**Agricultural Research and Development Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2024-2029**

1. **Background**
	1. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has “sustainability at the heart of a living, working active landscape valued by everyone” as its Strategic Vision. To ensure that the Department’s policy and operational activities are appropriately designed and targeted to achieve this Vision, it needs sound scientific evidence across the full range of its responsibilities.
	2. DAERA recognises the strategic importance of science in addressing the wider economic, environmental and social challenges associated with growing and re-balancing the NI economy. It wants to support a knowledge based bio-economy which will help agriculture and agri-food businesses become economically, environmentally and socially sustainable; support economic growth in rural areas; and assure the protection and enhancement of the environment to safeguard wellbeing and health.
	3. The DAERA Science Strategy Framework[[1]](#footnote-1) outlines a set of high level, long-term principles for DAERA to optimise its use of science to help deliver Departmental and Programme for Government objectives. It also outlines key actions for DAERA to better identify, prioritise, commission and evaluate scientific services required, so that we optimise the value gained from our investment in science.
	4. The DAERA Research and Development Strategy[[2]](#footnote-2) is one of three operational strategies of the DAERA Science Strategy Framework. It focuses on three key goals related to getting the best R&D, at the best value and make the best use of it to support the achievement of the DAERA purpose.
	5. This Strategy outlines a mission for DAERA, defines high level principles to be adopted and describes the desired end-state goals to be achieved in terms of more effective governance, understanding needs, providing assurance of best value in our investments and optimising use of research outputs. It also defines milestones to reach the goals including developing effective stakeholder engagement mechanisms, and implementing new governance processes
2. **Scheme Overview**
	1. The Agricultural Research and Development Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2024-2029 will commission and fund research and development activities in the agricultural sector. This research and development will concern only products listed in Annex I of the EC Treaty[[3]](#footnote-3). The work will be undertaken in compliance with “agricultural block exemption” Regulation (EU) 702/2014, in particular Article 31[[4]](#footnote-4).
	2. The Scheme forms part of a wider-ranging work programme agreed with the research organisation as explained in paragraph 3.3 below.
3. **Research Organisations**
	1. All work relevant to the Scheme will be commissioned from the following research and knowledge- dissemination organisations - Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) which is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) established by the Agriculture (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 (the Order), The Queen’s University of Belfast and Ulster University both of which are public research universities.
	2. AFBI carries out high technology research and development, statutory, analytical, and diagnostic testing functions for DAERA and other Government departments, public bodies and commercial companies. AFBI's NDPB status enables it to be innovative and entrepreneurial in its approach to business development. AFBI is forging new partnerships with other scientific institutes and research organisations and extending the range of services it offers. This enables AFBI’s unique breadth of scientific capabilities in the areas of agriculture, animal health, food, environment and biosciences to be offered to a wider prospective national and international customer base. AFBI is managed by an independent Board which is also responsible for monitoring its performance.
	3. Article 4(1) of the Order requires AFBI to carry out such scientific work as may be assigned to it by DAERA. Each year DAERA directs a programme of Research and Development (R&D) which AFBI must undertake. All research and development funded under this Scheme must be included in an annual work programme.
	4. The agricultural research and development detailed in this Scheme is included in the 2023/24 work programme and will be included in subsequent work programmes until the end of the Scheme. All programmes DAERA Directed AFBI Research Programmes relevant to this Scheme will be published on the DAERA Internet site below:

Link to: [DAERA directed Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) research work programme | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/daera-directed-agri-food-and-biosciences-institute-afbi-research-work-programme)

Link to AFBI website: <http://www.afbini.gov.uk/index/about-us.htm>

1. **Partners**
	1. A key principle of the Operational Strategy is to DAERA seek opportunities for collaboration and engagement with local, national and international research partners to meet its three key goals of getting the best R&D, at the best value and make the best use of it to support the achievement of the DAERA purpose. DAERA also encourages similar collaborations among rural businesses and public sector research organisations. DAERA encourage AFBI to do the same.
	2. AFBI must choose their partners because of their specific knowledge or expertise in an area.  They may, for example, work with specific companies because of their size and available resource to undertake research, or because they are the only company in a specific area.  They also work with other research organisations who have specific expertise/equipment.  In any case were AFBI will pay another partner to undertake work or provide a service as part of the research this must be paid at the market rate.
	3. DAERA will also fund agricultural research and development undertaken by The Queen’s University of Belfast and the Ulster University within collaborative research partnerships which will be detailed in an annual work programme (3.4) and which will be published on the DAERA Internet site under collaborative research funding[[5]](#footnote-5)
2. **Legal basis**Agriculture Act (Northern Ireland) 1949

