



Strategic Plan 2025-2027



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Forewords

As President of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society, it is my pleasure to introduce this strategy document which charts our path for the coming years.

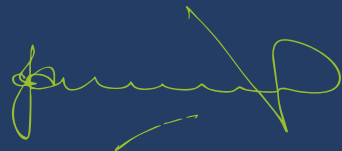
Our Society has been a steadfast advocate for the farming and food sectors in Northern Ireland for over 170 years. Throughout our history, we have helped to navigate numerous challenges, from shifting agricultural policies to the ever-evolving needs of the marketplace, always with the aim of supporting our rural communities and enhancing the industries that are vital to our economy.

None of this would be possible without the tireless dedication of our members, stewards, and Council. Your ongoing commitment enables the Society to thrive, and I am deeply grateful for your continued support.

Our success is best reflected in the enduring popularity of events like the Balmoral Show. The 2024 event was a tremendous success, showcasing not only the best of farming and food but also our resilience, adaptability, and efforts to inspire the next generation.

As we look forward, this Strategy sets out a vision for growth and sustainability, building on our proud heritage whilst ensuring we are well-positioned to meet future opportunities and challenges.

Thank you for being a part of this journey.



C John Henning OBE NSch FRAgS
President
Royal Ulster Agricultural Society



The Strategic Plan for the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society has been developed to ensure we maintain a viable and vibrant organisation for future generations.

Finance is fundamental to the delivery of our charitable remit; the promotion of agriculture through shows, events and exhibitions is dependent on sustainable income streams providing the enabling finance.

Agriculture is changing, and good farming practice is being redefined to meet the needs of the industry and wider Society, particularly in relation to the environmental challenges and climate change commitments. The RUAS will play a positive role in Northern Ireland's agricultural future, showcasing excellence in food and farming, and providing a focal point for education and innovation.

Key to all of this are our members and stakeholders. We thank everyone who has contributed to the consultation, and we look forward to your continued support as we work towards delivering an organisation that is relevant, inclusive and capable of evolving to meet the needs of its members and the wider industry.



Robin Irvine FRAGS
Strategic Steering Group Chairman
Royal Ulster Agricultural Society



Introduction

The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society's 170th anniversary is the perfect time to reflect on the Society's recent achievements. Since its relocation, the Society has developed the Eikon Exhibition Centre as the leading event venue within the region. The Society's flagship events have successfully grown, with the Royal Ulster Winter Fair becoming the premier event for the dairy industry, utilising all available capacity at the Venue. The extension of the Balmoral Show to a four-day show reflects the growth of interest and expansion of the agri-food sector, and the establishment of the third flagship event, the Royal Ulster Premier Beef & Lamb Championships, further demonstrates the Society's support for this evolving industry. The commercial events activity is growing apace, with new events being added to the calendar on a regular basis.

At the King's Hall Complex, the residential development is complete. The generated capital funds have been invested in developing the Eikon Exhibition Centre and showgrounds and will fund future capital obligations. The commercial redevelopment, which includes the King's Hall building, is progressing steadily and will provide enabling revenue streams for future generations. These legacy projects are vital for the future sustainability of the Society. All funds generated must be prudently managed so that future generations can realise their ambitions, grasp unforeseen opportunities and deal with future challenges that the Society will inevitably face.

Throughout this recent period, there have also been significant challenges with the pandemic, uncertainty around Brexit, the cost-of-living crisis and the impact of political impasse. Moving forward the Society seeks to expand its charitable activities, educational remit and engagement across the agri sector. To deliver this, it is vital that the Society's financial model is robust with increasing sustainable income streams.

This ambitious Strategic Plan seeks to position people at the heart of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society. Having engaged with the Society's membership, staff, and stakeholders, we now invite you to participate in the journey to ensure the Society's future sustainability and enhance its reputation and relevance. The Strategy will pilot ways to establish inclusion and reciprocity in the Society's charitable activities, operations and engagement, looking at how governance, structure, education and recognition can support inclusion and development. This will strengthen the Society's connection to the people with the skills, commitment and experience necessary for the Society to thrive.



Theresa Morrissey FCPFA
Group Executive Director
Royal Ulster Agricultural Society



Current Position

Farming & Food Sector NI

Gross output of Northern Ireland's agriculture is

£2.87 billion

Turnover in the Northern Ireland food and drink processing sector increased to

£6 billion

Produce consumed within NI - **24%**

Produce consumed beyond NI - **76%**

26,131 Farm businesses in NI

Agricultural labour force is **52,676**

77% of Northern Ireland's land area of **1.35 million** hectares is used for agriculture

Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture 2023 DAERA

"NI food production feeds 10 million people"

Royal Ulster Agricultural Society

Charitable Activities Expenditure

£3 million per annum

Showcasing livestock across the Society's three annual events:

Cattle	1,000
Sheep	1,450
Pigs	50
Goats	61
Horses	1,050
Rabbits	140
Poultry	400
Show Jumping Horses	200

Showcasing **971** agri sector rural businesses across the Society's three annual events

Venue:

Balmoral Park - **55 acres**
Eikon Exhibition Centre - **13,100 sqm**

Engagement

RUAS Members

2,100

Volunteering Hours

4,768

Social Media Followers

172,798

Social Media Users Reached

1,863,751

Vision

Our ongoing vision is to:



Mission Statement

To position the Society as a forward looking, inclusive and resilient organisation that promotes the agri-food industry by showcasing excellence, innovation and best practice in farming and food.

