



**NIEL Evidence:**

**Nature Friendly Farming**

For

**The Committee for Agriculture, Environment and  
Rural Affairs (AERA)**

**16<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland. Its 65 Full Members represent 190,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be happy to do so.

Northern Ireland Environment Link  
89 Loopland Drive  
Belfast  
BT6 9DW  
P: 028 9045 5770  
E: [info@nienvironmentlink.org](mailto:info@nienvironmentlink.org)  
W: [www.nienvironmentlink.org](http://www.nienvironmentlink.org)

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We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence regarding the proposed motion to support Nature Friendly Farming in Northern Ireland.

## Summary

- Nature Friendly Farming can be defined as farming systems that produce food and other goods in a way that supports wildlife and restores nature.
- In addition to deploying the right management for wildlife, to be defined as nature friendly the underpinning farm system must also be sustainable i.e. capable of ongoing production without negative impacts on the wider environment and contributing to ambitious action on climate change.
- A strong focus on delivering Nature Friendly Farming is not a choice between productivity and sustainability, but an opportunity to maintain our long-term ability to produce food and other commodities by restoring the natural resources that farming and land management depends upon.
- Investing in Nature Friendly Farming can help deliver several public policy priorities, meet international and national environmental commitments and secure a more resilient, profitable future for the agriculture sector.
- There are numerous examples of Nature Friendly Farming in NI and further afield, where farmers have been financially supported to protect and restore nature through adopting sustainable farming practises.
- This has resulted in the recovery of threatened species such as Yellowhammer, Curlew, Marsh Fritillary Corncrake and the habitats which they are dependent upon.
- Current investment in Nature Friendly Farming falls well below what is required to protect nature and the environment throughout our countryside.
- Future policy can support Nature Friendly Farming by retaining current agriculture expenditure, but redirecting it to deliver environmental public goods such as increased wildlife and reduced carbon emissions.
- Future Policy must be underpinned by local legislation to set a legal framework for future farming and land management in NI.
- This legislation should set out the framework as to how funding will be delivered with a commitment to the development of new funding mechanisms to reward the delivery of public goods and facilitate wider change.
- Support schemes that incentivise Nature Friendly Farming should form the bedrock of a new agriculture policy in Northern Ireland, with funding based on the scale of environmental need.
- Legislation should also establish a pre-defined and time limited transition period. This is essential to provide the certainty and stability that the farming sector will need to plan for the future.
- In the early years of transition, it is essential that the good work delivered by farmers and land managers is maintained. This will involve the renewal of existing Agri-Environment scheme contracts, until new schemes are in place and ready to be rolled out across the countryside.
- A just transition to help support farmers on the journey from the current policy framework to the next will be key to delivering success. There will be a need for business and ecological advice, funding and support to help businesses adapt and plan for the future.
- A transition fund should be established to allow farmers to access dedicated business advice and access funding to improve their businesses in advance of the full roll out of a future policy with Nature Friendly Farming at its heart.
- We recommend that the Committee endorses the proposed motion and takes consideration of our recommendations on how Nature Friendly Farming can be supported in the future.

## A definition of Nature Friendly Farming

Nature Friendly Farming (NFF) can be defined as farming systems that produce food and other goods in a way that supports wildlife and restores nature. In addition to deploying the right management for

wildlife, to be defined as nature friendly the underpinning farm system must also be sustainable i.e. capable of ongoing production without negative impacts on the wider environment and contributing to ambitious action on climate change. In NI we have a varied landscape, consisting of a range of different farming sectors. As such, actions to become 'Nature Friendly' will differ depending on the context of the farm business and the landscape in which it is operating. However, we would consider a farming system Nature Friendly if it is meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- High Nature Value farming systems that are beneficial for biodiversity. For example, the management of species rich grassland for Corncrake and Marsh Fritillary.
- Lowland farmland adopting the six key actions for Farm Wildlife on 5-10% of the farmed area. An example is the management of arable farmland for priority seed eating species such as Yellowhammers.
- Farmland with a significant area of semi-natural farmed habitats in good condition.
- Farmland adopting management to support stable or increasing populations of species of conservation concern with bespoke management needs not automatically covered by any of the above.

