

traditional unionist voice

Agricultural Manifesto 2009



www.tuv.org.uk

www.jimallister.org

European Parliamentary Election 4th June 2009

1 Allister



Dear Agricultural Voter,

In 2004 I asked for your support on the basis of pledges made. Now, after 5 years representing you in Brussels I again invite your support, but this time on the foundation of my proven track record. I hope I have earned your trust as a dependable voice for farming in Europe.

Since agricultural policy is set in Brussels it is vital to have the best voices representing you there. It's because agriculture matters so much that I devote maximum time as an MEP to farming issues. Hence, the reason for producing this separate Agricultural Manifesto.

As your MEP I believe I have demonstrated unwavering commitment to fighting hard for the best deal possible for Ulster's farmers. It is not an easy task. It takes skill and tenacity. I am pledged to continue this fight on your behalf.

With major CAP reform due by 2013 there will be much focus in the new Parliament on planned changes. We need to shape these to suit our needs. Likewise the change coming with abolition of milk quotas will throw up major challenges, not to mention the unexpected problems which always confront agriculture.

In the following pages you will get a fuller picture of my stand on the major issues.

Best wishes.

Yours truly,

Jim Allister QC MEP



Your champion in Europe

In his first term as an MEP Jim Allister has been a true champion of Northern Ireland agriculture, working tirelessly to defend the interests of local farmers at home and abroad - and not just at election time. Anyone familiar with the weekly farming press will know of his mastery of the wide range of agricultural issues.

TUV recognises the centrality of the agri-food industry in terms both of its vital contribution to our local economy and as an important part of the social fabric of rural communities. A prosperous agricultural base provides for vibrant rural communities.



Re-discovering CAP principles

Brussels has overall responsibility for shaping agricultural policy across EU Member States, as a result of the Common Agricultural Policy. Traditionally, the CAP was about delivering an adequate supply of affordable food, with adequate producer returns.

Swept along by every latest fad, be it food into fuel or climate change correctness, the Commission has steered the CAP away from these founding priorities. In consequence agriculture has declined.

Of course higher standards of animal health and welfare and environmental adherence have their place, but we must not lose sight of the primacy of producing sufficient and safe food for Europe and maximizing export opportunities, in circumstances where the world population is expected to rise to 9 billion by 2050.

While TUV does not object to policies which ensure high European production standards, we do object to the systematic imposition of these higher standards on EU producers only, and not on foreign imports. The unacceptable reality is that local farmers have to comply with more and more costly regulation, which serves only to undermine their ability to compete with non-EU products, often produced to lesser standards.



Fighting against red tape

The European Commission is notorious for producing unworkable legislative proposals, ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous of how straight vegetables must be; all imposing massive additional cost onto producers, and onto consumers.



The Commission's over-zealous regulation of agriculture is now being mostly driven from a hyper-environmental fixation, and often with little regard for the extra burdens which these policies impose on farm businesses.

Jim Allister is very clear that farmers must have 'freedom to farm'.

Consistent approach to production standards

The EU Commission has a history of dragging its feet on necessary protective action against unfair foreign competition. The import restrictions finally imposed on Brazilian beef imports only came after months of campaigning, in which Jim Allister played a prominent part.

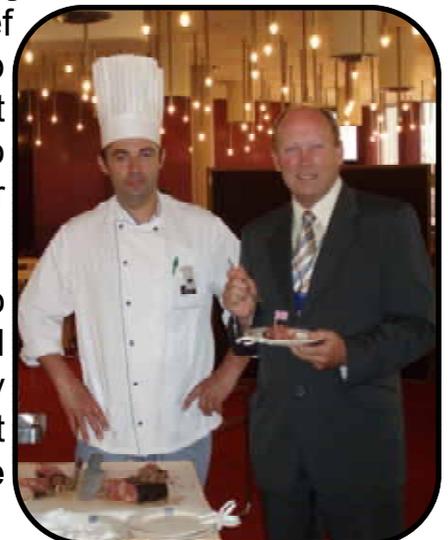
Jim Allister will continue to work towards ensuring all food coming into the EU bears proper country of origin labelling and complies with minimum EU standards. An adequately funded publicity campaign must be rolled out to raise awareness among EU consumers, and farther afield, of the higher production standards which exist in the EU.



