STATUTORY RULES OF NORTHERN IRELAND

2025 No. 41

AGRICULTURE

The Suckler Cow Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

Made - - - -	*6th March 2025*
Coming into operation	*1st April 2025*

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs(**a**) makes these Regulations in exercise of the powers conferred by section 9(1) of the Agriculture Act (Northern Ireland) 1949(**b**) and Articles 52(9) and 70(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013(**c**).

These Regulations are made with the approval of the Department of Finance(**d**) under section 9(1) of the Agriculture Act (Northern Ireland) 1949.

Citation and commencement

1. These Regulations may be cited as the Suckler Cow Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and shall come into operation on 1st April 2025.

Interpretation

2. In these Regulations—

"age at first calving" means in relation to a heifer, its age in months when her first calf is born;

"applicant" means an eligible farm business which has applied for a payment under the scheme;

"authorised person" means any person authorised by the Department to act in matters relating to these Regulations;

"birth" means a registered birth on NIFAIS;

"calving interval" means the number of days starting from the day after a calf is born and ending on the day a subsequent calf is born to the same eligible cow;

"the Department" means the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs;

"eligible cow" means a female bovine animal of an eligible beef breed specified in the Schedule as registered on NIFAIS that has given birth to, or aborted one or more calves;

(**a**) The Ministry of Agriculture for Northern Ireland became the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 c.36 section 40 and Schedule 5 paragraph 8(1); Renamed as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development by the Departments (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 S.I. 1999/283 (N.I.1) Article 3(4) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs by the Departments Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 c.5 (N.I.) section 1(2)

(**b**) 1949 c.2 (N.I.)

(**c**) EUR 1307/2013

(**d**) The "Ministry of Finance" is now the "Department of Finance"; see section 1(4) of the Departments Act (NI) 2016 c.5 (N.I.)

"eligible calving event" means where an eligible cow or heifer gives birth to either—

(a) an eligible live calf which is—

(i) born alive and lives for at least 24 hours after its birth;

(ii) identified with an approved ear tag;

(iii) tested in compliance with the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Eradication Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2016(**a**); and

(iv) registered on NIFAIS; or

(b) an eligible dead calf which is—

(i) a bovine foetus or calf born dead or which dies within 24 hours of birth;

(ii) identified with an approved ear tag;

(iii) tested in compliance with the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Eradication Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2016;

(iv) meets the criteria as stated in regulation 4(3);

(v) registered on NIFAIS; and

(vi) confirmed as having been disposed of by a method approved by the Department; or

(c) in the case of a multiple birth, a calf falling within paragraph (a) or (b) or both;

"eligible farm business" means a farm business where the eligible calving event occurred and which meets the requirements of regulation 5 in a relevant scheme year;

"eligible heifer" means a female bovine animal of an eligible beef breed specified in the Schedule as registered on NIFAIS that has never given birth to or aborted a calf;

"Farm Sustainability Transition Payment Scheme" has the same meaning as in the Farm Sustainability (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2025(**b**);

"Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme" has the same meaning as in the Farm Sustainability (Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025;

"NIFAIS" means the Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System maintained by the Department;

"relevant scheme year" means the year of application to the scheme;

"scheme" means the Suckler Cow Scheme;

"scheme payment" means a payment under regulations 3 and 7;

"Scheme Year 1" means the year beginning on 1st April 2025 and ending on 31st March 2026;

"Scheme Year 2" means the year beginning on 1st April 2026 and ending on the 31st March 2027;

"Scheme Year 3" means the year beginning on 1st April 2027 and ending on 31st March 2028;

"Scheme Year 4" means the year beginning on 1st April 2028 and ending on the 31st March 2029;

Suckler Cow Scheme Payments

3.—(1) Subject to paragraphs (2) to (4), the Department may in Scheme Years 1 to 4, in accordance with these Regulations, make a scheme payment to an eligible farm business.

(2) A payment application approved by the Department for a relevant scheme year shall be paid into the account of the eligible farm business from the following scheme year.

(**a**) S.R. 2016 No. 22 as amended by S.R, 2024 No. 225

(**b**) S.R. 2025 No. 33

(3) Subject to paragraph (4), the Department may make payments for a scheme year up to an annual maximum number of 222,000 eligible calving events.