In addition to this, the following overarching principles should be part of a truly NFF system:

- Adopting progressive Integrated Pest Management (IPM), including veterinary medicine use in the livestock sectors to minimise the impact of practices on non-target species.
- Adopting progressive nutrient management planning to minimise pollution of aquatic habitats and contribution to reductions in GHG emissions.
- Optimising soil management to restore soil biodiversity and prevent pollution to aquatic habitats.
- Ensuring the protection of water quality and the capacity of farmland to manage water levels to minimise the risks of drought and flooding.
- Integrating Climate Change mitigation and adaptation measures to reduce emissions and build resilience for wildlife.
- Minimising the use of imported feed with negative impacts on biodiversity to reduce the impact of UK agriculture on global biodiversity loss and threat from invasive species.
- Promotion of initiatives such as the *Farming for Wildflower* initiative to encourage the use and provision of seed of native origin to replace the imported native species.

### **Why support Nature Friendly Farming?**

A strong focus on delivering NFF is not a choice between productivity and sustainability, but an opportunity to maintain our long-term ability to produce food and other commodities by restoring the natural resources that farming and land management depends upon. Investing in nature and the environment can help deliver several public policy priorities, meet international and national environmental commitments and secure a more resilient, profitable future for the agriculture sector. Some of the key reasons for investing in NFF are;

#### **Meeting domestic and international commitments**

There are multiple policy drivers with an ambition to restore, protect and enhance the natural environment in Northern Ireland. These range from helping to meet our contribution to the UK's international commitments on climate change and biodiversity, to domestic commitments such as the Northern Ireland Environment Strategy, a forthcoming Climate Change Act and meeting the outcomes of Northern Ireland's Programme for Government. Delivering each of these goals will require significant changes in land use and land management. This has been recognised by a range of organisations and institutions including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) who have highlighted the scale of change required in the land

use sector in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup> to limit warming below 1.5 °C above pre industrial levels. Meeting international targets for biodiversity will also require a transformational shift to sustainable land management, with many targets having implications for land use, land use policy and incentives. A new much more ambitious agriculture policy is needed which is funded to meet the scale of need and with a clear focus on the delivery of environmental public goods to provide a vehicle to secure these necessary changes across agricultural and rural land.

### **Addressing market failure**

There is a strong intervention logic to focus public money on delivering for the environment, due to the high degree of market failure associated with environmental outcomes. The potential provision of environmental public goods through agriculture and other land management activities is high, however, markets often cannot secure a supply of these goods. This has led to widespread environmental degradation, from the decline of farmland birds, to reductions in water quality. Therefore, public money is vital to secure these environmental public goods, by effectively creating a market for them.

### **Improving farm business resilience & productivity**

Research has shown that engaging in NFF practises, can increase the economic stability of farm businesses at the same time as reducing the negative impacts of farming on the environment<sup>2</sup>. NFF can help to reduce the effects of environmental hazards, such as climate shocks as well as providing a higher and more stable provision of natural pest control, through the adoption of practises to benefit the environment and biodiversity. Finally, investment in environmental land management helps to provide an income that is independent of market volatility, thereby building resilience against external shocks. Investing in environmentally sustainable farming practises can also contribute to improving farm productivity, through the restoration of functional biodiversity such as pollinators and soil. For these reasons we believe the strongest arguments for long term continued investment in farming and land use is to pay for the delivery of public goods and to target other appropriate investments which enable businesses and communities to and to change and thrive in the future. To achieve this, **support schemes that incentivise NFF must form the bedrock of a new agriculture policy in Northern Ireland.**

### **What could be considered as good practise both locally and further afield?**

The European Union Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has provided the overarching framework for farm support in Northern Ireland, heavily influencing how we farm and manage our land. Established in the 1950s to meet specific post-war challenges, the CAP is one of the oldest common policies in the EU. It represents over a third of the EU's budget amounting to over £350 billion between 2014 and 2020. Of this, most funding has been allocated to direct payments, which are based on the amount of land owned by a farm business. In NI, this equates to roughly £300 million per year<sup>3</sup> representing around 91% of NI's annual agricultural budget<sup>4</sup>.

