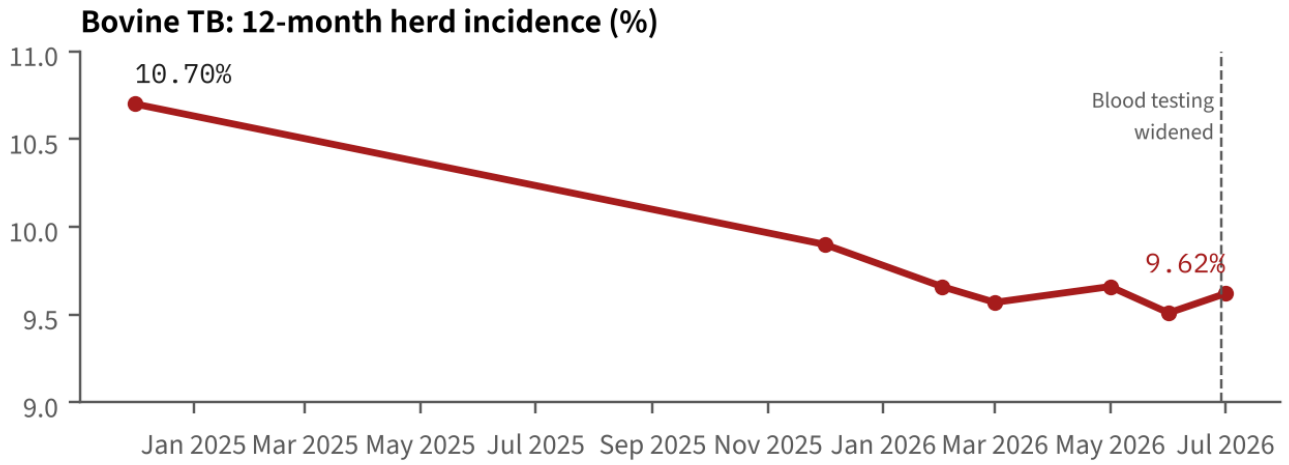
A typical NI beef year. Housing dates vary with land and weather; the hedge-cutting ban is in Farm Sustainability Standard 2.

13. Animal health and vaccines

- **BVD.** Tissue-tag testing of all calves has been compulsory since 1 March 2016 (BVD Eradication Scheme Order (NI) 2016, run by Animal Health and Welfare NI). Herd restrictions for positive or untested animals began on 1 February 2025 under the BVD Control Order (NI) 2024; the reduced threshold applied from 1 June 2026 (DAERA).
- **Bluetongue (BTV-3).** First confirmed in NI near Bangor, Co Down, in November 2025, suspending NI's EU disease-free status. Three vaccines were permitted under specific licence from 23 July 2025, and under a general

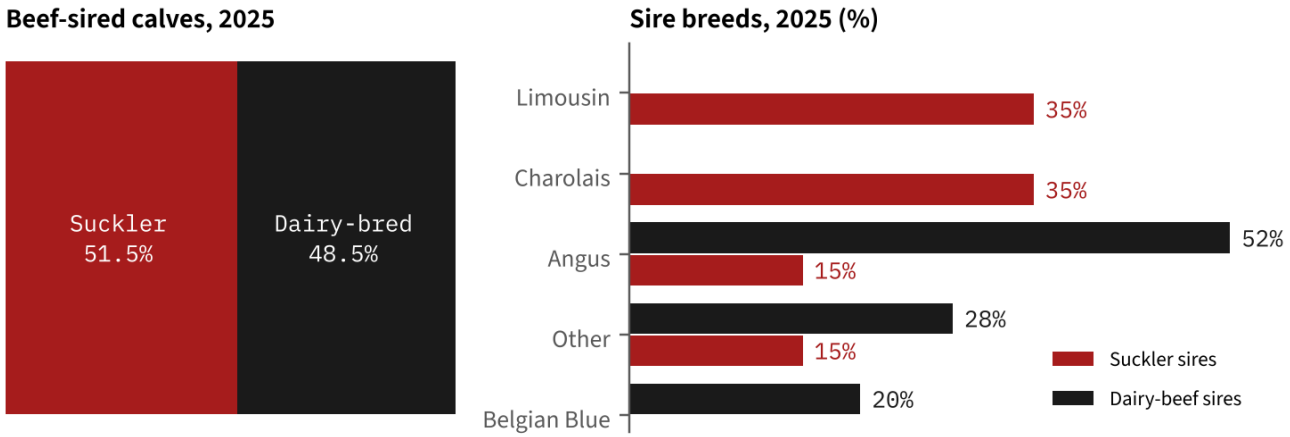
licence from 15 April 2026. Cross-border breeding and production moves resumed on 6 March 2026.