Fighting our corner

Jim Allister has worked relentlessly in Brussels to secure significant wins for Northern Ireland agriculture. The lifting of the EU ban on British beef in 2006, after a long hard fight, was a momentous step forward for the red meat sector. Since 2006, the red meat industry has been able to engage in much hard work to recapture important export markets which had been lost for a decade.

A positive outcome on this issue and others like it goes to show that perseverance does pay off. An MEP of a small region on the periphery of Europe has to be especially persistent and skilled in order to secure the desired result for Northern Ireland – **in Jim Allister, you have those qualities.**



Jim Allister's work as an MEP does not end in Brussels. It is effective because he follows through the entire chain of policy – from formulation in Brussels, to its transposition and implementation in Northern Ireland. For example arising from the Nitrates Directive, he fought in both Brussels and Belfast to obtain the increase to 60% grant under the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme and to minimize the slurry-spreading restrictions.



Holding DARD to account

TUV believes Northern Ireland has been ill-served by its present DARD Minister, whose lack of interest in farming matters, and narrow pursuit of an all-Ireland ideology has cost our industry dear. The recent dioxin debacle has illustrated clearly the fallacy of a 'fortress Ireland' approach, rather than a 'fortress Northern Ireland' focus on animal health issues. Meanwhile, the same complacent attitude has been demonstrated over the totally inadequate response of the Executive for farmers affected by flash flooding during August 2008. While decisions were made to grant affected domestic householders a one-off payment almost immediately, it took the Executive many more months to decide what – if any – compensation would be granted to affected farmers. In the end, approximately only two thirds of costs incurred by farmers were compensated.



The same dysfunctional approach has been demonstrated throughout the Department of Agriculture, for example the Farm Modernisation spectacle of farmers having to queue in the public street to recoup some of their own money.

There is no effective opposition within the current Stormont arrangements to hold DARD to account.

There has been no effective challenge from within to Gildernew's priorities of taxing farmers through modulation, and giving the extra €171 million disproportionately into 'rural development' axis 3 priorities.

- The Red Meat Task Force Report is merely gathering dust.
- Though the EU Task Force Report identified the funding deficiencies necessary to be rectified to enhance agricultural competitiveness, there has been no meaningful response.
- The mis-match in funding provision within the Rural Development Programme has gone largely unchallenged.
- The continuing absence of a modernization programme for the dairy sector, to aid movement away from reliance on whole milk powder exports, is appalling.

With DARD and the Executive largely failing agriculture, the strong independent voice which Jim Allister provides is essential.

Future CAP reform

There will undoubtedly be many more challenges for the local agri-food industry over the next 5 years. We have the prospect of another major reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to be phased in from 2013. Single Farm Payments - already being heavily eroded via modulation deductions - will come under further pressure. Jim Allister will defend this essential lifeline to the industry.



Pressure on EU funding will intensify the pressure for more co-financing in agriculture. Given the UK's track record, this would not be good for Northern Ireland agriculture. Jim Allister will be seeking to hold the line against such a trend.

TUV will argue that CAP funding is essential to cover the extra costs generated by EU food safety, animal welfare and environmental requirements in order to keep our producers competitive.

Less favoured areas

TUV recognises the critical role the current LFA scheme plays in sustaining farm businesses in Northern Ireland's less favoured, marginal areas. LFA is an essential element of farm incomes at present, especially for suckler and sheep farmers, worth around £22 million per annum. Indeed, approximately 80% of Northern Ireland's suckler cows and breeding ewes are produced on LFA land. Of course, there are wider social benefits which directly flow from the LFA payment, not to mention well reported environmental benefits from maintaining grazing on marginal areas.



An EU wide review of the LFA scheme is underway, looking at new ways of defining the aims of such a payment. Jim Allister will be fighting to safeguard this payment and ensuring our challenging landscape continues to be designated.

Dairy sector

The roller coaster ride of recent years in the dairy sector has destabilized one of the most pivotal components of our agricultural industry.

Jim Allister not only opposed the removal of key market support mechanisms during the CAP Health Check, but was to the fore in lobbying relentlessly for the deployment of export refunds. As ever, the Commission moved slower than it ought, subjecting producers to unsustainable prices. In our volatile global market it is vital that effective safety nets survive the negotiations on the CAP, which will take place in the new term of Parliament.