Despite numerous reforms and significant investment, this policy remains poorly designed and ill-suited to addressing the challenges facing farming and rural areas. They are too blunt an instrument to help farmers adapt and move to sustainable business models and fail to target funds to where support is most needed. They also fail to reward the environmental goods and services that farming can provide and often keep many farmers on a production focused pathway even when this makes little economic sense. It could be argued that the way in which the CAP has been structured has been a major driver if biodiversity decline in NI.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/sixth-carbon-budget/>

<sup>2</sup> Stability of farm income: The role of agricultural diversity and agri-environment scheme payments

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2017-2022/agriculture-environment-and-rural-affairs/budget-scrutiny/committee-report-on-202021-budget/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmniaf/939/93906.htm#footnote-271>

Despite the inherent flaws associated with the CAP, there have been some examples of farm support schemes which have delivered a range of environmental objectives through agriculture and land management. For example, Agri-Environment Schemes, funded under the CAPs Rural Development Programme have helped to achieve clearly defined environmental objectives, from improvements in water quality, the restoration of priority habitats and targeted interventions for key species. The evidence suggests that, when these schemes are well designed and well implemented, building from a baseline of effective regulation they can provide significant benefits for farmers and the environment, as well as providing good value for money to the taxpayer. To date, these have represented the most effective means of supporting NFF practises in NI and further afield. The following examples demonstrate where NFF has achieved success.

#### **Faughan Valley (Riparian) Native Tree Planting Project**

The River Faughan is one of the highest quality salmon rivers in Europe and was designated an ASSI in 2008 and an EU Natura 2000 SAC in 2009. Previous field drains carried nutrients and sediment during flood events from the land directly into the River Faughan. The Woodland Trust Northern Ireland in partnership with the Loughs Agency and supported by Northern Ireland Water, worked with landowners to divert water from field drains into a wet wood. These measures improve water quality by buffering sediment and nutrients and create wet woodlands to improve the local biodiversity value of the sites.

#### **The Heart of The Glens Landscape partnership - Farm and Farmland Sustainability Project**

The Woodland Trust worked in partnership with 13 landowners in the Antrim Glens to develop farm plans that identified and delivered new green infrastructure in the area. This included the planting of new native farm woodland, hedgerows and riparian woodland to improve drainage, provide shelter for livestock and deliver an extended habitat for wildlife including the endangered red squirrel.

#### **Recovery of Yellowhammers in East County Down**

Between 1991 and 1997 NI's population of yellowhammers declined by 65% with many localised extinctions. In response the RSPBNI established the Yellowhammer Recovery Project to work with farmers to deliver specific habitat management including the provision of safe nesting habitat, and an abundance of food throughout the year. Farmers with support of a dedicated advice service, delivered key interventions on the ground to produce impressive results. Monitoring of the scheme found that Yellowhammers increased by 89% on the farms that adopted the range of habitat options, highlighting the importance of well targeted schemes and farm advice in delivering environmental outcomes.

#### **Saving waders in the Antrim Hills**

The Glenwherry area within the Antrim Plateau is known as a stronghold for the Irish curlew breeding population. This was an ideal site to set up an agri-environment scheme partnership between farmers, DAERA and the RSPB with the overall aim to halt and reverse the decline of this iconic species. By working in partnership with local farmers, there is the possibility of 3,500 hectares being managed as one unit for curlews and other breeding waders including lapwings and snipe. On the 24 farms involved in the group in 2019, RSPB NI recorded 28 pairs of curlews and more than 120 pairs of Snipe, showing the promise of this management type. The early success of this type of scheme in Glenwherry demonstrates the importance of working across a landscape to deliver for nature. Future support schemes should build on this, delivering the right mix of advice support and joined up action, so that the impressive results here can be achieved across the countryside.