- **TB vaccine.** APHA's field trials of the cattle BCG vaccine with a companion DIVA skin test, in England and Wales, completed their on-farm phase in 2026 and will support GB marketing applications (GOV.UK). Nothing yet licensed for NI; trading partners' tests still cross-react with BCG.
- **Routine vaccination** against clostridial diseases, pneumonia viruses (IBR, RSV, PI3) and leptospirosis is common practice, guided by the herd vet; none is compulsory.



Source: DAERA monthly TB statistics; July 2026 as reported by the Irish Farmers Journal. Scale starts at 9%.

14. Breeds and types



Source: LMC analysis of NIFAIS calf registrations, 2025, as reported. Not verified against LMC.

Measure (2025 calf registrations)	Figure
Beef-sired calves	383,318, 72.7% of all registrations
Suckler share of beef-sired calves	51.5% (62.2% in 2021)
Suckler sires	Limousin and Charolais about 35% each; Aberdeen Angus about 15%
Dairy-beef sires	Aberdeen Angus 52%; Belgian Blue 20%
All beef calves	Aberdeen Angus 31.5%, the most recorded breed
Dairy bull calves	About a fifth of dairy-sired calves (a third in 2021), as sexed semen spreads

Source: LMC analysis of NIFAIS data, as reported by the UFU and the farming press, early 2026. [not verified]

- **Continental** (Limousin, Charolais, Simmental, Belgian Blue): heavier, leaner carcasses that grade well; suited to the specification.
- **Native** (Aberdeen Angus, Hereford, Shorthorn): earlier maturing, marbled, and sold under breed premiums.
- **Rare and Irish** (Irish Moiled, Dexter, Kerry): small numbers, slow finishing on grass; a market in breed-and-place beef such as Glenarm Shorthorn.

15. Exports and markets for every cut

- UK red meat exports, including offal, were worth £2bn in 2025, up 12% (AHDB, 25 March 2026, from HMRC data). UK beef exports to Japan were worth £9.8m in 2025, and beef exports to the USA rose 71% by volume in the first half of 2026 (AHDB).
- UK beef imports rose 3.2% to 75,000 tonnes in Q1 2026, with Australian and New Zealand volumes surging (AHDB, 4 June 2026).
- **Carcass balance.** Each market takes the cuts it values: steaks and roasts at home, offal and some cuts abroad. AHDB calls finding markets for low-demand cuts “pivotal” to value.

16. Offal

- Edible offal: liver, kidney, heart, tongue, tail (oxtail), cheek, tripe (stomachs) and sweetbreads. Most goes to export or pet food; little is eaten in NI homes.
- The FSA treats intestines, stomachs, scalded heads and feet, cattle ears, masks and lips as edible co-products with their own processing rules (FSA Manual, chapter 2.12).
- Over-12-month cattle still lose skull, brain, eyes and spinal cord as specified risk material.
- The value of offal per animal has fallen as Asian demand shifted (Ireland: 34c of a €6.95 a kilo price in March 2026). [not verified]