Jim Allister opposed the increase in quotas within CAP Health Check negotiations, believing that increased Republic of Ireland production could reduce our export of liquid milk. Likewise, the planned end to quotas in 2015 is something which concerns him.

The level of Rural Development support, assigned by DARD, to increase the competitiveness of the dairy industry is pitifully inadequate. It is imperative that our industry positions itself to be able to compete most effectively. Undoubtedly, there is a pressing need for restructuring within the industry, in order to be more competitive in what is an increasingly volatile and competitive global marketplace, yet the Stormont Executive seems indifferent.

The industry's current over-dependence on commodity products, in particular milk powders, has become a risky strategy going forward. While the industry is showing itself to be forward looking, more substantial Government support is essential. Dairy UK, on behalf of the Northern Ireland industry, is in the process of assessing the needs of the industry by 2015, but the findings must be matched by governmental commitment and action. A recent decision by EU Member States to re-allocate €1.02 billion of unspent CAP funds into New Challenges, including dairy restructuring, is an ideal opportunity to secure much needed investment for the benefit of Northern Ireland dairying.

Sheep

It is with grave concern that we witness the continued dramatic decline in sheepmeat production across the EU, with rising imports displacing local produce. These developments have been prompted by unsustainable returns for sheep farmers. Apart from the obvious ramifications in terms of lost income streams for those concerned, the decline within the sheep sector is having a knock-on effect environmentally. Sheep are ideally placed to upkeep less fertile areas, and in maintaining biodiversity. Therefore, there are strong social, economic and environmental grounds for introducing an environment-linked payment in order to maintain the sheep sector, particularly since current arrangements under the CAP have obviously failed in maintaining viability within many aspects of sheep meat production.

The introduction of mandatory electronic identification for sheep is recognised as a major issue set to face sheep producers across Europe, not least in Northern Ireland.

Jim Allister continues to oppose this unnecessary move.



Jim Allister regularly raises Northern Ireland issues with European Agriculture Commissioner, Mariann Fischer-Boel



The intensive sector

Pig and poultry producers face massive challenges. Compliance with nitrate and phosphate requirements has placed the intensive sector under particular pressure. Jim Allister was one of the first politicians to recognize the necessity for the Rose Energy project and to support it.



The planned move away from conventional cages poses huge challenges to the poultry sector. Jim Allister has spoken out against the folly of imposing such constraints on our egg producers, only to see local production supplanted by imports of from countries where no such constraints apply. He will continue this battle.

MEP backs UFU red tape fight on IPPC

Jim Allister has been actively opposing the proposed extension of IPPC controls to more pig and poultry producers. While the defeat in the Parliament of the Commission's plans to subject more poultry farms to these draconian controls was welcome, there can be no let up in the campaign to deliver the sector from such unnecessary burdens.

Arable/potatoes

The arable sector has come under immense pressure to do away with some essential production tools, such as plant protection products in recent discussions at EU level. Clearly, enhancing productivity is key to being competitive. It is imperative that local growers are not obligated to comply with more stringent standards, particularly on pesticide use, than the obligations which are imposed on imports from third countries. It is nonsensical for different standards to be imposed on home produce compared with third country imports, as product displacement will be the most definite outcome, with no added benefits for consumers.

Jim Allister will continue to battle against policy madness which Brussels has been foisting upon this sector.

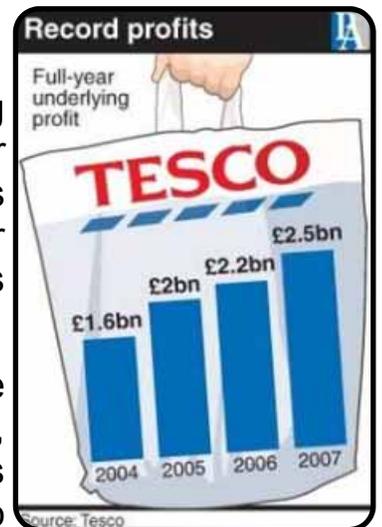


Redressing imbalances in the supply chain

A recurring theme, and perhaps one of the primary threats facing the Northern Ireland agri-food industry today, is the ever increasing power which the large multinational supermarkets hold over their supply chain partners. There is currently a major imbalance between retailer, processor and producer, and this is something which must be rectified.