#### **Keeping the Corncrakes call in Scotland**<sup>5</sup>

At the end of the 19th century, corncrakes bred in every region of the UK. By the 1990s they were restricted to the far north and western fringe of Scotland. The primary driver of this massive decline

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<sup>5</sup> Wilkinson, N.I., Wilson, J.D., & Anderson, G.Q.A. (2012). Agri-environment management for corncrake *Crex crex* delivers higher species richness and abundance across other taxonomic groups, *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, 155, pp27–34

was the mechanisation of hay mowing while increasingly early hay and silage harvest dates further reduced breeding success. The Scottish Corncrake Conservation Programme, launched in 1991, worked to build partnerships between agricultural communities, conservationists, government and agencies to devise corncrake management prescriptions to halt the decline and incorporated them into standard agri-environment schemes. A dedicated advisory support and outreach service was developed to assist farmers in accessing the payments. The result has been a spectacular reversal in the UK corncrake population. Numbers have more than doubled since the early 1990s with corncrake payments forming a significant part of agricultural incomes in the High Nature Value extensive cattle areas of the Scottish Highlands and Islands.

### **Future agricultural policy to support Nature Friendly Farming?**

Farming and land management policy needs transformed. Incremental changes to the status quo will fail to deliver a safer climate a nature rich countryside or diverse economic opportunities for farmers and rural communities. We now have a chance to reconsider our strategic vision and objectives for farming and rural land use in NI. This represents a significant challenge but provides a unique opportunity to transform agriculture and land management to deliver better outcomes for people, nature and climate. A future agriculture policy can enable a transition to NFF by:

#### **Retaining current levels of investment**

Currently over £300 million is invested in NI agriculture and land management every year. It is important that this level of funding is maintained. Without this, addressing the Nature and Climate emergency through NFF will be extremely difficult. But the rationale for making this level of public investment in farming and land use needs to be much clearer than it has been to date. So much of the current funding is invested in payments that fail to deliver a sustainable future for our countryside, or benefit society more broadly.

#### **Redirecting how we spend public money**

The strongest arguments for the long term continued investment in farming and land use is to pay for the delivery of public goods and to target other appropriate investments which enable businesses to adapt and thrive in the future.

#### **Providing a legal mandate for change**

Agricultural legislation is essential to set a legal framework for future farming and land management in Northern Ireland. It must be based on the principle of public money for public goods to provide clear a purpose for financial assistance in the future. With this, it should set out the framework setting out how funding will be delivered with a commitment to the development of new funding mechanisms to reward the delivery of public goods and facilitate wider change. This will ensure that future investment helps meet climate and nature objectives, whilst supporting farmers for delivering them. A Bill must set out a clear timeline in which the current policy will be phased out and ultimately replaced by a new system of farm support.

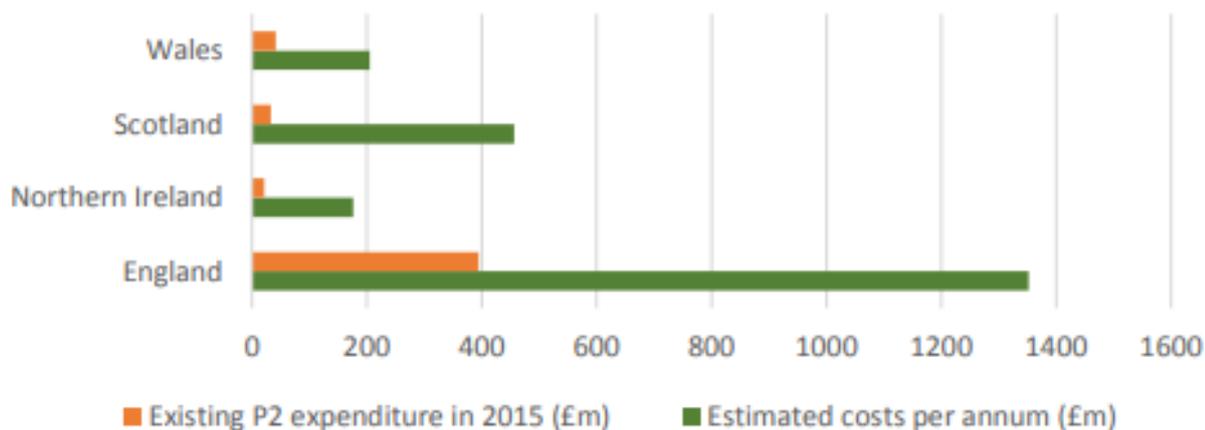
#### **Meeting the scale of need; Investing in nature and the environment**