17. Ears and tongue

- **Ears** carry the animal’s identity: two official tags for life, one of which took the BVD tissue sample at birth. After slaughter, scalded and depilated cattle ears are an edible co-product (FSA), but most are dried as dog chews, a Category 3 animal by-product that must be heat-treated against salmonella (GOV.UK).
- **Tongue curing.** An ox tongue is brined (salt, sugar, spices, traditionally saltpetre) for about 8 to 10 days, simmered for several hours, skinned, then pressed in a bowl under a weight and served cold in slices, or served hot with a sauce. Curing salts must meet the nitrite limits in force: in NI, the lower EU limits since 9 October 2025.
- **A market.** Beef tongue is prized in Japan. The Commission’s July 2026 act adds frozen cattle tongues to the EU Deforestation Regulation from 30 December 2027.

18. Beef on the bone

- The Beef Bones Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 banned the sale of bone-in beef from 16 December 1997, after BSE advice that bone marrow might carry infection. The ban was lifted in NI from 17 December 1999 (SR 1999/495), and the rules were revoked in 2008.
- Today, from negligible BSE-risk areas such as NI, the vertebral column is no longer specified risk material at any age (FSA, 21 November 2025), so T-bone and other bone-in cuts are open to older cattle too.
- Bone-in matters for dry-ageing and for flavour and presentation: rib of beef, T-bone, côte de boeuf, bone marrow and stock.

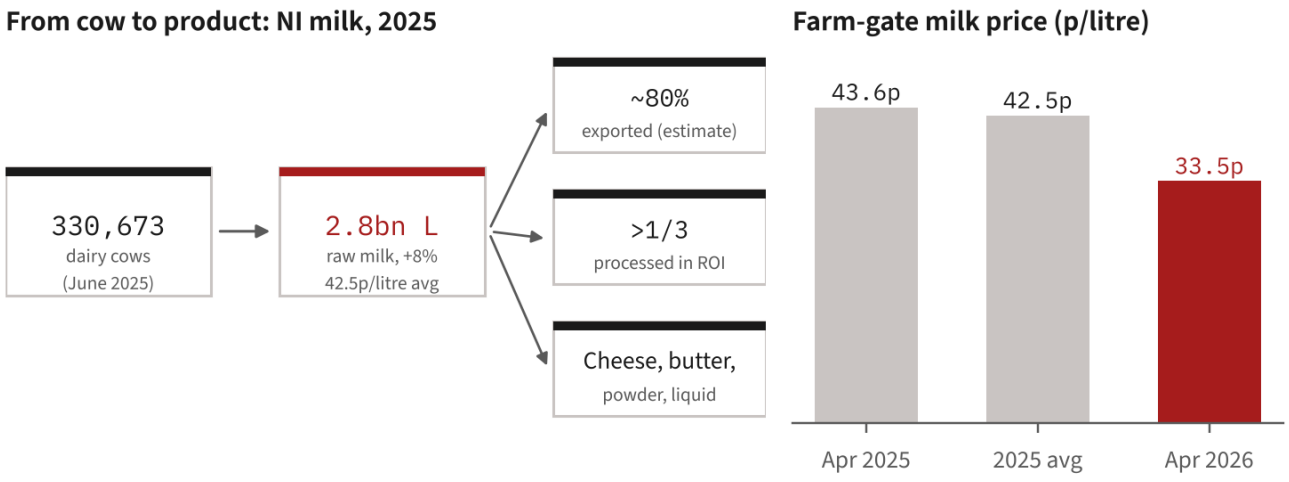
19. Menus

- **Everyday:** mince (cottage pie, spaghetti bolognese, burgers), stew, roast and steak. Mince takes much of the forequarter and trim.
- **Traditional:** corned and salt beef, spiced beef at Christmas, pressed tongue, oxtail soup, beef and Guinness stew, steak and kidney pie.
- **Restaurant:** dry-aged bone-in steaks, braised cheek and short rib, bone marrow, and named-origin beef such as Glenarm Shorthorn aged by Hannan Meats.
- **Public menus.** Schools, hospitals and councils buy large volumes through public contracts. Origin is not required on catering menus, so NI beef is often unnamed where it is served. (analysis)

