

Appendix A

Document	Title	Page
1	Invitation from SULS Project team to visit BH Estates	1
2	Committee Agreement to visit BH Estates	2-12
3	Committee Agreement to Date of Visit	13-23
4	Correspondence concerning organisation of visit	24
5	Presentation Slides	25-44
6	Email of thanks from BH Estates	45

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 31 March 2025 11:54
To: Thompson, Dr Janice <Janice.Thompson@niassembly.gov.uk>
Cc: DAERA Assembly Support <DAERA.AssemblySupport@daera-ni.gov.uk>
Subject: SULS Visit

Janice,

Just to follow up on our phone call on Friday.

The Minister visited Blackiston Houston Estates last week and he suggested that it would be very beneficial for the Committee to visit.

The SULS Project Team would like to invite the AERA Committee to BH Estates site in Dundonald to hear about their Farm2Export Project and the process of livestock slurry separation that BH Estates and their consortium partners are developing. The event will include a visual demonstration of the supply chain of materials from slurry, chicken litter and factory waste to organo mineral fertiliser and the associated environmental benefits.

If Committee were agreeable to a visit, you and I had felt that a Thursday afternoon after a formal Committee meeting in Parliament Buildings when members are together may be an opportune time to arrange a visit.

Happy to discuss.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer (DALO)
Clare House | 303 Airport Road West | Belfast | BT3 9ED

[REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

I am part of the [DAERA Legislation Network](#) - a group of DAERA officials with legislation experience contactable through MS Teams to support the Department with its legislative programme.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

3 April 2025

Parliament Buildings, Room 21

Present: Robbie Butler MLA (Chairperson)
Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
John Blair MLA
Tom Buchanan MLA
Aoife Finnegan MLA
William Irwin MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA
Áine Murphy MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk
Mr Nick Faulkner, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor
Ms Sarah Preece, Clerical Officer

The Meeting Opened in Public Session at 10:13am

Aoife Finnegan MLA joined the meeting at 10.18am

The Deputy Chair advised the Committee that he would be chairing the first hour or so of the meeting as the Chair was not available until around 11am.

1. Apologies

None

2. Declaration of Interests

The Deputy Chair reminded Members of their responsibility to declare any interests in any of the items under discussion.

Declan McAleer MLA declared that he had previously served as a councillor on Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Deputy Chair referred to an invitation from the SULS Project team to visit Blackiston Houston Estates site in Dundonald to hear about their Farm2Export Project and for a demonstration of the process of livestock slurry separation that they are developing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the invitation to the list of potential visits.

The Deputy Chair referred to an invitation from the Managing Director of the Irish Grouse Conservation Trust to visit their operation at Glenwherry and the Antrim Hills to witness its ongoing work, which has succeeded in restoring the population of Irish Red Grouse from eight 20 years ago, to over 300 today.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the invitation to the list of potential visits.

The Deputy Chair advised the Committee that, in keeping with the Executive's commitment in the New Decade New Approach document to conduct Reviews of Arm's Length Bodies, a review of AFBI has been undertaken and a report is under

consideration by the Minister and that a review of the NI Fishery Harbour Authority is ongoing

Agreed: The committee agreed to write to the Department to seek a formal update on the list of bodies to be reviewed and the timetable for these reviews.

The Chair referred to an email received from the Cabragh Concerned Residents Association regarding the matter of an ongoing odour nuisance. The Committee noted that Sawgrass Substrates Ltd now operates on the site.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Sawgrass Substrates Limited to seek further information on the odour reported from the site.

4. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting on 27 March were agreed and signed by the Chair to be published.

Agreed: The Minutes were agreed.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 The Committee considered a response from the Department, dated 27 March, regarding the Avian Influenza Outbreak.

The response stated that the agreed policy is to pay compensation to the value of the poultry immediately before culling and not for birds which have died because of a disease incursion. However, where there has been a delay in initiating a cull, a potential for an ex-gratia payment may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The Committee also noted that following this current outbreak a review regarding the timing between confirmation of disease and culling commencing, and what further support is available to farmers will be undertaken.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

5.2 The Committee considered an update from the Minister, dated 28 March, regarding Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Slovakia and Highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in a sheep in England.

The update stated that:

- on 21 March FMD was confirmed in Slovakia in three cattle herds and as of 26 March a further case was identified at a fourth premises and a further outbreak has been confirmed in Hungary;
- Following a Departmental tracing exercise, no commodities requiring veterinary certification had been imported to NI from these countries; and
- On 24 March the first reported case of HPAI was confirmed in a sheep in Yorkshire with no infection detected in the remaining flock and there is no evidence to suggest an increased risk to the UK's livestock population or to the general public.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and keep a watching brief on the matter.

5.3 The Committee considered the response from the Department, dated 31 March, regarding The Farming for Sustainability Knowledge Transfer Payments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

The Committee noted that advice in relation to the tax status of these payments is not available as it sits outside DAERA's responsibilities and any information provided by DAERA would carry no standing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and that it awaits a response from HMRC in this matter.

5.4 The Committee considered the response from the Department, dated 1st April regarding the Draft Budget 2025-26 – Query on Just Transition Fund for Agriculture (JTfFA). The response provided details of projects the £12.8m Capital DEL funds will be directed towards:

- £5.5m for Bovine Genetic Improvements to assist farmers to make better informed breeding decisions for environmentally sustainable animals with reduced methane emissions and pollution potential;
- £5.4 for Sustainable Utilisation of Livestock Slurry (SULS) programme; and
- £1.4m for Farming for Carbon - this includes two elements: Livestock Dietary Emissions Challenge Fund and Carbon Footprinting Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

5.5 The Committee considered the response from the Department, dated 1st April, regarding the merger of two planning teams within the Natural Environment Division (NED) of NIEA. The merger on 2 December 2024 combined the Conservation Designation and Protection team (CDP) into the main planning team within NED- Countryside, Coast and Landscapes – Planning (CC&L).

The response stated that casework regarding proposals within designated sites and air quality related casework and all other natural heritage issues will now be assessed and responded to by a single case officer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

The Fermanagh & Omagh District Councillors joined the meeting at 10:24 am

Robbie Butler MLA joined the meeting at 10.48am

Áine Murphy MLA left the meeting at 11.27am

Áine Murphy MLA re-joined the meeting at 11.31am

Declan Murphy MLA left the meeting at 11.37am

Declan Murphy MLA re-joined the meeting at 11.41am

John Blair MLA left the meeting at 11.42am

John Blair MLA re-joined the meeting at 11.46am

6. Briefing from Fermanagh & Omagh District Council - Agricultural Liaison Group (ALG)

This agenda item was recorded by Hansard

The following Councillors briefed the Committee:

- Cllr Josephine Deehan

- Cllr Sheamus Greene
- Cllr John McClaughry
- Cllr Bernard McGrath
- Cllr Allan Rainey

The Committee heard that addressing the needs of a rural region and promoting the wellbeing of rural communities remains a key focus for the Council. The Councillors then highlighted a wide range of agricultural and environmental matters relating to their district including climate change impacts; importance of farm payment schemes to farmers and concerns regarding the control of Bovine Tuberculosis.

The Councillors highlighted concerns over planning delays regarding ammonia emissions and the need for support for farmers in this regard but also the need to protect waterways from pollution.

There then followed a question and answer session.

The Committee noted the issue of planning restrictions in connection with ammonia emissions and the frustrations expressed by the Councillors on behalf of farmers regarding delays to planning.

The Deputy Chair thanked the Councillors for the briefing and for travelling to Parliament Buildings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask to be kept updated regularly on the progress of the Ammonia Strategy and subsequent Ammonia Action Plan.

The Fermanagh & Omagh District Councillors left the meeting at 11.56 am
The meeting was suspended at 11.56am
The meeting resumed at 12.11pm

The NIMGA representatives joined the meeting at 12.12pm
Declan McAleer MLA re-joined the meeting at 12.13pm
Patsy McGlone MLA joined the meeting at 12.32pm

7.Agriculture Bill - Briefing from NIMGA

This agenda item was recorded by Hansard

The Committee noted it had asked if those who had responded to the Call for Evidence wished to make a further submission, following the Minister's decision that he will not be closing the FVAS at the end of 2025 and NIMGA wished to brief again.