That is why Jim Allister welcomes the recent passing by the European Parliament of a 'Food prices in Europe' Report, particularly in light of its robust calls for investigation into abuses by the large supermarkets. Safeguards must be put in place to protect consumers and producers alike from further abuses by supermarkets. Retail abuse is prevalent across Europe. It is wrong to have large multiple retailers announce record-breaking profits year on year, at the expense of profitability and vibrancy within the other parts of the supply chain.

In April, Tesco reported increased profits of £3 billion per annum, up 10% on last year, while the average farm income predicted for Northern Ireland cattle and sheep farms in the same period, according to DARD, stands at a £231 loss. Supermarkets need to demonstrate increased loyalty to its local Northern Ireland supply base, if they truly value the higher production standards which we have in place.



Cross cutting issues

Pressure must continue to be brought to bear on local Departments to address the costly business of **bovine tuberculosis** in cattle in an holistic way. Up to now, Northern Ireland Departments have been reluctant to deal with the wildlife dimension to the spread of this disease, which has resulted in enormous disruption and cost to farm businesses and taxpayers alike. Jim Allister has been instrumental in encouraging DOE and DARD in particular to permit the culling of infected badgers, which has produced some progress in recent months. The goal must be to eliminate this disease which has been virtually eradicated throughout the rest of the EU.



Discussions around '**cost and responsibility sharing**' are gathering pace, whereby it is proposed to offload additional costs associated with animal health onto producers and processors. This anti-farming policy is being driven by a cost agenda, which the industry can not afford to bear.

The battle to speed **GMO approvals** in Europe will continue. A fanatical and irrational lobby has succeeded in damaging the competitiveness of European agriculture by robbing it of expeditious access to new and cheaper product. Jim Allister has been clearly identified with those battling against this dogma.

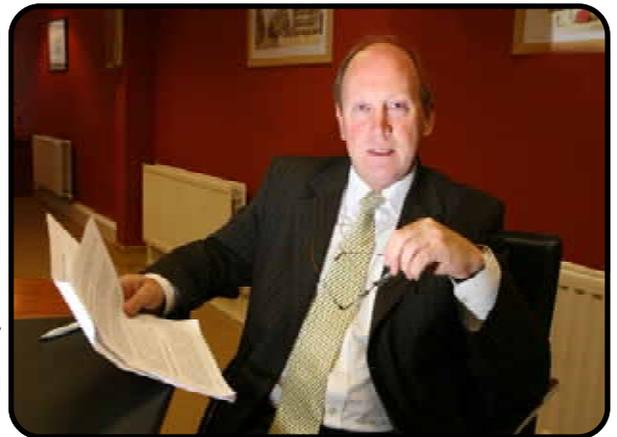
Just as the ultimately failed **WTO** dominated much of the last Parliament, so it will continue to be central to the future of European agriculture. Jim Allister was constantly berating Commissioner Mandelson over his willingness to sacrifice agricultural interests. He will continue to be vigilant in this regard, believing no deal is better than a bad deal.



Critical of the food to fuel focus in **biofuels**, Jim Allister supports the revised approach in Europe in moving towards energy from waste. Thus development of such second generation biofuels has his support.

Constituency service second to none

Jim Allister pays the same attention to detail in his constituency work as he does to lobbying the European Commission on the big issues of the day, ensuring the service he gives is second to none. While this work does not often hit the headlines, his efforts on behalf of individual constituents, be it on duplicate-field issues, ensuring single farm payments are promptly paid or a host of other issues, make up an extremely important part of his work.



Ensuring he is informed on those issues which come before the European Parliament is hugely important for Jim Allister, which is why he enjoys a positive relationship with key agrifood industry leaders, including the main industry lobby groups, representatives from all the main farm sectors, processors and the grain trade.



WORKING ON YOUR BEHALF IN BRUSSELS...

2004 - 2009 (as at 1/5/09)	Speeches	Oral Questions	Written Questions
Allister	228	46	214
Nicholson	86	3	42
De Brun	71	0	41

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