The concept of public goods is a way of describing the environmental and social goods and services which are provided by farming and land management that are not rewarded by the market. Because of this, encouraging their continued maintenance and production needs supporting through long term public investment. In terms of agriculture, the main environmental public goods that can be provided are biodiversity, high water quality, air and soil, a stable climate and resilience to flooding. Paying for public goods delivers a range of outcomes that society demands whilst also supporting farming and other land management processes. In many cases, farming and land management is crucial in delivering these, but current policy often fails to utilise the potential for delivering public goods through farming and land management.

The level of investment required to deliver public goods at the necessary scale is significant and would represent a transformational shift in how funding is currently spent. Recent research indicates **funding on the delivery of environmental public goods will need to increase 8-fold to at least £180 million per year, to meet current environmental commitments.**

Figure 1

Spend on environmental land management in 2015 compared to estimated environmental need<sup>6</sup>



### Future Environmental Support Schemes

To restore our natural environment new schemes will need to be able to effectively tackle both widespread environmental issues such as declines of farmland biodiversity, diffuse air and water pollution and highly targeted issues such as the restoration of priority habitats or recovery of a range of restricted species.

Widespread environmental objectives	Targeted environmental objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recovery and maintenance of widespread species and communities</li> <li>• Protection and recovery of soils</li> <li>• Nature based solutions to support both mitigation and adaptation to climate change</li> <li>• Improvements to and maintenance of water quality and use</li> <li>• Opportunities for recreation, access and connection to nature (e.g. connected permissive paths and signage, open farm days and educational visits)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management and enhancement of protected sites including area of scientific interest, and the European Protected sites Network</li> <li>• Management, restoration and recreation of priority habitat (peatland, wetlands, native woodland) to enhance biodiversity and deliver flow benefits to society</li> <li>• Recovery of rare, threatened and range restricted species</li> <li>• Strategic natural flood risk management (including catchment wide management)</li> </ul>

### Scheme Design

Following years of practical trials and scheme monitoring across NI and Europe it is possible to identify the key criteria associated with success as:

#### Evidence based interventions

Using the existing evidence base on what works and what doesn't to deliver specific environmental outcomes. This will include actions for specific species and wider ecosystem service delivery such as habitat creation and restoration.

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[https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/Assessing%20the%20costs%20of%20Environmental%20Land%20Management%20in%20the%20UK%20Policy%20Briefing\\_tcm9-449500.pdf](https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/Assessing%20the%20costs%20of%20Environmental%20Land%20Management%20in%20the%20UK%20Policy%20Briefing_tcm9-449500.pdf)

### **Action at the appropriate scale**

The scale of action matters. At the farm scale, there is clear evidence to suggest that devoting 5-10% of lowland farmland to Agri-environment options has significant positive impacts on wildlife abundance on the farm<sup>78</sup>. Future broadly accessible schemes should be based on scientific evidence regarding the required **quantity and quality** of habitats needed to result in on farm biodiversity and the delivery of other environmental outcomes. Achieving many environmental outcomes such as species recovery or improving water quality requires landscape scale action to provide bigger, better and more joined-up sites for nature. Already, several landscape scale schemes are being operated in Northern Ireland, through DAERA's Environmental Farming Group Pilot. Although in the relatively early stages of the pilot successes are being delivered through targeting the right management interventions, in the right landscape area, with skilled advisers and enthused farmers drumming up the required level of uptake. This model provides a good foundation to deliver schemes focused at delivering environmental outcomes at a landscape scale across Northern Ireland.