The following NIMGA representatives briefed the Committee:

- Mr John McArdle, Deputy Chairperson, NIMGA
- Mr Martin McKee, Member, NIMGA

The Committee heard that the extension of the FVAS is welcomed but concerns still remain and that any new scheme should have ringfenced funding at 4.1% as a baseline above which the Department could exercise discretionary powers.

The Committee also heard concerns about potential disruption to funding in the transition period between the current scheme ending and the commencement of a replacement scheme.

There then followed a question and answer session.

The Chair thanked the representatives for the briefing.

The NIMGA representatives left the meeting at 12.30pm

The Mushroom PO representatives joined the meeting at 12.31pm

7. Agriculture Bill - Briefing from Mushroom Producer Organisation

This agenda item was recorded by Hansard

The following representatives briefed the Committee

- Ms Liz Kelly, General Manager, Mushroom Producer Organisation
- Mr Andrew Mulligan, Member, Commercial Mushroom Growers UK Ltd
- Mr David Dallas, Technical Manager, Northway Mushrooms

The Committee heard that although the extension of the scheme is welcomed there are concerns that the scheme is only open to growers who are members of a PO registered in Northern Ireland and it is likely there will be none as of 01 January 2026. Clarity is required from the Department if the formation of a new PO in Northern Ireland will result in forfeit of existing funding.

The Committee also heard that concerns still remains regarding the discretionary element in Clause 1 and the representatives requested ringfenced funding set at a baseline of 4.1% above which discretionary powers can be exercised.

There then followed a question and answer session.

The Chair thanked the representatives for the briefing.

The Mushroom PO representatives left the meeting at 12:47pm

9. Departmental Written Briefing - Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System (NIFAIS) Update on go-live date for Stage 2

The written briefing advised that NIFAIS is an IT Project to replace, in stages, the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) used to deliver full traceability, disease control and public health functions.

The Committee noted that Stage 1 went live in September 2023 and Stage 2 is currently going through testing and an independent assurance assessment of project preparedness for 'going live' is scheduled at the end of April. The expected release will be in late June or early September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the briefing.

10. Departmental Written Briefing - Update on DAERA marine licensing clauses in the Financial Provisions Bill and annual uplift of marine licensing fees

The written briefing advised that DAERA currently can prescribe a fee for an application for a marine licence only and that clauses in the Financial Provision Bill will give it new powers to charge for costs incurred for related aspects of the licensing process.

The Committee noted that amending the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 will give DAERA similar fee charging powers to those available to other UK Regulators.

The Committee also noted that Marine licensing fees for 2025/26 are to increase by 2.37% from 1 April 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the briefing.

11. Correspondence.

The Committee considered the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland [ISNI] Delivery Tracking System (DTS) - investing activity report, DAERA, dated 30 March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the report and return to the matter at a later date as it still had concerns regarding costs and length of some projects.

The Committee considered a memo from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance, dated 27 March, regarding the Analysis of 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the memo.

The Committee considered a memo from the Clerk to the Committee for the Executive Office, dated 27 March, regarding Budget 2025/ 2026 – Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. The memo stated it has been identified as a priority in the Programme for Government and the Committee for the Executive Office has asked Committees if their Department has a role delivering the Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask about its role in delivering actions for rural women and girls as part of the Strategy and if so, how much funding was bid for and/or earmarked for the actions and which activities is it delivering under the Strategy.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department, dated 1 April, regarding the Pollution Prevention and Control PPC District Councils Charging Scheme NI 2025.

The Department advises that the fee charging scheme business operators of PPC activities are required to pay to cover the regulator's costs has been updated for 2025 and no major amendments have been made.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft Forward Work Programme and agreed it to be published.

The Committee noted last week it agreed to hear from young farmers clubs and the Ulster Farmers Union at the Balmoral Show and invitations have been issued.

The Committee also noted that it will take part in an engagement event after the meeting at the Balmoral Show.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Plan to be published.

13. Any Other Business

The Committee noted recently imposed reciprocal international trade tariffs by the United States of America on imports from the United Kingdom and imports from the European Union.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek an oral briefing on the impact of tariffs on matters relevant to its remit, with a particular focus on Northern Ireland's position with The Windsor Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a briefing from RalSe in relation to the impact on areas specific to agriculture.

14. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee is on **Thursday 10 April at 10.00am in Parliament Buildings**

The meeting went into closed session at 12.59pm

The meeting adjourned at 1.35 pm

Signature:

Robbie Butler MLA, Chairperson

Dated



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

5 June 2025

Parliament Buildings, Room 21

Present: Robbie Butler MLA (Chairperson)
Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
John Blair MLA
Tom Buchanan MLA
William Irwin MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA

Via Zoom: Áine Murphy MLA
Aoife Finnegan MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk
Mr Nick Faulkner, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor
Ms Sarah Preece, Clerical Officer

The Meeting Opened in Public Session at 10:06 am

The Deputy Chair advised the Committee that the Chair had a commitment this morning and he would be chairing the meeting until he arrived.

1. Apologies

None

2. Declaration of Interests

The Deputy Chair reminded Members of their responsibility to declare any interests in any of the items under discussion.

None were declared.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Deputy Chair referred to correspondence, dated 28 May, from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council regarding research and data-analysis

The Committee noted that the Council has a Rural Affairs Sub Committee, which progresses research and data-analysis relating to its District and have offered to present the findings of the research to the Committee.

The Committee noted there had been an evidence session with the Agricultural Liaison Group of the Council at the meeting of the 3 April.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a written briefing in the first instance from the Rural Affairs Sub Committee on its research.

The Deputy Chair referred to correspondence, dated 2 June, from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) regarding its call for evidence and it has invited Committees to provide views and experience of scrutiny of cross-cutting legislation by 30 September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the Committee team to research relevant Bill work undertaken by the Committee in the last mandate and will then consider a draft response to AERC in September.

The Deputy Chair advised that the Committee has been copied into from the Warrenpoint Community Association (WCA) to the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the NIEA, regarding a formal complaint and objection concerning allegations of breaches of planning control at a site near Carnbane Business Park, Newry.

The Committee noted it considered correspondence from WCA at its meeting on 1 May raising concerns regarding what WCA believes to be multiple significant breaches of waste management regulations at the Warrenpoint Harbour Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

The Deputy Chair referred to the Oxford Research Project titled The Combined Effects of Treated Sewage Discharge and Land Use on Rivers, highlighted by a Member during the briefing by the Office of Environmental Protection (OEP) at the meeting of 29 May. The report was, in fact, based on four rivers in England.

The Committee noted that the report was forwarded to Members and to the OEP for their reference.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the report.

The Deputy Chair referred to the joint concurrent meeting with the Committee for Infrastructure on 3 June 2025 when it heard from DAERA, the UFU and from a farmer with lived experience of the issues facing farmers during the A5 Western Transport Corridor Scheme.

The Committee noted the meeting was useful and the UFU are to provide examples of cases where there had been poor communication with farmers and information gaps in advice from the Department that farmers required.

The Committee noted the Infrastructure Committee discussed the concurrent meeting at its meeting on 4 June and agreed to write to DfI to ask about considerations in relation to other buildings in the path of the A5 and the impact of the road on farm practices.

Some Committee Members were keen to ascertain if DAERA would allow leeway in Single Farm Payment applications due to potential confusion around the amount of land still being farmed, as inexact fencing of some areas of vested land may lead to slight errors in calculation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what is the anticipated impact on the Single Farm Payment of slight errors in calculation of the land that is allowed to be farmed after vesting and what is the accepted tolerance, and did it consider advising farmers of the exact area of vested land to avoid errors in individual calculations.

