

# INCREASE IN AGE OF PRIME CATTLE AT SLAUGHTER IN Q3

**C**HALLENGING production conditions on NI farms this summer has contributed to an increase in the average age at slaughter of price reported prime cattle. A late spring delayed cattle turnout on many farms in 2018 and this will have negatively impacted animal performance at grass.

Performance will have been further hampered on many farms by drought conditions and poor grass growth during late June and July 2018 and in many cases producers had to introduce supplementary feeding at grass to maintain animal performance.

The average age of price reported steers killed during June-September 2018 was 26 months (793 days). This was an increase from 25.6 months (779 days) during the same period in 2017. This increase in the average age at slaughter by 14 days year on year will have had a direct influence on production costs at farm level. It should

also be noted that the average carcass weight of price reported steers only increased by 1kg to 352kg in the 2018 period despite the longer production period.

There has also been a slight increase in the proportion of steers slaughtered at over 30 months of age year on year. In the 2017 period 9.5 per cent of steers were over 30 months at point of slaughter and this increased to 11.8 per cent in the 2018 period.

The average age at slaughter for price reported heifers during June-September 2017 was 26.2 months (798 days). This increased to 26.4 months (804 days) in the same period in 2018. Despite the increase in the average age at slaughter by 6 days the average carcass weight of price reported heifers decreased by 2kg to 314kg in the 2018 period.

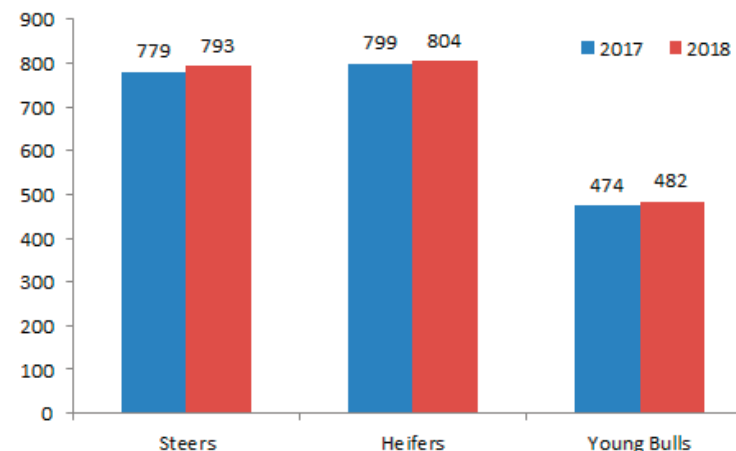
Heifers killed at over thirty months during June-September 2018 accounted for 14 per cent of the total

price reported heifer kill. This is an increase from 12 per cent in the same period in 2017.

The average age at slaughter of young bulls during June-September 2018 was 15.9 months (482 days). This is a slight increase from the same period in 2017 when the average age at slaughter was 15.6 months (474 days).

There are significant penalties in place for young bulls slaughtered at over 16 months of age as these animals do not meet the specifications of most major retail customers. Young bulls have a better feed efficiency than steers and tend to have higher live-weight gains. However finishing bulls at under 16 months requires a more intensive production system and is not suitable for all beef finishers. There is also a more limited market outlet for these animals so producers should liaise with the procurement staff of the individual processors before going down this route.

**Figure 1: Average age at slaughter of price reported steers, heifers and young bulls during June-September 2017 and 2018**



During the 2018 period 76 per cent of price reported young bulls were under 16 months. This was back slightly from the 2017 period when 80 per cent of young bulls met this requirement. While the average age at slaughter for young bulls was largely unchanged year on

year the average carcass weight increased from 339kg in the 2017 period to 343kg in the 2018 period. Much of this increase can be attributed to an increasing proportion of the young bull kill that were sourced from the suckler herd.

# CONFORMATION SCORES REMAIN SIMILAR IN Q3 2018

As indicated in the article above there have been changes to the age and carcass weights of prime cattle killed in local plants during June-September 2018 when compared to the same period in 2017.

There have also been some slight shifts in the conformation scores achieved by prime cattle at point of slaughter. Figure 2 displays the conformation scores achieved by the price reported steer kill during June-September 2018 and the corresponding period in 2017.

