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|  | **NORTHERN IRELAND REGIONAL FOOD PROGRAMME** |

**01 May 2024 - 31 March 2025**

**(Subject to budget availability)**

**GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS**

**PROGRAMME AIM**

The aim of the programme is to raise the profile of quality regional food and increase its consumption within NI, RoI and GB.

**PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the programme are:

* to assist the NI agri-food industry to develop and expand profitable and sustainable markets;
* to assist the development of a sustainable and thriving rural economy by raising the profile of quality NI food; and
* to increase integration and efficiency within the NI agri-food supply chain through enhanced co-operation and communication between/ within sectors.

The programme encourages all sectors of the **agri-food** industry to work together and will provide financial assistance for eligible additional activities. It is not designed to substitute existing activities already funded by applicants.

Awards will be made on a competitive basis and only eligible projects that are judged to have **best met the programme objectives** will receive funding. Hence some projects which are eligible in principle may not automatically be funded.

New projects will be supported at a more favourable rate than those that have received support through a past NIRFP programme, unless the latter can demonstrate additional development.

Established projects that have previously received funding will not receive support unless they demonstrate **significant additional** enhancement i.e. introduction of new elements / improvements that augment the achievement of the programme objectives.

**WHO CAN APPLY?**

**Applicant Eligibility**

* Formally constituted not for profit groups who have an NI membership/remit and plan to deliver projects that raise the profile of NI regional food products.
* Registered Charities who have an NI membership/remit and plan to deliver projects that raise the profile of NI regional food products.
* Not for profit regional development agencies who have an NI membership/remit and plan to deliver projects that raise the profile of NI regional food products.
* Joint applications from not-for-profit groups and/or charities or regional development agencies who have an NI membership/remit and plan to deliver projects that raise the profile of NI regional food products.

Individuals or companies cannot apply unless they fall into one of the above categories. All applicants **must** have an associated bank account.

**PROJECT ELIGIBILITY**

For the purpose of this programme, the definition of NI regional food is that it **must be** grown/produced or processed in NI. It should meet at least one of the following requirements:

* Exceed minimum national and EU legal requirements/ standards in relation to hygiene, traceability, animal welfare.
* Adhere to quality assurance schemes which are above minimum legal requirements.
* Promote the EU Protected Food Name Scheme.

To be considered eligible for support, projects must satisfy the principles underpinning government funding as outlined in ‘Managing Public Money Northern Ireland’ 2008.

(<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/managing-public-money-ni-chapters.pdf>).

**WHAT DO WE WANT DELIVERED UNDER THE 2024/25 PROGRAMME?**

NIRFP 2024-25 seeks to deliver projects under three categories of support including; ‘Regional Fairs/Exhibitions’, ‘Seminars/Workshops’, and ‘Information Programmes’.

**1. Regional Fairs/Exhibitions:** The organisation of/ participation in, fairs/exhibitions that raise the profile of quality, regional agri-food products, and impact on a sustainable and thriving rural economy through inclusion of local food producers and processors.

e.g. new and existing food-focused events, generic events and agricultural shows with a food element, trade shows (not already supported by Invest NI), and farmers markets.

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| **Category 1: Regional Fairs/Exhibitions Eligible Items** |
| * **Event publicity -** Production and distribution of printed materials (leaflets, posters, advertisements etc) and websites/social media platforms announcing the event.
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| * **Hire of venue and hire of space for general display.**

 Please note funding for in-kind support will not be considered. |
| * **Participation fees**

 Hire of staff and equipment for professional cookery demonstrations; provision of hospitality during event (media / food writers/ trade buyers).  |
| * **Travel costs**

 Media / food writers / trade buyers (grocery retailers/food service organisations). |
| * *Any branding/logos used in conjunction with regional fairs/exhibitions must be agreed in advance with the NIRFP management team.*
* *Applications will not be accepted for major trade shows where Invest NI plan to*

*support NI agri-food companies to attend.* * *Participation in the events / programmes must not be restricted to the*

 *membership of the group or organisation delivering those events / programmes.* |

**2. Seminars/ Workshops:** Provision of knowledge transfer activities that contribute to raising the profile of quality regional agri-food products e.g. ‘meet the buyer’ workshops, producer/ food forums, and seminars addressing quality aspects of regional food including Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGI).

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| **Category 2: Seminars/ Workshops Eligible Items** |
| * **Hire of venue**

 Please note funding for in-kind support will not be considered. |
| * **Organising costs**
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| * **Presenters**
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| * **Provision of invitations**
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| * **Compilation and distribution of educational/informational material to producers.**

 Publications must be of an educational/informational nature and must not encourage economic operators or consumers to buy a particular agricultural product. Publications must comply with the rules under Category 3 Information Programmes.  |
| * *Any branding/logos used in conjunction with seminars and workshops must be agreed in advance with the NIRFP management team to ensure compliance*

*with State Aid rules.* |

**3. Information Programmes:** Projects that raise awareness of quality regional agri-food products among the wider public that are in full compliance with State Aid requirements as outlined below e.g. quality schemes including PDO, PGI and generic promotion campaigns.