The Deputy Chair referred to an informal meeting on 3 June with Chair, him, and the Minister to discuss the NAP consultation. The Deputy Chair gave the Committee a brief overview of the meeting which covered a range of issues that the Minister then highlighted that day in oral questions.

The Deputy Chair stated he advised the Minister that a pre-consultation with the sector should have taken place before the proposals were announced and that it was a case of putting the cart before the horse. The matter of moving forward with proposals before the full scientific evidence was in place was also raised.

The Committee noted that a clerks memo providing a summary of the meeting will be provided to Members in due course.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the meeting.

The Deputy Chair referred to a draft of a letter from the Committee to Farmers for Action (FFA) covering the detail of its work on the matter and a summary of its restricted legal advice. This is the conclusion of its due diligence on the proposed draft Farm Welfare Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue the letter.

4. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting on 29 May were agreed and signed by the Chair to be published.

Agreed: The Minutes were agreed.

5. Matters Arising

The Committee considered a response, dated 30 May, from the Department of Communities (DfC) regarding Northern Ireland Shows Association (NISA).

The Committee noted the response states that DfC has no record of receiving correspondence from NISA on its Independent Resilience Review of Agriculture Shows in Northern Ireland Report and that DfC has no funding streams that NISA could avail of at this time.

Agreed. The Committee agreed to advise NISA to send the report to DfC.

The Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10:19am

6. Departmental oral evidence session - 2025-26 Main Estimates and June Monitoring Round Proposals

The Committee noted the Chair spoke on behalf of the Committee on the Supply Resolution for the Main Estimates 2025/26 in the Assembly on 3 June.

The following officials briefed the Committee:

- Roger Downey – Finance Director
- Nuala Hennessy – In Year Financial Planning Branch
- Helen Mullan – In Year Financial Planning Branch

The Committee was briefed on the outcome of DAERA's internal consideration of the main estimates and the June Monitoring Round and details of the return due to the Department of Finance on 5 June.

There then followed a question and answer session.

The Committee heard that the TB compensation projection is £47.4 million for 2025/2026 compared to £43.1m from the previous year. The Committee also heard that the final expenditure for the whole TB programme is expected to rise from £60m in 2024/ 2025 to over £65m by the end of this financial year.

The Deputy Chair thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The Officials left the meeting at 10:28 pm

The Committee then agreed to move to Agenda Item 9 and return to Agenda item 7 later in the meeting.

9. Correspondence.

The Committee considered the Correspondence memo.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the memo.

The Committee considered correspondence, dated 28 May, from Northern Ireland Marine Task Force (NIMTF) regarding the Outer Belfast Lough Marine Conservation Zone. The Committee noted that despite fishing in the area not being permitted since 2023, anchorage of commercial vessels still occurs resulting in damage to the site and are calling for urgent action by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.

The Committee considered correspondence from The Executive Office, dated 22 May regarding the Period Products (Free provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the report.

The Committee considered the memo from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance, dated 29 May, regarding Analysis of 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the memo.

The Committee noted on 22 May it considered a request from FFA seeking a formal meeting regarding the NAP proposals and Bovine TB. The Committee agreed to request that they submit a written paper in the first instance regarding the issues. The Committee considered the response from the Farmers for Action (FFA) dated 29 May.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the FFA to its proposed engagement event on the NAP proposals.

The Committee considered an invitation from The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) to the launch of its new independent research report 'The Environment, Human Rights and the Windsor Framework' on Tuesday 24 June, at the Europa Hotel, Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department, dated 30 May, regarding the Public Consultation on the draft Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3) - to launch on Monday 9 June for 8 weeks until 4 August. Officials will provide a briefing following the analysis of the responses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

The Committee considered a Clerk's Memo from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC), dated 30 May, regarding the Proposed EU Regulation strengthening the position of farmers in the food supply chain and a copy of the quarterly status update RalSe briefing note in relation to the progress of the proposed EU act.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the memo and the RalSe briefing.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department, dated 30 May, regarding the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework Action Plan published on 14 May. It proposes a new strategic cross-cutting approach to food to ensure coherence across food policies that help to improve economic, environmental, health and social outcomes for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the Action Plan.

The Committee considered correspondence, from Northern Ireland Mushroom Growers Association (NIMGA) to the leaders of the political parties calling for the continuation of current spending levels under the Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme (FVAS) to be reflected in the Agriculture Bill.

The Committee noted the Consideration Stage of the Agriculture Bill is on 9 June.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to visit Blackiston Houston Estates to see a SULS project in action, after the meeting on 26 June.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to visit the CAFRE Hill Farm at Glenwherry in the Antrim Hills, on 3 July, to see the work of the Irish Grouse Conservation Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the Forward Work Plan.

11. Any Other Business

None

The meeting was suspended at 10:35am as witnesses for Agenda Item 7 were not available.

The meeting resumed at 10:51am

The Chair joined the meeting at 10:51am

The Departmental Officials joined the meeting at 10:51am

Aoife Finnegan joined the meeting by zoom at 11:05am

The Chair returned to Agenda item 7

7. Departmental oral evidence session - Horticulture Pilot Scheme 1,2 and 3 (Policy Briefing and SL1)

This agenda item was recorded by Hansard

The Committee noted the policy briefing would be on the Horticulture Pilot Scheme and on the SL1 The Horticulture Pilot Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

The following DAERA Officials briefed the Committee:

- Paul McHenry, Acting Director of CAFRE
- Dr Eric Long, Head of CAFRE's Education Service
- David Dowd, Acting Head of CAFRE's Horticulture Branch

The Committee heard that the Department intends to make an SR, to be laid before the Assembly under the negative resolution procedure, providing it with the legal powers to implement the Horticulture Pilot Scheme as part of the roll out of the Sustainable Agriculture Programme.

The Committee heard that the overarching aim of the scheme is to determine the feasibility of a full horticulture scheme to increase the output of the Northern Ireland commercial horticulture industry

The Committee were briefed on the three Pilot Schemes 1: Sustainable Sector; 2: Innovation Driver and Support; and 3: Growers' Training and Support.

The Committee heard that the horticulture industry in Northern Ireland is fragmented with limited cooperation between growers and there is limited data available on the number and scale of businesses and the costs and returns on production.

One aim is to de-risk investment and innovation and participants will have access to specialist knowledge and dedicated support to assist growers in growing existing markets and securing new markets.

There then followed a question and answer session.

Concern was expressed regarding the criteria that Commercial Horticulture businesses must be a DAERA Category 1 or Category 2 Farm Business, and this will disadvantage smaller growers.

The Committee also queried the need for the Level 2 Certificate in Practical Horticulture Skills. DAERA advised that it was important that participants, especially new entrants, had a basic level of horticultural knowledge and CAFRE would be running the course.

Concern was expressed that a small number of larger growers could potentially swallow up the funding allocated leaving limited funds available for smaller growers.

The Committee heard that there will be an ongoing evaluation of the pilot scheme to develop a final scheme. It was proposed that the evaluation should consider crisis support.

The Chair thanked Officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Department proceeds to make the SR, and the Committee will consider it and the ESR Report in due course.

The Departmental Officials left the meeting at 11:48am

The Departmental Officials joined the meeting at 11:48am

8. SL1 The Agriculture (Student Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The following DAERA Officials briefed the Committee:

- Mark McLean - Chief Agricultural Economist, Policy Economics and Statistics Division (PESD); and
- Chloe Robinson Deputy Principal, Policy Development Branch (PDB)

The Committee heard that the Department intends to make a Statutory Rule to amend the Agriculture (Student Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 which sets the level of fees payable for undergraduate and postgraduate higher education courses delivered by DAERA, at CAFRE.

The Committee heard the SR will be laid before the Assembly under the negative resolution procedure and subject to Executive approval it is anticipated that it will come into operation on 1st September 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Department proceeds to make the SR, and the Committee will consider it and the ESR Report in due course.