During the 2018 period 16 per cent of steers achieved a U grade, back two percentage points from the same period in 2017 when 18 per cent of steers achieved a U grade. Meanwhile the proportion of R grading steers in the kill held steady at 35 per cent during the 2018 period.

As indicated in Figure 2 there was an increase in the proportion of O grading carcasses in the NI steer kill to account for 37 per cent of the kill during the 2018 period. Meanwhile the proportion of P grading carcasses decreased slightly to account for 11 per cent of the price reported steer kill in the 2018 period.

There are a number of factors that can influence the conformation score of prime cattle including carcass weight, production system and the type of cattle

included in the slaughter mix. During the period June-September 2018 58 per cent of the price reported steer kill were sourced from the suckler herd, a further 28 per cent were beef crosses and the remaining 14 per cent were dairy sired. In the same period in 2017 59 per cent of the price reported steer kill came from the suckler herd, a further 24 per cent were beef crosses while 17 per cent were dairy sired.

Figure 3 outlines the conformation scores achieved by price reported heifers in NI during June-September 2018 and the corresponding period in 2017. As with the steers there has been some slight changes in the conformation scores achieved by price reported heifers year on year.

During June-September 2018 14 per cent of price reported heifers were awarded a U grade, back one percentage point from the corresponding period in 2017. Meanwhile the proportion of heifers achieving an R grade declined from 45 per cent of the kill in the 2017 period to 43 per cent of the kill in the 2018 period.

O grading heifers accounted for 36 per cent of the price reported heifer kill during the 2018 period, an increase of three percentage points from the same period in 2017 when 33 per cent of

heifers achieved an O grade. The proportion of heifers achieving a P grade remained constant at seven per cent between the two periods.

As with the steers there have been some slight shifts in the origin of price reported heifers in NI price reported the slaughter mix. During the 2018 period 64 per cent of price reported heifers came from the suckler herd, back two percentage points from year earlier levels when 66 per cent of heifers were of suckler origin.

Beef cross heifers accounted for 31 per cent of the price reported heifer kill during the 2018 period, up from 27 per cent of the reported heifer kill during June-September 2017. The proportion of dairy sired heifers in the slaughter mix declined slightly from six per cent in the 2017 period to five per cent in the 2018 period.

While the conformation scores of price reported steers and heifers have remained fairly constant there has been an improvement in the conformation scores of price reported young bulls due primarily to shifts in the slaughter mix. Suckler origin young bulls accounted for 64 per cent of young bull throughput in the 2018 period with beef cross steers accounting for a further 19 per cent. Dairy sired young bulls accounted for the remaining 18 per cent.

Figure 2: Conformation scores achieved by price reported steer kill in NI June-September 2017 and 2018

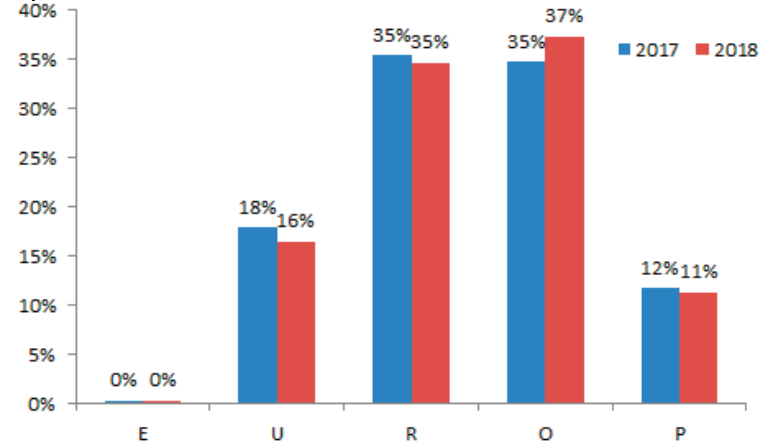
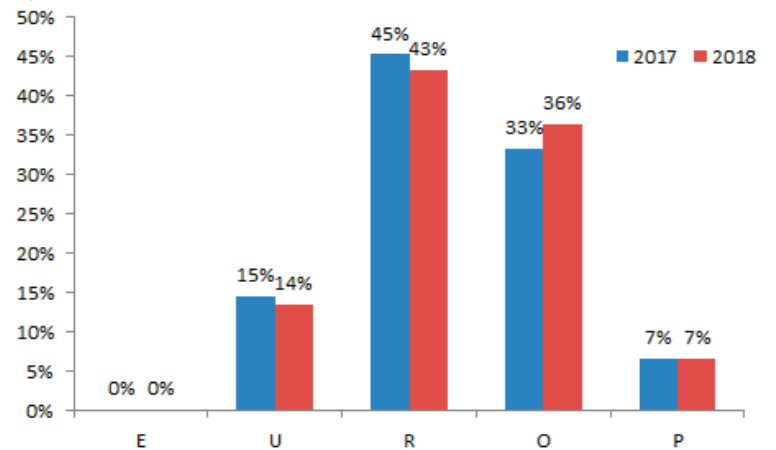