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| **Category 3: Information Programmes Eligible Items** |
| * **Production and distribution of factual information material (in print /electronic media/ radio/television).** e.g. description of regional food culture, description of quality assurance schemes, production methods, food safety standards and measures, hygiene, traceability, animal welfare etc.
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| * **Costs for the dissemination of scientific knowledge and factual information on generic agricultural products e.g. their nutritional benefits / suggested uses.**
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| * *Promotion campaigns must be*
1. *focused on products covered by quality schemes as defined in Appendix 1*

*OR* 1. *generic in character and for the benefit of all producers of the type of product concerned (no mention of specific companies, brands or origin permitted).*
* *Publications must not refer to any particular undertaking, brand name or origin. This restriction does not apply to the reference to origin for products covered by*
1. *quality schemes established under the EU regulations cited in Appendix 1.1*

*(including PDO and PGI) OR* 1. *quality schemes recognised by Member States as outlined in Appendix 1.2,*

*provided reference to origin is secondary in the message.* * *Any branding/logos used in conjunction with information programmes must be*

 *agreed in advance with the NIRFP management team.* |

**WHAT WILL NOT BE SUPPORTED UNDER THE PROGRAMME?**

**Examples of project items ineligible for support**

* Entertainment.
* Insurance.
* Security.
* Fencing.
* Licences e.g. trading and alcohol.
* Travel costs and hospitality for exhibitors/producers.
* Applicant organisation running costs e.g. wages, in-kind costs.
* Contingency planning costs.
* Project items in breach of State Aid requirements (e.g. promotion campaigns bearing non-compliant logos).

**WHAT LEVEL OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT CAN YOU EXPECT?**

**Category 1-3:** If successful, you will receive financial assistance of up to 40% of expenditure against eligible project items. Financial assistance will not be provided for items until they have been paid in full.

You may be eligible to claim for a management fee relating solely to the project. The management fee will be up to a maximum of 10% of total eligible project costs, subject to overall budgetary constraints and provision of evidence of management fee breakdown.

**CONDITIONS OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

If successful, the letter of financial assistance will include conditions that apply to all government funded programmes. This will include the following:

* Participation at events/programmes must allow for inclusion.
* The capture of sales data at events.
* Percentage of population reached though promotion campaign.
* The capture of consumer impressions.
* The use of promotional material to acknowledge the NIRFP support.
* The submission of paid invoices.
* The evaluation of the event or programme.
* Adherence to procurement guidelines **including correct tendering procedures** as outlined:

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| Total Value of Procurement | **Action & Minimum Number of Quotations/Tenders** |
| **Up to £5,000** | Seek 2 price checks with suppliers to ensure value for money has been achieved. |
| **£5,000 to £30,000** | Minimum of 2 tenders / written quotations. |
| **Over £30,000**  | Public advertisement for open or restricted tender competition  |

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| **Requirements in addition to procurement information** |
| * Original invoices
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| * Bank statements (these must be on headed paper and have the bank details clearly visible)
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| * Copy of cheque if paid in this way
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**State Aid**

Categories 1-3 of the Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme provides aid for:

1. knowledge transfer and information actions in compliance with Article 21 of Commission Regulation (EU) 702/2014 [ OJEC L 193, 1.7.2014, pages 1 -73]; and
2. promotion measures in favour of agricultural products in Northern Ireland in accordance with Article 24 of Commission Regulation (EU) 702/2014. In accordance with Articles 21(5) and 24(6)(a) the aid will be granted in kind by means of subsidised services and will be paid direct to the applicant (service provider). The Scheme does not involve direct payments of money to producers. The aid to be provided for the items listed as eligible for financial assistance above will be within the limits prescribed by Articles 21(8) and 24(8).

**HOW TO APPLY**

Please complete the application form that accompanies this guidance note and can be found at

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-regional-food-programme>

Applications must befor project works to be completed from **01 May 2024 to 31 March 2025.** A separate application form should be completed for each project. Projects may include more than one programme category.

Application forms should be submitted electronically and emailed to:

agrifoodsupportbranch@daera-ni.gov.uk

Hard copies can be forwarded to:

NIRFP Management Team

First Floor, Clare House

303 Airport Road West

Belfast

BT3 9ED

Applicationsmust be received by the NIRFP management team no later than **4.00pm on 15 April 2024.** No applications received after this date will be considered.

**The selection panel set up to assess applications may impose a maximum limit of funding on projects or applicants in line with the available budget.**

**What happens now?**

Your application will be checked for eligibility and completeness. Should any further information be required the NIRFP team will contact you for clarity. Eligible projects will be assessed by a selection panel and the outcome will be communicated to you in writing.

For queries relating to NIRFP please contact NIRFP management team on 028 9052 4497.

**Appendix 1– Quality Schemes**

‘Quality Schemes’ are defined by Article 20 of Commission Regulation (EU) 702/2014 as follows:

**1.1** quality schemes established under the following EU Regulations
(i) Part II, Title II, Chapter I, Section 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 as concerns wine;
(ii) Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012;
(iii) Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007;
(iv) Regulation (EC) No 110/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council;

(v) Regulation (EU) No 251/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council;

**1.2 (a)** quality schemes, including farm certification schemes, for agricultural products recognised by the Member States as complying with the following criteria:
(i) the specificity of the final product produced under such quality schemes must be

 derived from a clear obligations to guarantee:

* specific product characteristics, or
* specific farming or production methods, or
* the quality of the final product that goes significantly beyond the commercial

 commodity standards as regards public, animal or plant health, animal welfare

 or environmental protection;

(ii) the quality scheme must be open to all producers;

(iii) the quality scheme must involve binding final product specifications and compliance with those specifications must be verified by public authorities or by an independent inspection body;

(iv) the quality scheme must be transparent and assure complete traceability of agricultural products;

**1.2 (b)** voluntary agricultural product certification schemes recognised by the Member State concerned as meeting the requirements laid down in the Commission Communication - EU best practice guidelines for voluntary certification schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs.