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Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) Chief Executive, Colin Smith recognises the fact that bovine tuberculosis (bTB) is regarded by many farming families as the most significant threat to their businesses.

Disease infection rates continue to increase. And with this trend comes the growing pressure imposed upon beef and dairy enterprises in equal measure that manifests itself in so many different ways. Reducing and eventually eradicating bTB is a shared goal.

What has evaded all the relevant stakeholders up to this point is an effective strategy that can make all of this a reality. "Doing nothing is not an option," Colin Smith stressed. "Everyone with an interest in the eradication of the disease should support the efforts set in train courtesy of the blueprint devised by the newly established bTB Partnership Steering Group."

He added, "The Commission was asked to join the steering group at the beginning of this year, a request that was immediately acceded to. Encouragingly, all the relevant stakeholder groups, including the animal welfare lobby groups are now involved. This is a new process that is being led by a new chief veterinary officer and an agriculture minister who is still relatively new in post. Fresh thinking on any subject is always important. The plan references a transformative approach and new strategies. This is, by no means, a case of repeating what has been tried before but building on the good work that has been done to date by previous groups."

The Commission's CEO also believes that with a properly resourced plan, the initial target of a 2% reduction in herd incidence by 2030 set out within the new blueprint is achievable, placing NI on a pathway to halve current bTB levels by 2040 and achieve eradication by 2050.

These targets are set against the backdrop of a vision which recognises that fewer bTB breakdowns and consequential losses will help to address the stress, mental health and financial challenges experienced by farming families in dealing with the disease.

In addition, a reduction in disease rates will also bring about more efficient production at a reduced cost to industry, leading to a more sustainable and resilient agri-food sector. Lower disease rates will also have a significant positive impact on the health and welfare of both livestock and the surrounding wildlife.

In the longer term, reducing bTB will also have a positive economic impact, significantly reducing the cost to the public purse of tackling the disease, helping to reduce emissions and lower the carbon footprint of the industry on the pathway towards Net Zero.

But the elephant in the room remains that of dealing with the reservoirs of bTB that reside within wildlife populations. Colin Smith reiterated "Any new strategy designed to deal with the bTB issue must reconcile the challenges posed to cattle, wildlife and humans. Not addressing all of these issues at the same time is a recipe for continuing failure."

Beef Week 2025: the success story continues to build

Beef Week 2025 concluded on a high note, with feedback indicating a marked rise in consumer interest and engagement—both in terms of personal connection to the industry and increased enthusiasm for beef as a quality product.

In addition to a radio partnership with U105, retail sampling with industry partners ABP and collaboration

with UFU, LMC lead a host of social media activity throughout the week.

The commission also launched a first in Northern Ireland, Mini Beef Week – a primary school beef cookery and demonstration initiative focussing on the promotion of NIFQA beef to 8-11 year olds. The initiative took place at Spa Primary School, Ballynahinch where pupils enjoyed a beef demonstration event and went home with a selection of beef recipes for all ages.

A core focus of this year's campaign was to highlight the value and importance of our local beef industry. Consumer engagement reached unprecedented levels, with strong interest in the stories and background of our local farmers—underscoring the deep connection between producers and the public.



James and Lucy Gabbey, Ballygowan, Co. Down.

LMC's head of marketing and communications, Lauren Patterson takes up the story.

"Recent data has shown that frequency of beef consumption is on the rise in the United Kingdom. Kantar data has suggested that cuts like mince and steak pieces have seen a significant increase in volume as a result of increased frequency of purchase. Consumer concerns over ultra processed foods and the search for natural produce has placed whole cuts of beef at the forefront."

Lauren continued, "We are at an important juncture as an industry, where consumers want to know where their food has come from and are actively engaging with the production end of the supply chain."

Beef Week allows consumers to learn more about Northern Ireland's Farm Quality Assurance Scheme. It highlights the benefits this unique initiative delivers at all stages within the beef production and marketing chain, from farm to fork.

This year, we proudly shared the stories of three Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured farming families—The Rogers from Dromara, the McCanns from Armagh, and the Gabbey's from Ballygowan. Consumers across Northern Ireland responded with strong engagement, demonstrating a clear appetite for a more personal connection with the people behind their food.

"Our aim is to showcase the positive impact and values of our industry, encouraging a conversation rooted in acceptance, understanding, and unity. And who better to lead that conversation than the grassroots producers behind our world-class beef?"

Lauren Patterson again, "Beef Week serves as a valuable platform for all stakeholders across the farming and food sector—farmers, processors, and retailers—to come together and showcase the unique benefits of Northern Ireland's world-class beef. The campaign presents this message in a highly accessible, consumer-friendly way, strengthening public understanding and appreciation of Farm Quality Assured beef. The continued and substantial media interest year after year reinforces the strong connection between Northern Ireland's farmers and the exceptional quality of the food they produce."

LMC at Balmoral Show 2025

Balmoral Show 2025 is just over a week away. This year's event comes at a time when beef and lamb prices are buoyant, a trend that looks set to continue, at least in the short term.

Balmoral Show 2025 is a flagship venue for LMC. According to Commission chief executive, Colin Smith, the event allows representatives from the organisation to interface directly with consumers, farmers and representatives of other stakeholder groups equally.

He said, "The over-arching theme of our presence at Balmoral will be to confirm the key role that farm families have played and will continue to play within our beef and sheep sectors. We will also be highlighting the need for generational change to be effected within agriculture in the most sustainable way possible."

The LMC staff team and Board members will be at Balmoral 2025 from the Wednesday through to the Saturday.

One of the standout attractions during the show will be the ever-popular Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured beef and lamb cookery demonstrations, hosted at the Commission's Balmoral Show pavilion. These live sessions continue to draw large crowds, offering visitors the chance to sample delicious beef and lamb dishes, engage with LMC demonstrators, and take-home recipe books—bringing the farm-to-fork story to life in an interactive and memorable way.

In addition, there will be a number of interactive exhibits for visiting children. LMC's stand will play host to an interactive sensory experience for children, focussing on the advancements of our industry through generations. Activities will focus on animal health and welfare, diversification, soil nutrient health and grassland management in an age appropriate and informative way.

Taking pride of place in this context will be the winners of the LMC's annual primary school competition. As part of their prize, the winning teams enjoy a guided tour of the Show, ending up at the Commission's pavilion.

School competitions represent only one strand of LMC's educational programme. It's an initiative that continues to grow from success to success.



Lauren Cairns, LMC Sustainability Projects Manager with visitors to LMC stand.

The Commission is also confirming its continuing sponsorship of key livestock classes at Balmoral Show 2025.

These are: the sheep interbreed pairs' championship, the beef inter-breed champion of champions, the sheep young handlers' competition and the beef group-of-five championship.

So, it's very much a case of complementing activities in the show ring with those planned for the LMC stand over the four days of Balmoral 2025.

Colin Smith concluded, "Balmoral Show is a must attend event for LMC. The occasion physically brings together all the target groups, which the Commission interfaces with on a year-round basis: consumers, farmers, and representatives of the various agri-food stakeholder organisations.

"The backdrop of the show also means that it is possible to communicate with all of these important target groupings in a meaningful and relaxed manner."

LMC will be located in its usual position, Stand B4, adjacent to the main show ring at Balmoral 2025 and welcomes all visitors.