(4) Where in Scheme Year 1, Scheme Year 2, Scheme Year 3 or Scheme Year 4 the number of eligible calving events exceeds 222,000, the number of eligible calving events for which an eligible farm business may receive payment shall be reduced by the percentage calculated as follows—

$$\frac{\text{Number of eligible calving events exceeding 222,000}}{222,000} \times 100$$

Specific requirements: animals and farm businesses

4.—(1) Subject to paragraph (4), an eligible heifer must have an eligible calving event at a minimum age of 21 months and not exceeding the maximum age specified in column 2 of Table 1 in respect of the scheme year specified in column 1 of Table 1—

Table 1

Column 1 scheme year	*Column 2 maximum age at first calving*
1	34 months
2	32 months
3	30 months
4	29 months

(2) Subject to paragraph (4), an eligible cow must have an eligible calving event at a minimum calving interval of 271 days and not exceeding the maximum calving interval specified in column 2 of Table 2 in respect of the scheme year specified in column 1 of Table 2—

Table 2

Column 1 scheme year	*Column 2 maximum calving interval*
1	415 days
2	405 days
3	395 days
4	385 days

(3) The Department shall issue payment for a maximum of two eligible calving events in which an eligible cow has given birth to only eligible dead calves, from the date of commencement of these Regulations.

(4) Subject to paragraph (3), the Department shall not issue payment for any subsequent eligible calving events in which only eligible dead calves are born but will use those subsequent calving events to determine if the calving interval requirements in Table 2 of paragraph (2) are met.

(5) Animals with specified NIFAIS identification, registration and movement or disease statuses as set out in Table 3 shall not be eligible for payment.

Table 3

Age at first calving	*Calving interval*
Heifer and, or calves with DOBQ - (Date of birth query)	Calves with DOBQ - (Date of birth query)
Calves with VDF - (Valid dam failure)	Calves with VDF - (Valid dam failure)
Heifers and, or calves with IDU - (Identity unknown)	Cows and, or calves with IDU - (Identity unknown)
Calves with BVDU - (Bovine viral diarrhoea unknown)	Calves with BVDU - (Bovine viral diarrhoea unknown)

5. An eligible farm business shall—

(a) have applied for a payment under the scheme on or before the last day of the relevant scheme year;

(b) be eligible for a payment under the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment Scheme in 2025 to receive payment for eligible calving events in Scheme Year 1;

(c) be eligible for a payment under the Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme –

(i) in 2026 to receive payment for eligible calving events in Scheme Year 2;

(ii) in 2027 to receive payment for eligible calving events in Scheme Year 3;

(iii) in 2028 to receive payment for eligible calving events in Scheme Year 4;

(d) provide such further information in relation to any animal as the Department may request.

Use of NIFAIS information

6.—(1) The Department shall use the information recorded on NIFAIS to determine whether the requirements under regulation 4 are met.

(2) The NIFAIS information shall be conclusive evidence unless otherwise rebutted or corrected to the satisfaction of the Department by an eligible farm business.

Scheme Payment

7. The amount of the scheme payment is set out in Table 4—

Table 4

Payment	*Amount payable for an eligible calving event*
Age at first calving payment	£100
Calving interval payment	£100

Withholding and recovery of overpayments

8.—(1) This regulation applies where an application for payment has been approved by the Department and it becomes aware that the applicant—

(a) is not eligible to receive that payment;

(b) has without reasonable cause obstructed an authorised person in the exercise of their powers under regulation 9; or

(c) has failed to provide reasonably required assistance to an authorised person under regulation 10.

(2) Subject to paragraph (3), the Department may—

(a) revoke the approval of the application for payment; and

(b) where payment has not been made withhold the payment or any part of it; or

(c) where payment has already been made, recover from the applicant an amount equal to the whole or any part of the payment—

(i) as a civil debt; or

(ii) by way of offsetting against any sum otherwise payable to the applicant by the Department.

(3) Before exercising the power under paragraph (2), the Department must by a withdrawal or recovery notice, ("the notice")—

(a) give the applicant a written explanation of the reasons for the proposed action; and

(b) afford the applicant the opportunity to make written representations within 14 days beginning with the date of the issue of the notice; and

(c) consider any representations made by or on behalf of the applicant.