20. Leftovers and waste

- UK households wasted 6.4 million tonnes of food and drink in 2021/22; meals and meat and fish are the biggest items by cost and greenhouse gas (WRAP).
- A 2016 Love Food Hate Waste estimate put UK household beef waste at 34,000 tonnes a year, worth about £260m. [not verified]
- Leftover roast and stew make hash, cottage pie, sandwiches and stock; bones make broth. Buying whole-animal cuts (cheek, shin, short rib) uses more of each carcass.
- Catering and kitchen waste may not be fed to farmed animals under the animal by-products rules; it can go to anaerobic digestion or composting.

21. Dairy herd, milk, butter and cheese



Sources: DAERA June census (11 Dec 2025); DAERA agricultural incomes 2025 (20 Aug 2026); DAERA milk price notice April 2026. Export share: AHDB analyst estimate (2025). ROI processing: safefood, Mapping the dairy supply chain. April 2025 price derived from DAERA (33.45p plus 10.19p).

- **The herd.** A record 330,673 dairy cows in June 2025, up 2%, on about 3,050 farms with an average herd of 108 (DAERA). Dairy farms averaged £118,784 income in 2024/25, the highest of any farm type.
- **Milk.** NI produced a record 2.8 billion litres in 2025, up 8%, at an average farm-gate price of 42.5p a litre. Dairying was the largest output at £1.2 billion (DAERA, 20 Aug 2026). NI supplies roughly 18% of UK milk. [not verified]
- **Price swings.** The April 2026 price was 33.45p, 10.19p below April 2025 (DAERA). Output still rose: January to May 2026 was 1,291 million litres, up 3.4%. AHDB notes NI prices move more sharply than GB because most output is exported.

- **Where the milk goes.** An estimated 80% of NI dairy output is exported (AHDB analyst, 2025), and over a third of NI milk is processed in the Republic of Ireland (safefood). DAERA's milk utilisation statistics for 2025 (18 June 2026) give the split between liquid milk, cheese, butter and powder; *we could not open the spreadsheet and have not used its figures*.
- **Butter and cheese.** Most NI milk becomes commodity cheddar, butter and milk powder at large co-operative and private plants. [not verified] Roughly 10 litres of milk make 1 kg of cheddar, and about 20 litres make 1 kg of butter with skimmed milk powder as a co-product (typical yields; vary with fat and protein).
- **Artisan makers.** Young Buck, a raw-milk blue first made in Newtownards on 26 November 2013 (Mike's Fancy Cheese); Kearney Blue (Ards Peninsula, 2011); Dart Mountain's Sperrin Blue (2014); Fivemiletown's Causeway Cheddar; Ballylisk Triple Rose; and Abernethy hand-churned butter from Lagan Valley cream (press and tourism sources). [not verified]
- **The beef link.** Almost half of beef-sired calves (48.5%) now come from the dairy herd (section 14). Sexed semen keeps dairy heifers for replacement and puts beef sires on the rest; Angus dominates dairy-beef sires.
- **Carbon and nutrients.** A dairy cow emits more methane a year than a suckler cow, but it produces milk as well as a calf, so beef from dairy-bred calves carries a much smaller share of the breeding-herd methane (section 7). The dairy expansion adds slurry and phosphorus in the Lough Neagh catchment, the same limit as beef (section 6). (analysis)
- **Rules.** Raw-milk cheese is legal in NI under the EU food hygiene rules that still apply under the Windsor Framework; cheese and butter sold in NI follow EU labelling and contaminant rules. Dairy is in scope of the SPS agreement (section 23).

