



Ulster 2024

Five Nations Conference Report

In mid- October, 5 members headed to Belfast for the Five Nations Conference hosted by the Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster (YFCU). The Five Nations Conference started in 2023 to encourage greater engagement between YFCU, Wales YFC, National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs, Macra na Feirme and SAYFC.

The team consisting of Jean Andrew, Toni Hope, Jack Young, Robert Hendrie and Mhairi Dalgliesh travelled from both Edinburgh and Glasgow airport for ease of convenience. When we all arrived in Belfast, we had some time to spare before we needed to head the conference venue so we used this time to get to know each other and also visit the Titanic Museum in Belfast.

We then hopped on the train to head to the conference venue of Crawfordsburn Scout Centre in Bangor. Upon arrival, we got to meet the teams from the other nations before settling down to dinner and an evening of icebreaker games.

The theme of the conference this year was Rural Leadership and our first full day of the conference was jam packed! We started with a knowledge exchange session with the other Nations to learn more about how the different organisations work with the view to picking up some ideas to bring back to Scotland. This sharing of ideas and knowledge continued throughout the five days and we came back with so much information and ideas to share with our clubs and the Senior Leadership Team of SAYFC.

Following this, we were able to take part in two activities within the grounds of the centre; archery and crate climbing allowing us to work on our team working skills. In the afternoon, we got to be creative as we took part in an Apprentice-style activity on making a soda farl. Within this, we identified who would work on finance, production and marketing and this was a great activity to allow us to practice leadership of a team and how to allow people to play to their strengths in a team working scenario.

Our first evening started with a cultural piece from each Nation. SAYFC kicked off with a Scots Verse poem about rain before going on to quiz our fellow 5 Nation members on the definitions of some words within the Scots dialect. Other Nations had us dancing a traditional dance, learning facts about the history of their Nation or sampling food and drinks native to their hometowns. We finished our first evening with a line dancing and jiving lesson which was great fun and we picked it up quicker than we thought we might!

Friday was our day of touring farms and local businesses to hear about their activities and we headed down the Newtonaird Peninsula. We started at Clandeboyne Estate; a Jersey and Holstein dairy farm with anaerobic digester (AD) and have now expanded into yoghurt making.

This business employs 26 people and produces 60,000 pots of yoghurt per day selling into Aldi, Tesco and Sainsbury's. We have been able to find some of their tasty yoghurts in Aldi in Scotland since we returned! The aspect of this visit that stood out most to members was the circular economy element. The farm grows all its own crops to supply the AD plant. The heat and electricity from the AD plant is then used in the yoghurt production facility with the heat also being used to heat the mansion house on the Estate. The whey from yoghurt production can also be filtered out and put into the digester.

Our second visit of the day was to RL Produce which grows beetroot, cabbage, leeks, spring onion and parsley. This business does a significant amount of school education and they have a close working relationship with their suppliers to the point that their produce in Tesco now has an additional sticker of 'RL Produce, Northern Ireland'. In terms of leadership, it was notable at this business that they recognised the struggles of staff and worked to improve them. The family kindly treated us to some homemade potato and leek soup at the end of our visit. Just what was needed to warm us up on a cold and windy day on the Coast!

Our final visit of the day was to Echlinville Distillery. They started distilling in 2016 on a 20ac site just a few miles along the road from the 80ac family farm. They are a producer of gin, whisky and poitin. It was interesting to hear how this family business had grown and the story of their unique double distilled whisky. Shortly before we visited, they had just sold their first whisky which sold out in 30mins! To help with cash flow until their first whisky was ready, the family had bought over existing whisky brands where the Distillery had closed to give them something to sell while their spirit was in casks.

On Saturday, Kevin Doherty, Chief Executive of Rural Support in Northern Ireland run a session on what makes a good leader. This was a very thought provoking session that also included participation on a hypothetical scenario. The scenario allowed us to work as a team (we didn't always agree!) but we reached a conclusion that all agreed on. There were lots of learnings that we can take from this session and apply back to our leadership and team working scenarios within SAYFC.

Our Five Nations Conference experience concluded with a bus trip into Belfast to see some of the landmarks and enjoy a meal out together as a group before we all went our separate ways on Sunday.

The Five Nations Conference allows you to:

- Make connections with members all across the UK.
- Learn useful tips and ideas that you can bring back to your club and SAYFC as a whole.
- Visit interesting businesses within the UK.
- Have fun and socialise.

When we asked the 2024 team what they would say to anybody who was considering Five Nations Conference in the future, the response was: Don't consider it, just apply!