### **Focus on defined and measurable environmental outcomes**

Agreements with a clear focus, are often more successful. Not all national and local objectives can be secured on a single farm or land holding. A farm level audit can help identify key assets, risks and opportunities to support the selection of appropriate outcomes and management interventions. To ensure *"the right outcomes in the right place, delivered in the right way"*.

### **Effective targeting at a farm and landscape scale**

Effective targeting is widely recognised as being a key factor in successful environmental land management. Schemes can be targeted:

- Geographically, for example to a catchment to secure improvements in water quality, or in areas supporting High Nature Value farmland.
- By outcome or theme, offering management measures designed to achieve specific environmental objectives such as the farm wildlife packages, or
- By beneficiary, selecting applicants with a good track record of environmental delivery.

A combination of these different approaches is often required within scheme design. Effective targeting and associated support are not added costs, rather a key mechanism to improve delivery and achieve environmental outcomes.

### **Trusted and quality advice**

New farming and land management policies have the potential to introduce significant changes to the way land is managed in Northern Ireland. Advice will play a key role in helping farmers and land managers understand this changing context and support decision-making on the land they own or manage. Getting the level of advice right is crucial and can boost the success and quality of the environmental outcomes delivered. Going forward the scope and purpose of advice will have to result in land management that helps Northern Ireland to meet both its international and domestic environmental commitments. Future advice should also include the economic benefits of sustainable land management.

### **Engagement and experience**

Ultimately farmers and land managers determine whether an environmental land management agreement will achieve its target outcomes. Scheme design must be practical and intuitive and individual agreements should clearly set out expected outcomes at a farm or land holding level. Experienced and motivated farmers and landowners deliver better environmental outcomes<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Winspear, R.; Grice, P.; Peach, W.; Phillips, J.; Aebischer, N.; Thompson, P.; Egan, J.; Nowakowski, M. (2010) The development of Farmland Bird Packages for arable farmers in England. *Aspects of Applied Biology*, 100 pp.347-352

<sup>8</sup> Bright, J.A. et al. (2015). Higher-tier agri-environment scheme enhances breeding densities of some priority farmland birds in England, *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, 203, pp69–79

<sup>9</sup> McCracken, M.E. et al. (2015) Social and ecological drivers of success in agri-environment schemes: the roles of farmers and environmental context, *Journal of Applied Ecology* 2015, 52, 696–70

Therefore, new schemes should value the experience of farmers and land managers<sup>10</sup>, encourage peer-to-peer learning, possibly even rewarding experienced farmers who share their knowledge with neighbours. However, this should not override scientific evidence or environmental priorities.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

Investment in monitoring and evaluation is essential in understanding the effectiveness of policy interventions and to drive constant improvements in design and delivery and importantly ensure good value for money.

### **Flexibility**

In securing environmental outcomes from land management, it will be important to adapt and improve management interventions according to local conditions. When co-developed with advice from experts with sound knowledge, flexibility can facilitate innovation, help respond to a changing environment, engage farmers and ensure better environmental delivery<sup>11</sup>. More can be done to ensure that flexibility is inbuilt into the design of future schemes, to ensure that local land management is tailored to delivering the specific objectives it is required to meet.

### **Investing in change**

Payments for public goods can provide a solid revenue stream for farm businesses alongside market returns and other sources of income. With this, there is also a need for public investment to support businesses to adapt to a new policy framework and to encourage wider rural development. This could take the form of one-off capital investments and grants, to help improve environmental performance, support diversification, to develop new income streams or improve business efficiency. Funding could be made available to purchase machinery, invest in technology or physical infrastructure, provided it offers good value for public money and is compatible with nature and climate objectives. Such moves will help build overall business resilience.