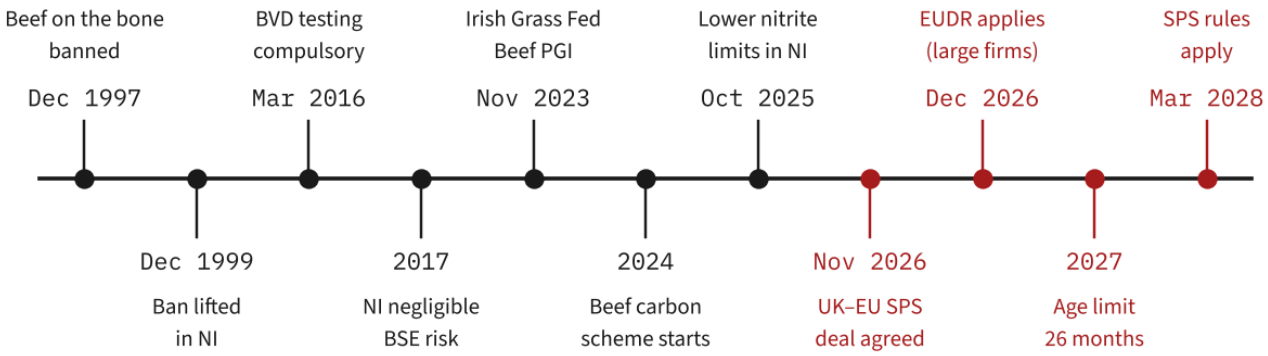
22. Raw milk at the farm gate

- **Legal, but tightly limited.** Raw (unpasteurised) cows' milk for drinking may be sold in NI only by a registered producer, direct to the consumer: at the farm gate, in farmhouse catering, at farmers' markets by the farmer, by pre-arranged delivery or collection, from a milk-round vehicle, or in a farm shop on the holding. Retail shops and off-farm shops have been barred since 1985 (Food Hygiene Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, Schedule 6; FSA guide to the law in NI, v3, November 2025). The NI guide does not list vending machines or online sales as routes for cows' milk, unlike the England and Wales summary.
- **Who checks.** DAERA's Agri-food Inspection Branch registers and inspects on the FSA's behalf, normally twice a year, and samples at least twice a year. A new seller must notify DAERA and the district council 28 days ahead and may not sell before an inspection.
- **TB is the catch in NI.** The milk must come from a herd that is officially TB free and brucellosis free. If the herd loses TB-free status, sales stop and registration is suspended. With herd TB incidence around 10% (section 13), that is a real business risk. (analysis)
- **Standards and label.** Plate count 20,000 cfu/ml or less, coliforms under 100, and no Salmonella, Campylobacter or STEC in 25 ml. Bottles must say "Raw milk" and carry the warning that it has not been heat-treated and may contain organisms harmful to health, and that children, pregnant women, older people and those who are unwell should not drink it. Raw goat and sheep milk is not under the same sales limits but carries the warning.
- **Availability.** Very small. About 135 producers were registered across England, Wales and NI in 2023 (safefood). No current NI count has been published that I could find; a campaign site reported a registered NI farm in 2017. [not verified] Scotland has banned all raw milk sales since 1983.
- **Benefits claimed, and the evidence.** Buyers cite taste, cream line, freshness, a direct link to the farm and a higher farm-gate price. Some observational studies of farm children in Europe link unboiled farm milk with less asthma and allergy, but they do not show cause and are not advice to drink it. [not verified] The FSA says there is no established health benefit and treats raw milk as a high-risk food; its scientific advisers rated raw cows'

drinking milk medium risk per portion, with high uncertainty (ACMSF annual report 2025). Outbreaks of STEC and Campylobacter linked to raw milk continue in England.

- **For a dairy farmer (analysis).** A niche, premium, direct-sale line that suits a small, TB-free, high-hygiene herd near a town. Testing costs (£63 a sample to the FSA), labelling, insurance and the TB risk mean it is a side business, not a market for NI's 2.8 billion litres.