The Departmental Officials left the meeting at 11:55am

14. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee is on Thursday 12th June at 10.00am in Castle Archdale, County Fermanagh.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55am

Signature:

Robbie Butler MLA, Chairperson

Dated

Suls visit

From DAERA Assembly Support <DAERA.AssemblySupport@daera-ni.gov.uk>

Date Mon 02/06/2025 18:25

To Thompson, Dr Janice <Janice.Thompson@niassembly.gov.uk>; +Comm Agri-Env-Rural Public Email <Committee.AgriEnvRural@niassembly.gov.uk>; DAERA Assembly Support <DAERA.AssemblySupport@daera-ni.gov.uk>

hi,

Officials were speaking to Jack Blakiston Houston and that date suits and he would be pleased to welcome the AERA committee on 26th

He has also offered lunch so if you could put it to the committee that if they wanted to go to the farm, they could have a meet and greet and presentations over lunch and then head out round the facilities?

Thanks



Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)



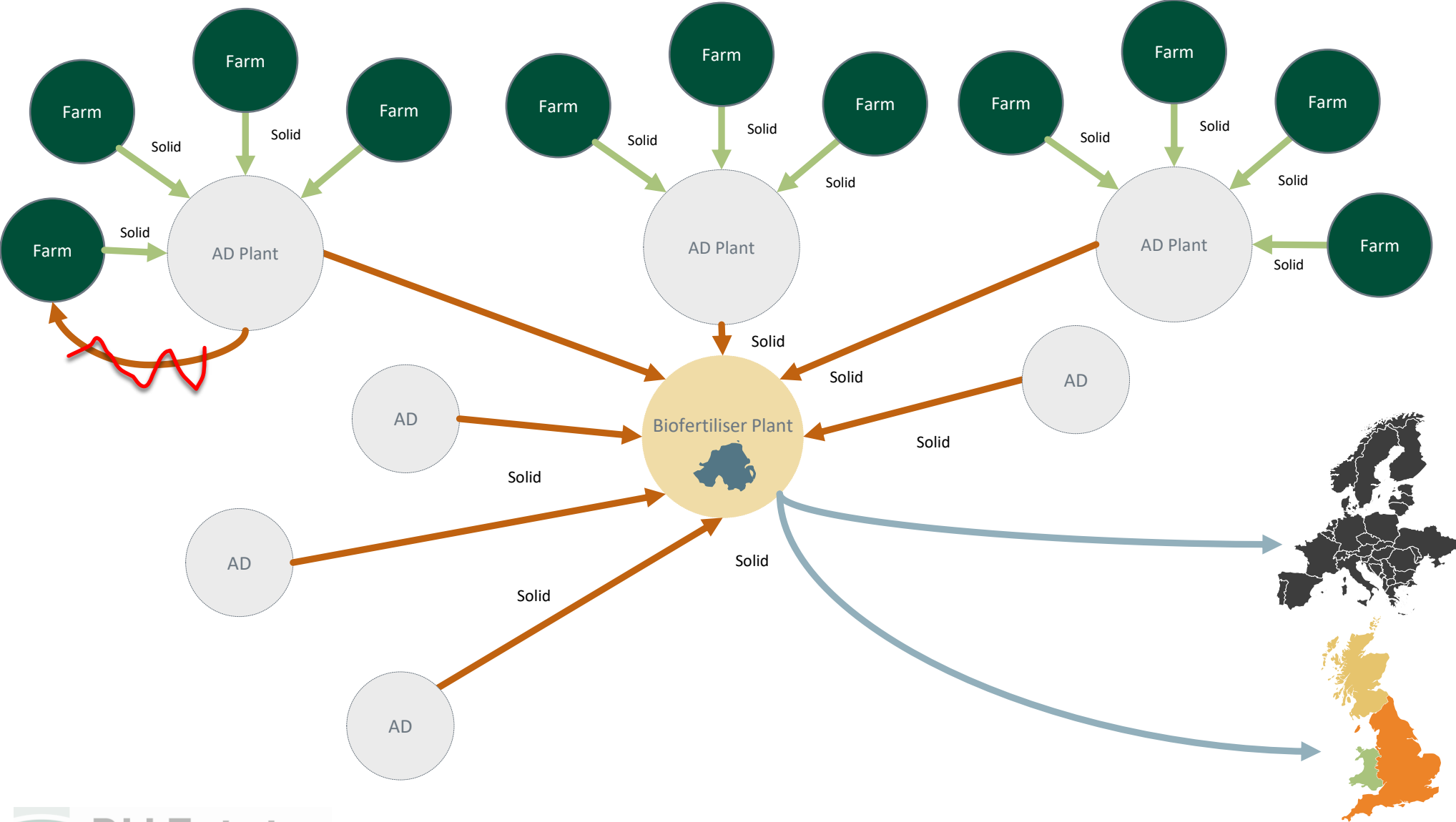
Farm2Export

Presentation to the Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs Committee

26th June 2025

www.bhestates.com

Overall Schematic – shows the system a successful project will deliver – and how gas networks *need* to understand AD



What is on offer for governments and citizens:



Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy

Economy (Jobs):

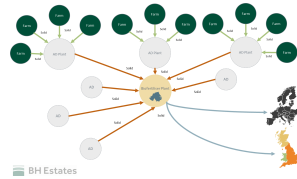
Significant jobs in the supply chain – and jobs linked to skills that are present in the rural economy.

Waste

Manage waste more effectively and more economically – less pollution, more value

Energy Security

Energy self sufficiency - less reliance on imports from others.



2



END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Food Production:

Reduction in supply chain risk for critical elements for food production (locally and internationally).



Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment

Air Quality

Significant net reduction in ammonia emissions from agriculture.

GHG (CO2)

Lower fossil fuel for heat or electricity, lower mineral fertiliser use.

Water Quality

Significant phosphorous can be removed from waste and agriculture.

GHG (Methane)

Biogenic methane is captured and used rather than emitted at scale.

Key Barriers:

NAP Key Action:

Regulations must encourage and support the capture of phosphorus by AD plants rather than penalise it.

Ammonia - Revised Operational Protocol Key Action:

NIEA should recommend granting of planning permission for nutrient recovery technologies in order to deliver reductions of nutrient pollution and other legislative requirements.

Waste Management Licensing Key Action:

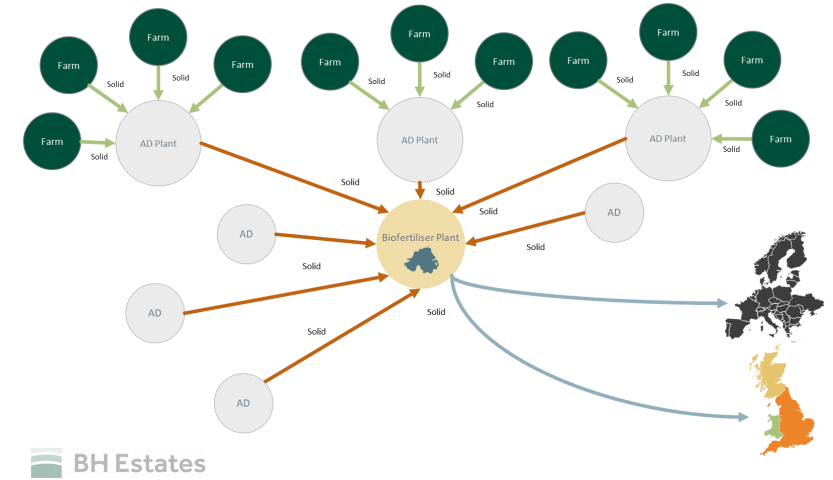
Existing AD plants should be granted WML to take manures.

ROCS (Electricity) Key Action:

Subsidy levels need to be at a level to build ADs and feed them with waste, and use heat efficiently.

Biomethane Key Action:

Subsidy levels need to be at a level to build ADs and feed them with waste.

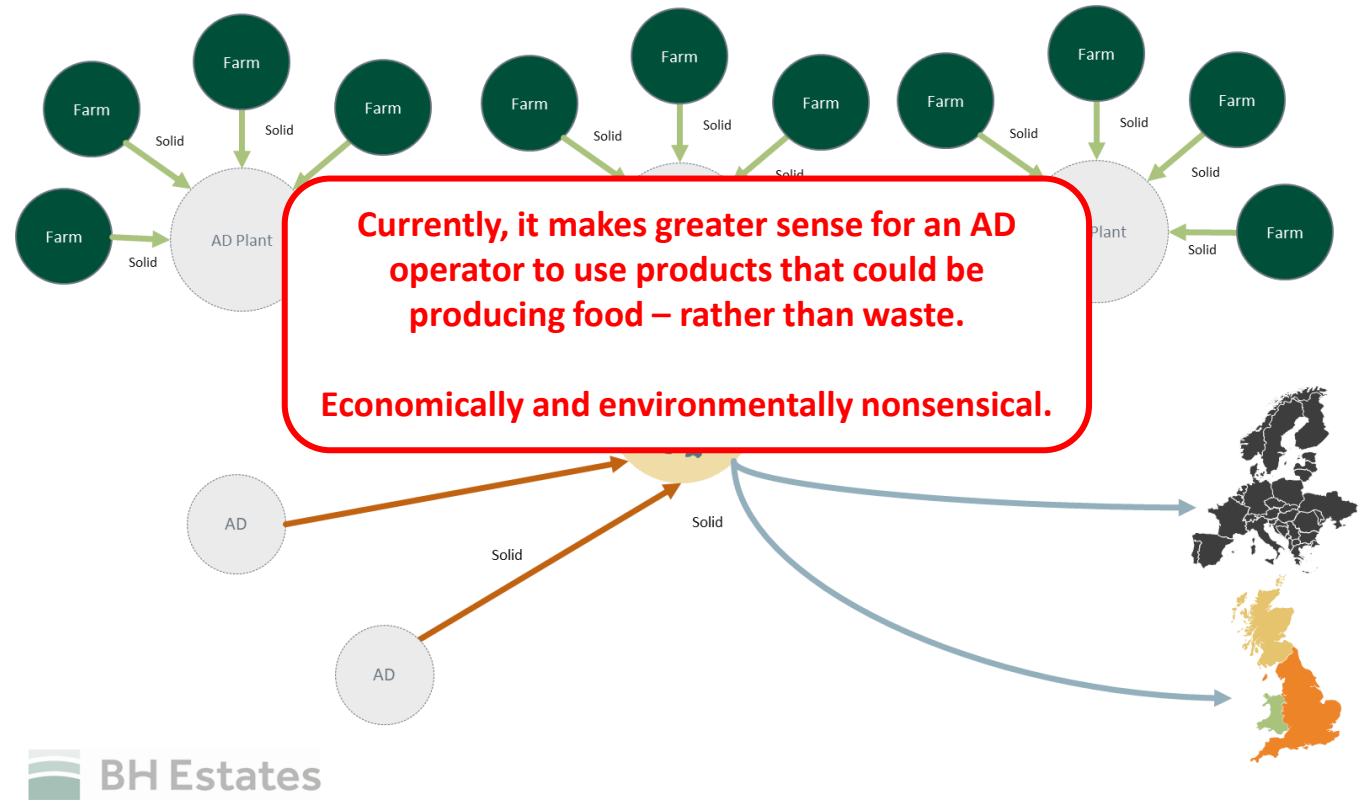
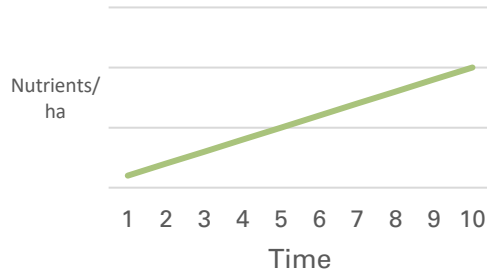


NAP - What is the problem?



BH Estates

- Although manure material can be/is used by AD in NI. There is a limit to how much nutrient concentration can occur.

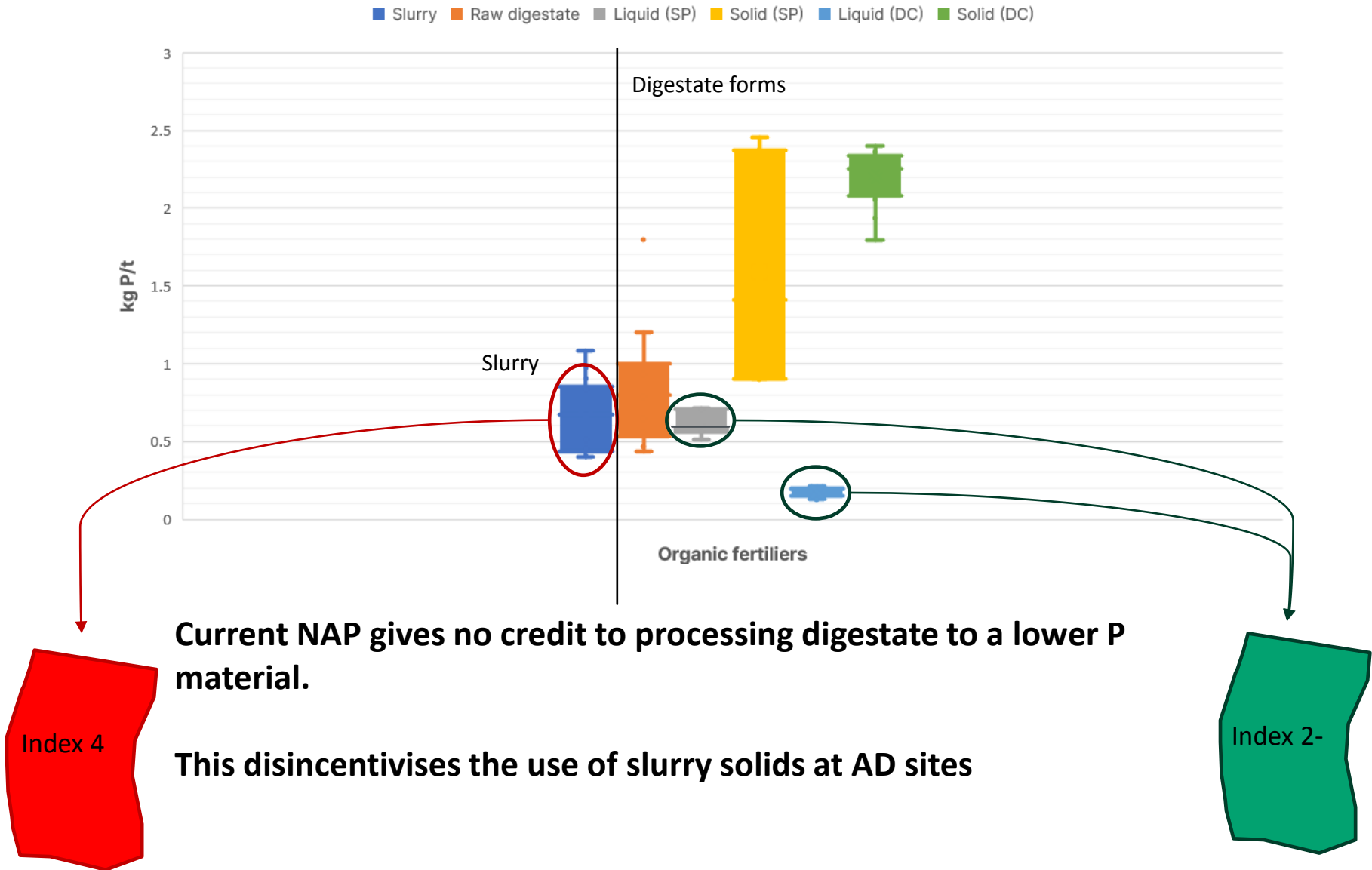


- + in the current NAP, any nutrients contained in digestate need to match crop requirement.