Agriculture (Northern Ireland) Order 2004

1. **Scheme Duration**
	1. The Scheme will commence on 1 January 2024 and will end on 31 December 2029.
2. **Scheme Objectives**
	1. The aim of the Scheme is to undertake research and development in relation to agricultural products[[6]](#footnote-6). DAERA will direct AFBI to undertake fundamental research, industrial research and experimental development intended to improve the efficiency and quality of production of Annex I products. DARD will also fund agricultural research and development undertaken by The Queen’s University of Belfast and the Ulster University within collaborative research partnerships. The aim of this intervention is to increase profitability and market share by generating niche products or by improving production methods. There will be benefits across all sub-sectors being of benefit to consumers
3. **Scheme Conditions**
	1. All of the activities under this Scheme will satisfy the criteria for aid for research and development in the agricultural sector set out in Articles 31 of Commission Regulation (EU) 702/2014) i.e:
* The aided project shall be of interest to all undertakings active in the particular agricultural or forestry sector concerned (Art 31(2) of the Regulation).
* DAERA will publish on the internet information that the research will be carried out and with which goals prior to the commencement of the research. An indication of (a) the date when the results of the activity are expected to be published on the internet and that those results will be available to all undertakings in the particular sector concerned at no cost and (b) the place where those results will be published, which may be in the form of a link that will provide access to that place of publication. The results referred to above will be made available on the internet for at least five years (Art 31 (3) & (4)) of the Regulation).
* DAERA will grant aid under this scheme directly to the research and knowledge dissemination organisations. This scheme will not involve payments to undertakings active in the agricultural sector based on the price of agricultural products (Art 31(5) of the Regulation).
* The aid intensity will not exceed 100% of the eligible costs and will be restricted as detailed in paragraph 9 below (Art 31(5) of the Regulation).
1. **Eligible Costs**
	1. In accordance with Article 31(6) of Regulation 702/2014 the eligible costs under this Scheme are restricted to:
* personnel costs (researchers, technicians and other supporting staff) to the extent employed on the research project;
* costs of instruments and equipment to the extent and for the period used for the research project; if such instruments and equipment are not used for their full life for the research project, only the depreciation costs corresponding to the life of the research project, as calculated on the basis of good accounting practice, shall be considered eligible;
* costs for buildings and land, to the extent and for the duration used for the research project; with regard to buildings, only the depreciation costs corresponding to the life of the research project, as calculated on the basis of good accounting practice shall be considered eligible; for land, costs of commercial transfer or actually incurred capital costs shall be eligible;
* cost of contractual research, knowledge and patents bought or licensed from outside sources at arm’s length conditions, as well as costs of consultancy and equivalent services used exclusively for the research activity;
* additional overheads incurred directly as a result of the research project; and
* other operating costs, including costs of materials, supplies and similar products incurred directly as a result of the research activity.
1. **State Aid**

10.1 Aid under this Scheme constitutes State Aid within the meaning of Articles 107 to 109 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and has been notified to the Commission as compliant with Regulation ((EU) 702/2014 [OJEU, 193, pages 1 – 75, 1.7.2014].

1. [DAERA Science Strategy Framework document (daera-ni.gov.uk)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/daera/daera-science-strategy-framework-V2.PDF#:~:text=The%20proposed%20Science%20Strategy%20Framework%20outlines%20a%20Vision,optimising%20investment%20in%20resources%20and%20having%20effective%20governance.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [DAERA Research and Development Strategy 2022-2026 | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/daera-research-and-development-strategy-2022-2026) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Consolidated Version of the Treaty Establishing the European Community (OJEU C321, E/37, 29.12.2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Commission Regulation (EC) 800/2008 of 6 August 2008 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the common market in application of Articles 87 and 88 of the Treaty (General block exemption Regulation) (OJ l 214, 9.8.2008, p3-47) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Collaborative research funding | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/collaborative-research-funding) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Art 2 (4) of Commission Regulation (EU) 702/2014 defines “Agricultural products’ as::

“(a) the products listed in Annex I to the Treaty, except fishery and aquaculture products listed in Annex I to Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)