Figure 3: Conformation scores achieved by price reported heifer kill in NI June-September 2017 and 2018



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# WEEKLY BEEF & LAMB MARKETS



## CATTLE TRADE

### NI FACTORY BASE QUOTES FOR CATTLE

(P/KG DW)	This Week 01/10/18	Next Week 08/10/18
<b>Prime</b>		
U-3	350 - 356p	350 - 354p
R-3	344 - 350p	344 - 348p
O+3	338 - 344p	338 - 342p
P+3	292 - 304p	292 - 302p
	Including bonus where applicable	
<b>Cows</b>		
O+3 & better	252 - 270p	248 - 270p
Steakers	140 - 170p	140 - 170p
Blues	120 - 130p	120 - 130p

Cow quotes vary depending on weight and grade.  
Pricing policies vary from plant to plant. Producers are advised to check pricing policies before presenting cattle for slaughter.

### Deadweight Cattle Trade

**B**ASE quotes from the plants for in-spec U-3 grade prime cattle have held steady this week at 350-356p/kg. The majority of plants quoted 352-354p/kg for steers and heifers this week. Quotes for O+3 grading cows have come under pressure early this week with quotes back slightly to 252-270p/kg. Similar quotes are expected for all types of cattle early next week in the majority of plants.

Good supplies of prime cattle have continued to come forward for slaughter in NI with 7,092 prime cattle killed locally last week. This was an increase of 468 head from the previous week. Throughput of prime cattle during 2018 has totalled 245,680 head, a 0.9 per cent increase on the corresponding period in 2017 when 243,464 prime cattle were slaughtered. Cow throughput has also remained strong with 2,077 cows killed last week, a decrease of 161 cows on the previous week. Cow throughput in NI plants during 2018 to date has totalled 75,893 head, a 5.7 per cent increase on the 71,805 cows killed in the same period in 2017.

Imports of prime cattle from ROI for direct slaughter in local plants last week totalled 331 head with a further three prime cattle imported from GB. Prime cattle imports for direct slaughter in NI plants totalled 1,247 head during September 2018. This is an increase of 584 head when compared to the corresponding month last year when 663 prime cattle were imported for slaughter in local plants. Meanwhile exports from NI to ROI for direct slaughter last week consisted of seven prime cattle and 104 cows while a further 43 prime cattle and 38 cows were exported to GB.

The average steer price in NI last week was back 0.8p/kg to 351.1p/kg while the R3 steer price increased by a penny to 360.7p/kg. The average heifer price in NI last week was unchanged at 355.1p/kg while the R3 heifer price reported a marginal decrease to 361.8p/kg. The average young bull price in NI last week was back 3.3p/kg to 336.8p/kg while the R3 young bull price was back by 1.3p/kg to 350.2p/kg. The deadweight cow trade has continued to come under pressure in NI with an average cow price of 252p/kg, back 1.2p/kg and an O3 cow price back 2.4p/kg to 270.8p/kg when compared to the previous week.

Deadweight prime cattle prices reported a mixed trade in GB last week with the average steer price up 0.6p/kg to 371.5p/kg with the R3 steer price increasing by 0.9p/kg to 380.9p/kg. The average heifer price in GB last week was up 0.8p/kg to 372p/kg while the R3 heifer price increased 0.4p/kg to 380.1p/kg. Cow prices came under some pressure across all the GB regions last week with the average cow price back by 0.7p/kg to 238.8p/kg. This is 13.2p/kg below the equivalent price in NI.

Deadweight prices in ROI have continued to come under pressure for the majority of reported grades last week. The R3 steer price was back a penny to the equivalent of 329.2p/kg while the R3 heifer price was back the equivalent of 1.9p/kg to 338.3p/kg. This puts the differential with NI at 31.5p/kg for R3 grade steers and 23.5p/kg for R3 grade heifers.