DISINCENTIVISES:

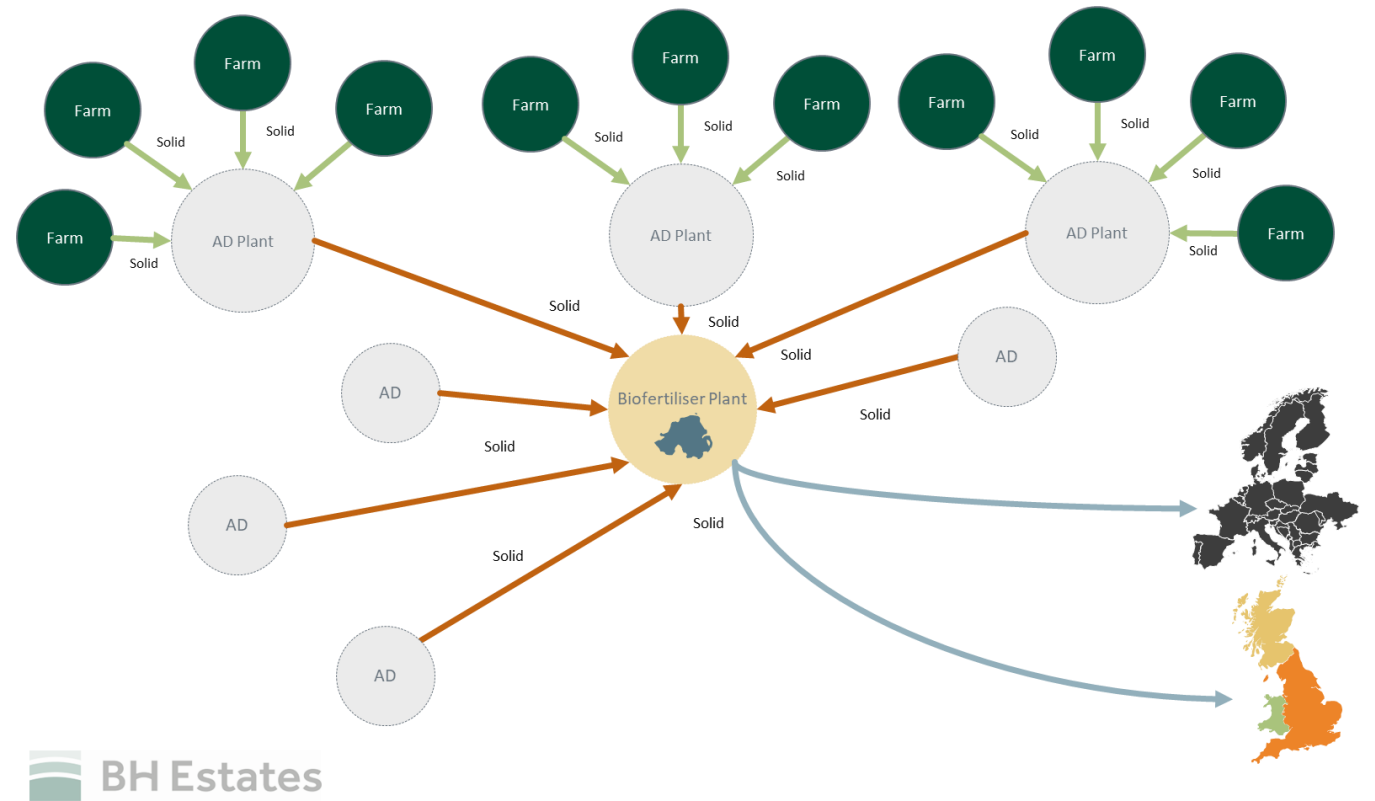
- The use of manures as AD feedstock
 - The processing of digestate.

***Necessary steps to achieve a nutrient supply chain from farms through AD*



Nutrient movement should be supported by NAP

- Incentivise AD to process digestate

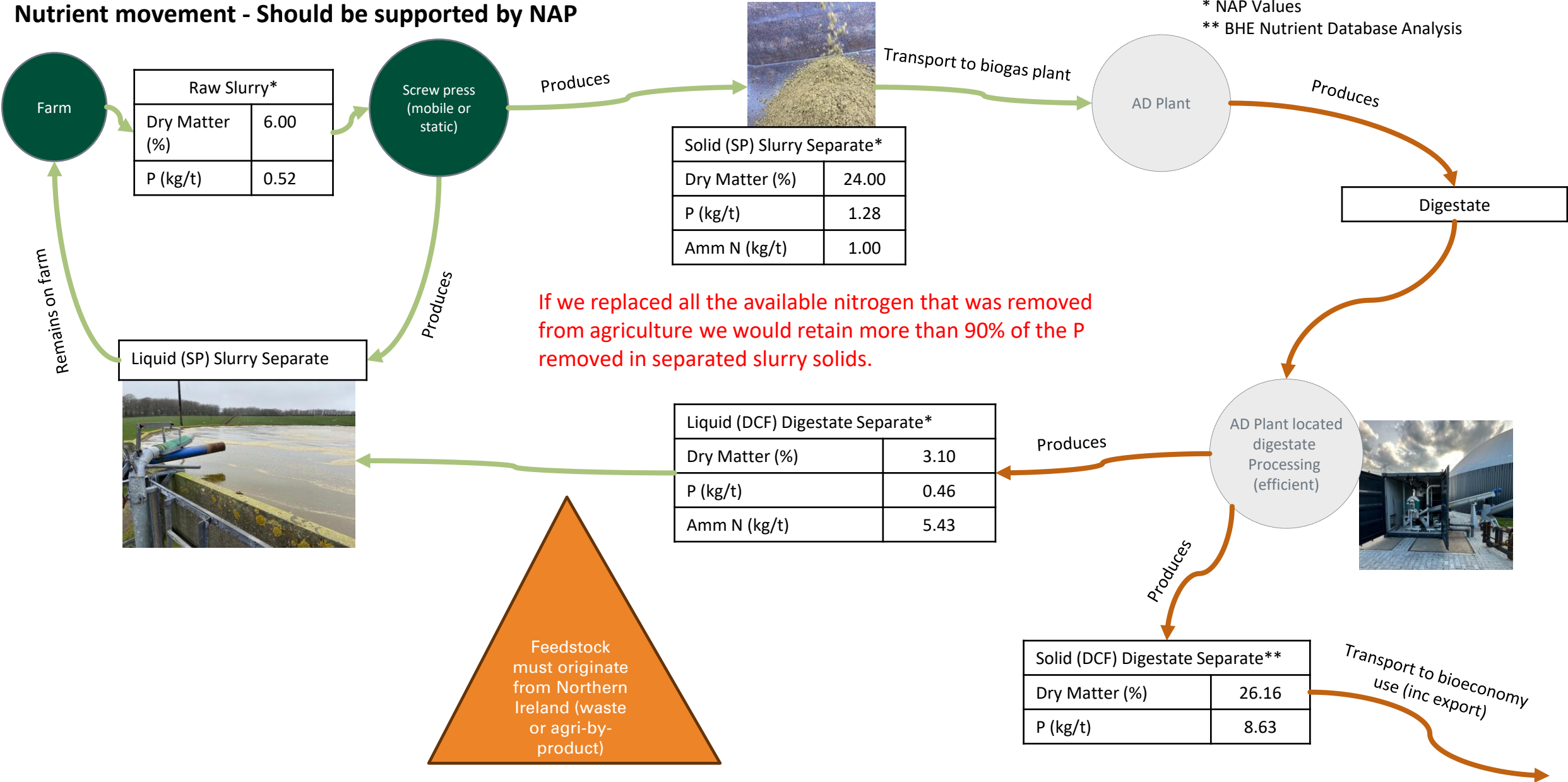


What is the solution?