The Society aims to inspire and inform current and future generations, advancing appreciation of the sector and its role in supporting the environment and rural communities.

We support excellence in livestock husbandry and food production through competitions and events as we embrace future challenges and opportunities.



Values of the Society

The prisms through which the Society will conduct its business.



Strategic Priorities

We have identified nine strategic priorities for the next three years. Each priority has its own clear vision, operational initiatives and three-year outlook. These priorities will be delivered with the Society's Vision, Mission and Values as overarching parameters.

Financial Sustainability: Financially robust with sustainable income generation



Increased utilisation of the Venues with more diverse enabling income streams.

Prudent management of the Society's funds and investments.

Funding designated reserves to support ambitious charitable priorities.

Instilled a culture of continuous improvement within the Society.

Delivering value for money with robust cost control processes implemented.

Governance Structure: Fit for purpose and fit for the future



Structural governance review fully implemented.

Enhanced transparency and accountability of decision-making.

Clarity on staff structures, roles and responsibilities to aid succession planning.

Holistic risk management strategy in place.

Charitable structures, policies and procedures updated and implemented.

Environmental, social, and governance plan developed, activated and impact measured.



Education:

Connecting people to the story and purpose of agriculture



Developing and piloting a budgeted Education Policy:

- Researching viability of educational grants/awards/scholarships.
- Enhanced educational opportunities for the Society's membership.
- Establishing partnerships with education providers within the food and farming sectors.

Supporting educational programmes: resourcing teachers, lived experiences for children, interactive hands-on workshops.

Enhancing the awareness, recognition and reputation of our educational and charitable work.

Enhancing visibility of the Society with a raised profile within education and third sectors.



People:

Nurturing talent within the Society to be ambitious, creative and resilient



Enhanced Membership Experience

- Completing a review of membership to include categories and benefits.
- Encouraging participation and succession of engaged members.
- Delivering an outward engagement programme to recruit new active members.
- Encouraging next-generation participation through mentoring and education programmes, peer connection opportunities and creating a welcoming space within the Shows.



People:

Nurturing talent within the Society to be ambitious, creative and resilient



Enhanced Volunteering Experience

- Developing and implementing a Volunteer Policy:
 - Increased recognition, awards, training and development and educational opportunities.
 - Best practice procedures in place for managing and engaging with volunteers.
 - Pilot a “youth forum” to provide student and young farmers with an entry-level pathway to the Society’s structures.



People:

Nurturing talent within the Society to be ambitious, creative and resilient



Enhanced Staff Development

- Investing in a planned programme of upskilling and training of staff.
- Championing growth and development opportunities for staff to support succession planning.
- Investing in technology and innovation to enable staff to deliver better customer experiences, business efficiencies, and focus on strategic related projects.



Engagement:

The RUAS is engaged across the agri sector and the wider community



Build and invest in the brand of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society

- Elevating and actively communicating our environmental sustainability practices.
- Supporting a positive environmental message to the agricultural industry and wider society.
- The Society's agri events are positioned to celebrate and champion the farming and food sectors.
- Engaging and collaborating with agri-food sector partners to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes.
- Developing initiatives to build community support for the Society and the Venue.
- Supporting and strengthening links with local Show Associations.



Partners:

Strengthen and develop relationships with key partners



RUAS and Eikon Exhibition Centre are recognised as the anchor tenant of the MLKDC Site.

Collaborating with MLKDC to improve access and infrastructure and to deliver further site development.

Working with partners in Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and governmental bodies to demonstrate the economic and social importance of the RUAS and Eikon Exhibition Centre.

Exploring opportunities to facilitate and collaborate with the agri sector partners at the Venue.



Shows and Events:

Celebration of agriculture that connects the rural and urban communities



Optimising awareness, participation and attendance at the Society's Shows.

Be recognised as the premier agri-food event on the Island.

Entertaining, educating, and demonstrating the excellence of local produce, sustainable farming and farming innovation.

Proven enhancement in the visitor experience and perceived value for money of the Shows.

Featuring competitive livestock classes that reflect the needs of the industry in terms of efficiency, sustainability and animal welfare.

Engaging with the sector to identify trends in the agricultural industry to inform and shape the future of Shows.

An enhanced traffic management solution for the Venue in place.



Place:

Where people enjoy coming together to connect, learn, trade and socialise



Eikon

Establish the Eikon Exhibition Centre as the premier events campus for the region.

Customer-focused operating procedures and systems established with a focus on inclusivity and embracing diversity.

Developing and measuring a pathway to environmental sustainability for our Venue, structures, events and activities.

Actioning a planned maintenance programme to ensure the excellent condition of the Venue is maintained.

Investment programme agreed for infrastructure and technology to ensure that the Venue remains “state of the art”, innovative, and delivers value for money for clients and visitors.

Implement a marketing and sales strategy that underlines the Venue’s USPs to raise awareness of the Venue amongst GB and ROI event organisers.



Heritage: Honouring the past and embracing the future



Explore the feasibility of a curated shared heritage and educational asset with peer organisations.



Next Steps

The Society is in a robust position to succeed in the implementation of this ambitious new strategy.

We are fortunate to have great people, expertise, and a passionate and engaged network. Utilising available resources, the Society aims to attract more support through its membership, volunteers and partnerships.

Operational plans will be prepared each year, and these will outline the specific actions to be taken to deliver the strategic priorities detailed. These plans will be fully costed to ensure that the Society achieves the annual financial targets. We will respond positively to the opportunities and challenges arising over the period with the expertise, dedication and passion of the people of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society.





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