### LAST WEEK'S DEADWEIGHT CATTLE PRICES (UK / ROI)

W/E 29/09/2018	Northern Ireland	Rep of Ireland	Scotland	Northern England	Midlands & Wales	Southern England	GB
Steers	U3	359.2	339.1	391.3	380.7	380.7	384.1
	R3	360.7	329.2	390.5	378.7	375.5	380.9
	R4	359.9	328.9	392.8	384.4	377.0	383.9
	O3	353.3	310.5	371.7	353.0	347.2	357.4
	AVG	351.1	-	388.3	371.7	361.6	371.5
Heifers	U3	365.1	349.5	394.9	385.0	388.4	389.2
	R3	361.8	338.3	386.4	380.5	376.4	380.1
	R4	358.9	338.5	389.3	379.6	380.7	382.4
	O3	355.9	323.2	374.3	360.0	349.4	360.8
Young Bulls	U3	352.7	333.6	383.7	360.9	363.0	367.0
	R3	350.2	324.9	375.2	357.0	361.8	363.4
	O3	330.1	309.0	346.9	328.9	325.4	331.9
	AVG	336.8	-	369.9	346.9	348.3	351.4
Prime Cattle Price Reported	6144	-	6666	7179	7302	4793	25940
Cows	O3	270.8	262.9	274.9	266.9	267.0	267.7
	O4	275.6	263.6	278.3	266.5	266.5	268.1
	P2	229.1	229.9	237.8	214.5	226.1	226.5
	P3	249.6	250.7	250.1	238.4	238.1	242.1
	AVG	252.0	-	270.7	239.2	232.9	238.8

Notes: (i) Prices are p/kg Sterling-ROI prices converted at 1 euro=89.13p Stg  
(ii) Shading indicates a lower price than the previous week.  
(iii) AVG is the average of all grades in the category, not just those listed

### REPORTED NI CATTLE PRICES - P/KG

W/E 29/09/18	Steers	Heifers	Young Bulls
U3	358.4	365.1	353.3
R3	356.4	358.9	348.5
O+3	349.1	350.9	327.4

\*Prices exclude AA, HER and Organic cattle

### REPORTED COW PRICES NI - P/KG

W/E 29/09/18	Wgt <220kg	Wgt 220- 250kg	Wgt 250- 280kg	Wgt >280kg
P1	167.9	181.2	188.2	206.6
P2	189.1	211.2	227.2	241.0
P3	197.7	228.5	245.5	252.8
O3	234.1	248.2	258.6	273.1
O4	-	224.0	274.4	275.8
R3	-	-	295.0	294.7

### LATEST LIVEWEIGHT CATTLE MART PRICES NI

W/E 29/09/18	1st QUALITY			2nd QUALITY		
	From	To	Avg	From	To	Avg
<b>Finished Cattle (p/kg)</b>						
Steers	200	214	205	170	197	185
Friesians	132	149	140	118	130	123
Heifers	200	210	204	170	198	185
Beef Cows	150	196	165	120	149	135
Dairy Cows	109	130	118	60	108	85
<b>Store Cattle (p/kg)</b>						
Bullocks up to 400kg	220	233	228	175	219	200
Bullocks 400kg - 500kg	220	255	238	175	219	200
Bullocks over 500kg	215	235	220	180	214	197
Heifers up to 450kg	215	254	230	170	214	192
Heifers over 450kg	195	217	208	165	194	180
<b>Dropped Calves (£/head)</b>						
Continental Bulls	330	490	380	200	320	265
Continental Heifers	275	380	320	160	270	205
Friesian Bulls	80	125	100	35	75	55
Holstein Bulls	50	90	70	10	40	30

# SHEEP TRADE

## SHEEP BASE QUOTES

(P/Kg DW)	This Week 01/10/18	Next Week 08/10/18
Lambs >21kg	370-375p	370-375p

## REPORTED SHEEP PRICES

(P/KG)	W/E 15/09/18	W/E 22/09/18	W/E 29/09/18
NI L/W Lambs	344.8	342.8	344.5
NI D/W Lambs	382.6	374.2	375.1
GB D/W Lambs	412.8	403.1	403.2
ROI D/W	398.4	392.9	390.8