Powers of authorised persons

9.—(1) An authorised person may exercise any of the powers specified in paragraphs (2) to (4) for the purposes of these Regulations.

(2) An authorised person on producing, if so required, a duly authenticated document showing the person's authority to do so, may at all reasonable hours enter any land other than a building used only as a dwelling house.

(3) An authorised person may—

(a) carry out any inquiries, checks, examinations, measurements and tests;

(b) take samples;

(c) inspect any part of the land (whether it is farmed or is withdrawn from agricultural production) and any livestock;

(d) mark any animal or other thing for identification purposes;

(e) have access to, inspect and copy any documents or records (in whatever form they are held) or remove such records to enable them to be copied;

(f) have access to, inspect and check the operation of, any computer and any associated apparatus or material which is or has been in use in connection with the documents or records; and for this purpose require any person having charge of, or otherwise concerned with the operation of, the computer, apparatus or material to afford such assistance as is reasonably required and, where a document or record is kept by means of a computer, reasonably require the document to be produced in a form in which it can be taken away;

(g) remove a carcase found on the land for the purpose of carrying out a post-mortem examination on it;

(h) take a photograph of anything on the land; and

(i) remove anything reasonably believed to be evidence of any failure to meet the eligibility conditions.

(4) An authorised person entering any premises or land by virtue of this regulation may take with them such other persons as they consider necessary.

(5) For the purposes of this regulation a computer includes any electronic device.

Assistance to authorised persons

10. An applicant or any employee, agent, contractor or tenant of an applicant shall give an authorised person such assistance as may be reasonably required to enable the authorised person to exercise the powers conferred by regulation 9.

Offences and penalties

11.—(1) Any person who—

(a) without reasonable cause obstructs an authorised person or a person accompanying the authorised person (see regulation 9(4)) in exercise of the power conferred on the authorised person by regulation 9 or

(b) without reasonable cause fails to comply with a requirement under regulation 10, shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) Nothing in paragraph (1) shall be construed as requiring any person to answer any question if to do so may incriminate that person.

(3) A person guilty of an offence under paragraph (1)(a) shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under paragraph (1)(b) shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on 6th March 2025

L.S.

Rosemary Agnew
A senior officer of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

The Department of Finance approves the forgoing Regulations

Sealed with the Official Seal of the Department of Finance on 6th March 2025

L.S.

Patrick Neeson
A senior officer of the Department of Finance

SCHEDULE

Regulation 2

Eligible Beef Breeds

Aberdeen Angus	European Angus	Pustertaler
Aubrac	Galloway	Red Poll
Australian Lowline	Gasconne	Romagnola
Bazadais	Gayal	Rotbunt
Beefalo	Gelbvieh	Salers
Beefmaster	Gloucester	Shetland
Belgian Blue	Hereford	Shorthorn
Belted Galloway	Highland	Shorthorn Beef
Bison	Irish Moile	Simmental
Blonde D'Aquitaine	Kerry	South Devon
Blue Albion	Lakenvelder	Speckle Park
Blue Grey	Limousin	Stabiliser
Brahman	Lincoln Red	Sussex
Braunbieh	Longhorn	Tyrone Black
British Blue	Luing	Vaynol
British White	Maine Anjou	Wagyu
Canadian Black	Malkekorthorn	Water Buffalo
Charolais	Marchigiana	Welsh Black
Chianina	Miniature Zebru	Welsh White
Chillingham	Murray Grey	White Galloway
Devon	Old English	White Park
Dexter	Parthenais	Yak
Droimeann	Piemontese	Zebu
English Park	Pinzgauer	

EXPLANATORY NOTE

(This note is not part of the Regulations)

These Regulations establish the Suckler Cow Scheme. The Scheme provides for payments to be made by the Department to eligible farm businesses in relation to age at first calving and calving intervals, which meet the eligible animal requirements.

The Scheme—

specifies the payments available (regulation 3 and 7);

specifies the eligibility criteria for animals and farm businesses (regulations 4 and 5);

specifies the use of NIFAIS information (regulation 6);

provides the powers for withholding and recovery of overpayments (regulation 8);

provides for the powers of authorised persons (regulation 9);

specifies the assistance to authorised persons (regulation 10);

provides for the offences and penalties (regulation 11); and

specifies eligible beef breeds (Schedule).

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