### **Investing in knowledge**

Delivering NFF requires a greater investment in knowledge transfer, skills, advice and training to ensure that farmers and rural businesses can adapt to, and benefit from, a system focused on sustainable farming and land management. Adopting NFF practises makes good business sense<sup>12</sup> and can be key to improving farm productivity, profitability and resilience, but farmers need to be supported to adopt these practises with confidence. There is potential to enhance both the profitability and sustainability of farming systems in Northern Ireland, by focusing on profit margins and reducing production to maximum sustainable levels. Farm business advice could play an important role in enhancing profitability, by focusing on boosting margins rather than volumes, as well as identifying opportunities to add value to produce and enhance income through diversification. Evidence demonstrates that only a minority of farms currently undertake standard business management practices such as producing budgets, analysing gross margins, preparing cash flow forecasts or producing in-depth profit and loss accounts. The low take-up of advice suggests a role for public intervention – such as the provision of free or subsidised advice – to enhance farm business planning and management.

### **Providing a clear transition**

We recognise that a transition to NFF represents a significant departure from the status quo and that getting there will not happen overnight. However, there is an urgent need for change and to define a clear direction of travel. We must move with purpose whilst allowing enough time to plan and adapt.

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<sup>10</sup> Lastra-Bravo, X. B. et al (2015). What drives farmers' participation in EU agri-environmental schemes?: Results from a qualitative metaanalysis, *Environmental Science & Policy*, 54, pp 1-9

<sup>11</sup> Meye, C et al. (2015). Design rules for successful governmental payments for ecosystem services: Taking agri-environmental measures in Germany as an example, *Journal of Environmental Management* 157, (1), Pp 146-159

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nffn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/20012-NFFN-Report-Nature-means-business-DIGITAL-1.pdf>

To this end, a pre-defined and time limited transition period (e.g. 5-7 years) is essential to provide the certainty and stability that the farming sector will need to plan for the future. A clear transition period is also essential in ensuring that agriculture and land use policy can rise to the challenges we currently face. Failure to do so, will result in drift and stagnation, neither of which are in the interests of farming, nature or climate. Below we have outlined what we believe an agricultural transition should entail:

### **Maintaining the good**

In the early years of transition, it is essential that the good work delivered by farmers and land managers is maintained. This will involve the renewal of existing Agri-Environment scheme contracts and the opportunity for new farmers to enter schemes. Funding should be provided at the current level provided under the Rural Development Programme as a minimum. This will provide a base upon which future land management schemes can build.

### **Providing a Just Transition Fund**

Supporting farmers on the journey from the current policy framework to the next will be key to delivering success. There will be a need for business advice, funding and support to help businesses adapt and plan for the future. A transition fund should be established to allow farmers to access dedicated business advice and access funding to improve their businesses in advance of the full roll out of a future policy.

### **Piloting new approaches**

There is a need to pilot new approaches of farm support to ensure that they are practical to deliver, capable of delivering environmental outcomes, can secure buy in from farmers and provide adequate reward for the delivery of environmental outcomes. As funding is removed from the Basic Payment Scheme, it should be used to pilot new approaches to delivering environmental land management. These should be trialled with farmers and other relevant organisations within the farming and land use sector. This will ensure that by the end of the transition period, payment schemes focused on public goods delivery are effective and ready to be rolled out across NI.

## **Conclusion**

Nature Friendly Farming has a vital role to play in building resilient, productive and profitable agriculture sector, that can address the nature and climate emergency. Future policy must utilise the immense opportunities provided by NFF, recognising that it is central to securing the productive capacity of our land and can provide significant economic benefits to farm businesses. Policy should focus on delivering NFF at scale, enabling all farmers to transition towards nature friendly practises. This will a significant uplift in the amount of funding allocated towards environmental management, with well designed, practical schemes focused on the delivery of public goods sitting at the heart of a future policy.

We recommend that the Committee endorses the proposed motion and takes consideration of our recommendations on how NFF can be supported in the future.