## Deadweight Sheep Trade

**T**HE lamb trade has held relatively steady in NI this week with quotes for R3 grading lambs of 370-375p/kg up to 21kg. Similar quotes are expected for early next week. Lamb throughput in NI last week totalled 10,743 head, up 1,293 from the previous week. Throughput for the year to date has totalled 285,623 a 8.3 per cent decrease from the 311,391 head killed in the corresponding period in 2017. Lamb exports to ROI for direct slaughter last week totalled 7,071 head this brings exports for the year to date to 247,760, a seven per cent increase from 230,858 head exported in the same period in 2017. The average deadweight lamb price in NI last week was 375.1p/kg, up 0.9p/kg from the previous week. In the same week last year the average deadweight lamb price in NI was 366.6p/kg. The deadweight lamb price in ROI last week decreased by the equivalent of 2.1p/kg to 390.8p/kg.

## This week's marts

**T**HE marts have continued to report good numbers of lambs passing through this week with the liveweight trade generally back compared to last week. In Kilrea on Monday 520 lambs sold from 320-347p/kg compared to 350 lambs last week selling from 326-358p/kg. In Saintfield on Tuesday 782 lambs sold from 320-350p/kg compared to 712 lambs last week selling from 330-376p/kg. In Rathfriland this week 907 lambs sold from 313-389p/kg (Avg 328p/kg) compared to 753 lambs last week selling from 324-389p/kg (Avg 345p/kg). In Markethill on Wednesday 1250 lambs sold from 330-357p/kg compared to 1,150 lambs last week selling from 330-358p/kg. Top reported prices for cull ewes generally ranged from £80-110 across the marts this week.

## LATEST SHEEP MARTS

From: 28/09/18		Lambs (P/KG LW)			
To: 04/10/18		No	From	To	Avg
Friday	Newtownstewart	496	312	335	-
Saturday	Omagh	1170	368	451	-
	Swatragh	1100	332	370	-
Monday	Massereene	1168	330	368	-
	Kilrea	520	320	347	-
Tuesday	Saintfield	782	320	350	-
	Rathfriland	907	313	389	328
Wednesday	Ballymena	2020	315	370	321
	Enniskillen	421	318	352	-
	Markethill	1250	330	357	-
	Armoys	312	335	370	-

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## BEEF AND LAMB PROMOTION REPRESENTS EXCELLENT VALUE FOR MONEY

**T**HIS month will see the LMC roll out its latest promotional campaign, highlighting the tremendous value of farm quality assured beef and lamb – produced here in Northern Ireland – to local consumers.

But it's also worth highlighting the fact that the Commission fully evaluates the impact of each activity it undertakes, a point confirmed by the organisation's Industry Development Manager, Colin Smith: "We are very aware that all of this activity is funded by the beef and sheep industry levy. So it must deliver on all fronts including that of representing full value-for-money."

He added: "Prior to each campaign taking place we carry out an omnibus survey of 1,000 local consumers in order to gauge the general awareness of locally produced, farm quality assured beef and lamb products.

"Once the promotional activity has been completed, we repeat the exercise, in order to gauge its impact. The good news is that previous surveys have all confirmed the high level of public awareness, where farm quality assured beef and lamb products are concerned.

"The awareness of the first burst of advertising in early 2018 showed that awareness of our campaign was 72 per cent, which is considerably higher than industry norms in other regions of the UK. In turn, this should make the process of getting more consumers to actually purchase quality assured produce more effective."

Colin confirmed that the LMC's current promotional strategies are working. "But we can take nothing for granted. We need to get people more engaged in local produce."

The latest LMC beef and lamb campaign launched on October 3rd.

It will continue through until March 2019, running on television - UTV and Channel 4, radio, outdoor digital and traditional poster sites, online, YouTube plus a specific partnership with the Daily Mail (NI).

LMC recipe images will feature strongly throughout the campaign. The current promotional activity is part of a three-year campaign.

Colin Smith again: "The nutritional benefits of including beef and lamb are universally accepted. "The new campaign encourages local consumers to seek out the Farm Quality Assurance logo in shops and, if necessary, to ask retailers if they stock farm quality assured beef and lamb products."

According to Colin, the home market accounts for between nine per cent and 11 per cent of all the beef and lamb produced here in Northern Ireland. "And we need to protect this asset.