Dates that shaped NI beef, and dates ahead (red)



Sources: legislation.gov.uk; DAERA; European Commission; GOV.UK. Dates as in the text.

23. UK and EU: now and later

Matter	Now (21 Nov 2026)	Later
SPS agreement	Agreed at the UK–EU summit on 20 November 2026 (GOV.UK guidance, 20 Nov 2026). Legal text and UK implementing legislation awaited.	GB to align with EU food and feed rules from 1 March 2028.
Nitrites in cured beef	Regulation (EU) 2023/2108 in NI since 9 Oct 2025: non-heat-treated meat 150 to 80 mg/kg, sterilised 100 to 55.	GB expected to align under SPS.
EU Deforestation Regulation	Applies in NI; DAERA is the competent authority for cattle, soya and palm (GOV.UK, updated 11 Nov 2026). From 30 Dec 2026 for large and medium operators, 30 Jun 2027 for micro and small.	A Commission delegated act of 13 July 2026 removes cattle hides, skins and leather from scope and adds frozen tongues from 30 Dec 2027. *Check it has been published in the Official Journal.*
Specified risk material	NI and GB both negligible BSE risk.	Aligned.
Labelling	Origin labelling of beef under EU rules in NI. Some GB-to-NI retail goods carry "Not for EU" labels under the Windsor Framework.	Expected to change under SPS. [not verified]

24. Structural issues

- **Succession and land.** Farm owners are ageing, and conacre (short-term letting) dominates. [not verified]
- **Labour and plant capacity.** Processors report shortages of boners and official veterinarians. [not verified]
- **Live exports** of cattle to GB and the Republic of Ireland move with the price gap. [not verified]

25. Opportunities and risks (analysis)

- **Openings:** a footprint-based successor to the age scheme, using genomics and Soil Nutrient Health Scheme data; a Northern Irish beef name on the Orkney model; recognition of native breeds within Farming with Nature (cost not estimated); slurry to biomethane only with phosphorus export; fifth-quarter craft lines and a fix for hide disposal; one plant serving GB and EU markets under SPS.
- **Risks:** continued suckler decline; the age limit against hill and native cattle; tighter phosphorus rules in the 2027–2030 Nutrients Action Programme; payments ending after 2027; wider TB testing; imports from Australia and New Zealand; feed traceability under the deforestation rules.

26. What this means (analysis)

- **The question for NI is speed and system, not grass against grain.** Younger slaughter and better calving cut lifetime methane; that is why the schemes pay for them.
- **Suckler and dairy-bred beef need separate policy.** The suckler herd carries the hills, the hedges and the highest footprint per kilo.
- **Phosphorus may decide herd size before carbon does.**
- **The money question is 2028.** Both beef schemes are funded from area payments and nothing is published beyond 2027.

27. Not yet verified

- Autumn 2026 prices and the GB–NI gap (press reports of LMC and AHDB data); UK imports from Australia and New Zealand.
- The 2021 Lough Neagh source split, seen via FactCheckNI; the Bangor 2020 figures, seen via press; the Teagasc finding; UFU positions.
- Publication of the EUDR delegated act on leather; the land, labour and live-export points in section 24.
- Dairy: NI share of UK milk; processor and plant details; artisan maker dates; DAERA milk utilisation 2025 split (spreadsheet not read); whether any NI farm is currently registered to sell raw cows' drinking milk. GrassCheck yields and calf registration shares (press reports of AgriSearch and LMC data); household beef waste (2016 estimate); the DAERA statement on methane and the herd shift; Bovaer's current scope.

Reviewed on 21 November 2026 by two panels: a fact-check against primary sources, and a practitioner panel (farmer, processor, DAERA policy, environmental NGO views). Created with assistive technology including AI and re-checked against the official sources listed. General information, not legal or financial advice.

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