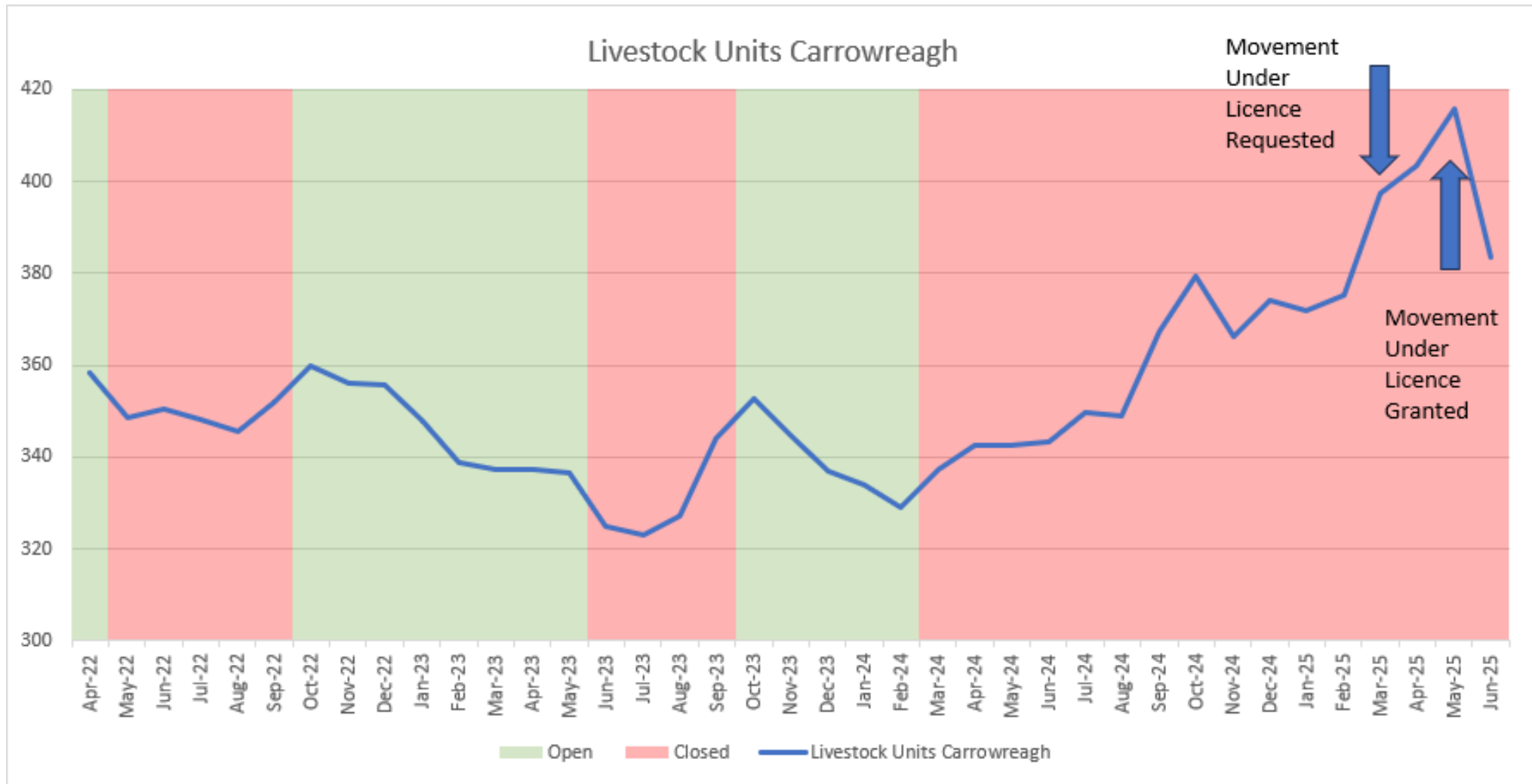
Regulations must encourage and support the capture of phosphorus by AD plants rather than penalise it.

To regulate a version of Low P digestate in same manner as bovine slurry provided certain low P parameters are demonstrably met.

Nutrient movement - Should be supported by NAP



Some farms *need* to remove nutrients, and sometimes having too many nutrients is no fault of their own (TB).



What about Ammonia?

Key point:

Scaled nutrient supply chain can deliver effective and meaningful ammonia reductions and support phosphorus redistribution.

Key action:

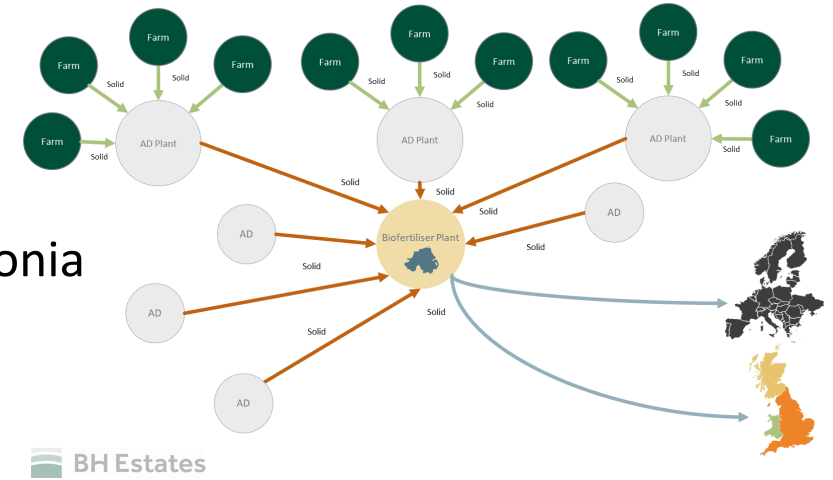
Planning/Operational Protocol – NIEA should recommend granting of planning permission for nutrient recovery technologies in order to deliver reductions of nutrient pollution and other legislative requirements.

DAERA Target:

6.69 kT reduction in ammonia emissions nationally on 2022 levels.

BH – Pre-reviewed Initial Project Assessment:

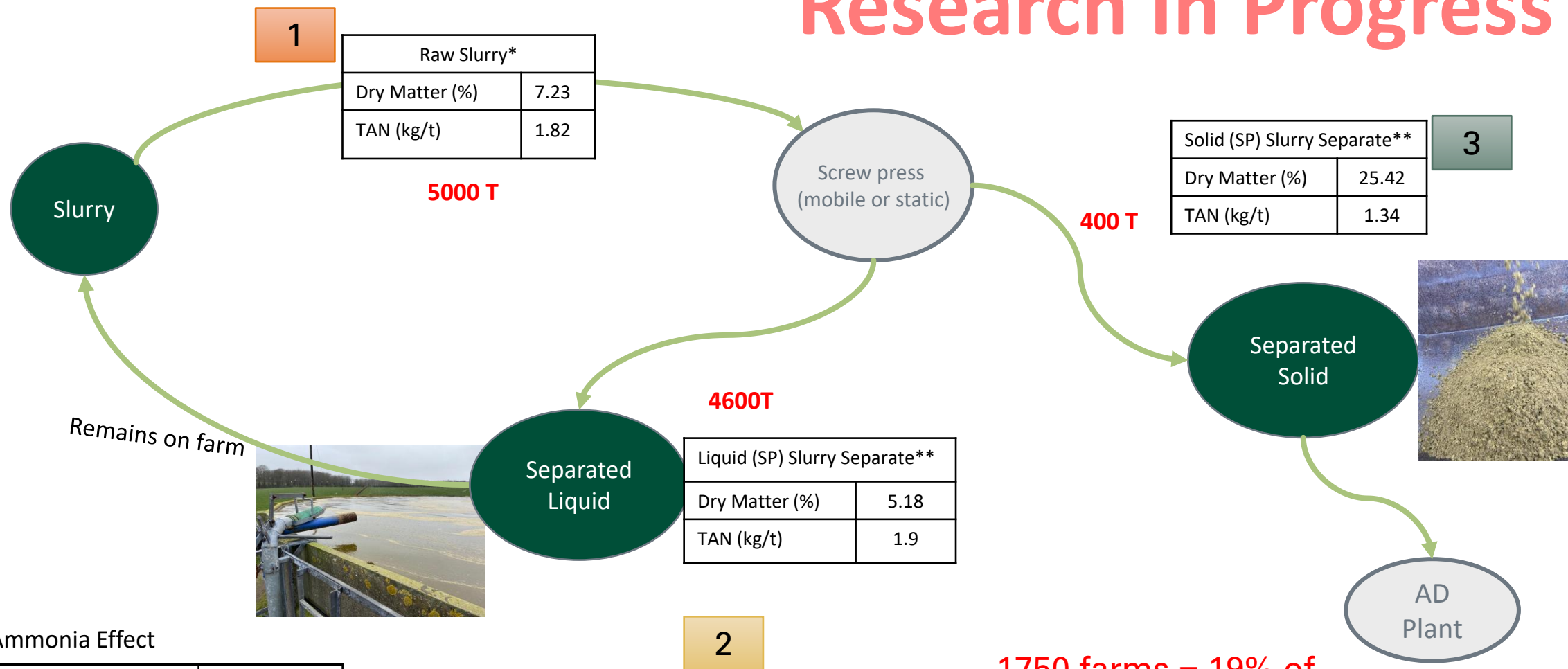
19% of 6.69kT reduction in ammonia emissions can be delivered if nutrient supply chain is restricted to cattle slurry solids only