The LMC is the only organisation that promotes home-produced beef and lamb in a concerted and ongoing manner," he said.

Image 1: Hawaiian Burger Recipe available from: [www.beefandlambni.com](http://www.beefandlambni.com)



### NORTHERN IRELAND BEEF AND LAMB TO BENEFIT FROM RED TRACTOR INVESTMENT

**A**CCORDING to the LMC, the recent launch of a campaign to further endorse the benefits of the Red Tractor farm quality assurance scheme in England, Scotland and Wales will also be a very good news story for beef and lamb produced in Northern Ireland.

The Commission's Colin Smith takes up the story. "All farm quality assured beef and lamb produced in Northern Ireland, destined for retail outlets in the rest of the UK, is able to be stamped with the Red Tractor logo. There is total equivalence between our Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIBL FQAS) and the Red Tractor schemes. This is guaranteed because of an equivalence agreement between the owners of the two schemes and the standards they cover."

Last month saw Red Tractor announce its intent to substantially increase the breadth of its food chain assurance regime in a bid to become the flagship of British food and farming. Red Tractor will communicate to consumers what sits behind the Red Tractor logo through a £1.5m national TV campaign, supported with print, digital and in-store activity.

The campaign, which is being supported by licencees from across the UK, was launched on 12th September. The new campaign has been designed to increase shopper understanding of what the Red Tractor logo means and the lengths it goes to, to ensure traceable, safe food that is farmed with care.

Colin Smith continued: "Now is a critical time to remind

consumers of the high quality beef and lamb produced in the UK. With LMC's promotional work in the Northern Ireland market being augmented by Red Tractor's campaign in GB the key messages about locally produced beef and lamb should reach the length and breadth of the UK.



"NIFQA beef and lamb has been eligible to carry the Red Tractor logo since it was introduced in the year 2000. Consumers in the UK expect the highest standards of animal welfare, food safety and care for the environment and this is exactly what NIBL FQAS delivers.

"NIBL FQAS takes pride in its robust standards in key areas such as traceability with the assurance status of animals being verified using the world leading APHIS system. Likewise, animal feed standards in Northern Ireland undergo some of the most stringent safety checks in Europe. These are just some of the lengths NIBL FQAS goes to provide consumers with the assurances they expect.

"As Brexit approaches it is critical that consumers both recognise and choose quality local produce and the close working relationship between NIBL FQAS and Red Tractor is important to ensure this happens."

### IN MY OPINION..... RICHARD HALLERON

**R**ECENT press reports highlighting the fact that lamb consumption levels here in Northern Ireland languish behind other meats are worthy of comment. In the first instance, headlines can be totally misleading.

The reality remains that local sheep farmers produce, possibly, the best lamb in the world. It is a meat produced almost completely from grazed grass, making it a consumer's dream. Locally produced lamb ticks every box. Exquisite taste and quality are guaranteed, traits that are further embellished by the traceability, welfare and other guarantees provided for courtesy of the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme.

I watched a recent series of television reports on the state of the local lamb industry. All featured the thoughts of Co Down producer John Martin. And while his analysis of the industry was totally on target, what struck home with me to an even greater extent was the breath-taking shots of his sheep grazing against the backdrop of a Strangford Lough setting that looked exquisite. If ever a television report had been put together to say that we are serious about the way we produce food in Northern Ireland – that was it.

Let's hope that the same thoughts hit home with the many consumers across Northern Ireland as they watched these

same reports from the comfort of their living rooms and kitchens.

For its part, the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) does a tremendous job in promoting lamb consumption on our home market; week-in: week-out.

A case in point is the Commission's most recent recipe book, which was published to coincide with this year's Balmoral Show. It features a number of new and exciting lamb recipes. This is backed up by regular cookery demonstrations at a wide range of venues plus all the work that is done in schools.

As it turns out, lamb is one of the most versatile meats that we can enjoy. Nutritionally, it contains a host of mineral and vitamins we need. And, of course, it can be prepared for the table in many ways. Lamb mince, for example, is delicious and can be included in a wide range of different dishes.

There is tremendous support for locally produced food right across Northern Ireland. And this sentiment is likely to gain further momentum.

The good news is that the lamb industry has a tremendously positive story to tell. And, no doubt, this message will sink home with local consumers to an even greater extent during the period ahead.



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