Research In Progress

What about Ammonia?

Research In Progress



Ammonia Effect

Consideration	Effect on ammonia
Less TAN (less slurry)	Reduction
Less dry matter in slurry	Reduction
Enabling LESSE	Reduction

- Roughly 835 kg less NH₃ is emitted with nutrient recovery per farm*

1750 farms = 19% of national target reduction in ammonia.

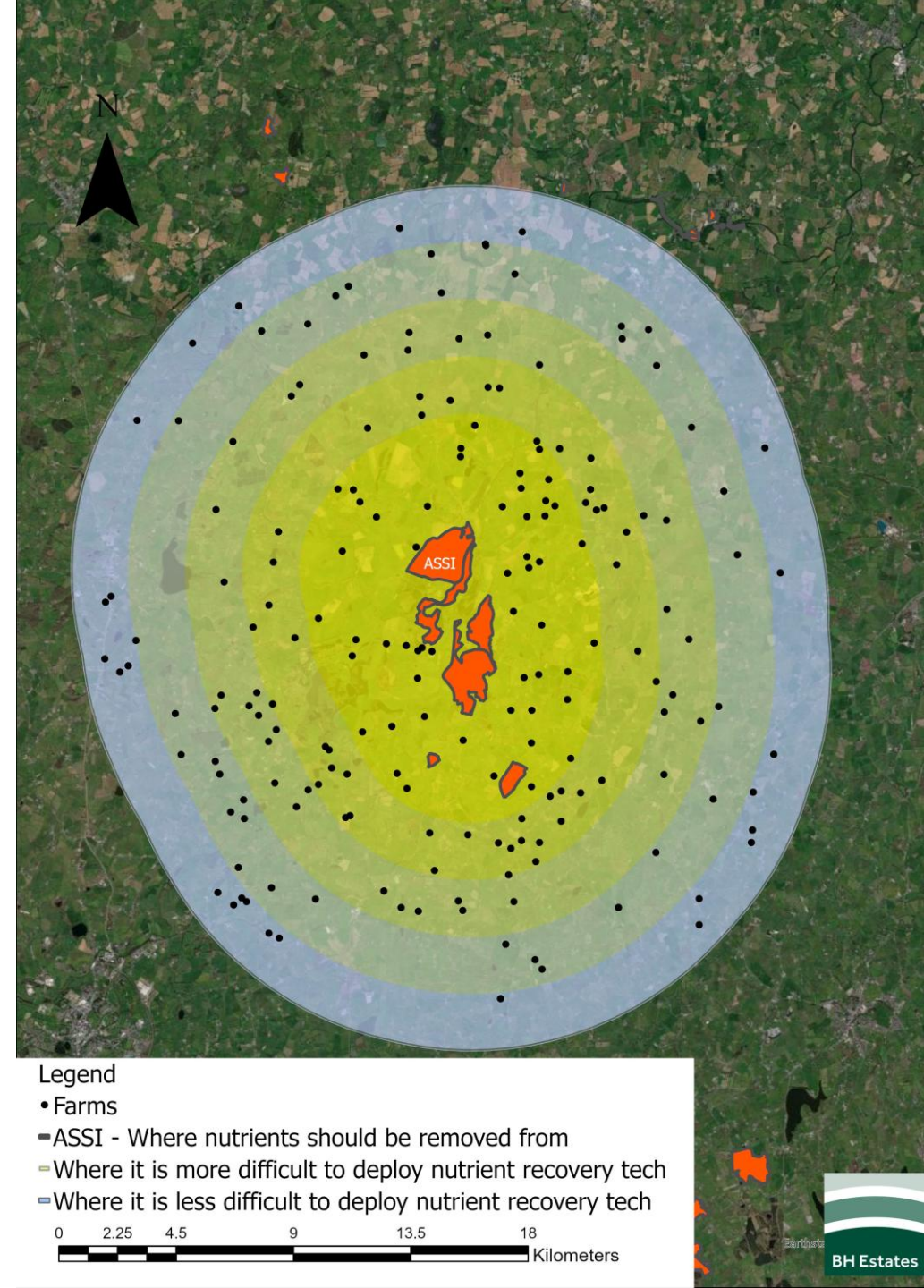
RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Currently the biggest legislative barrier we have identified in the delivery of this supply chain

- Interpretation of operational protocol (HRA Article 6(3) v other legislation).
- Relationship between Operational Protocol and NAP/manure processing.
- It is impossible to avoid ammonia emissions (albeit small) in a livestock manure processing supply chain.

If not addressed

- Effect of NAP?
- Lough Neagh Action Plan?
- Climate Action Plan?
- Biomethane?
- Renewable Electricity and CHP?



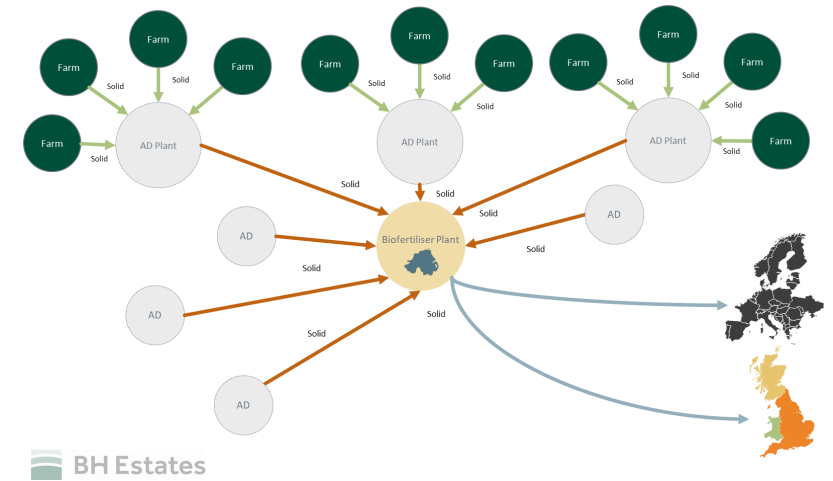
Economics of AD

Key point:

AD is a waste management technology but supports tied to the generation or export of energy are vital.

Key action:

Competitive scheme for the generation of biomethane and CHP anaerobic digestion must both be brought forward.



Economics of Renewables: Waste AD needs subsidy

	Solar	Wind (Onshore)	Anaerobic Digestion (Large & waste/manure)
Annual Operational Expenditure per MW installed	£10-20,000	£30-40,000	£800k - £1m
Removes Waste from Rural or Urban Economy (Environment)	✗	✗	✓
Contributes to Energy Security	✓	✓	✓
Contributes to Food Security (Nutrient redistribution)	✗	✗	✓
Target operational efficiency	20%	40%	90%



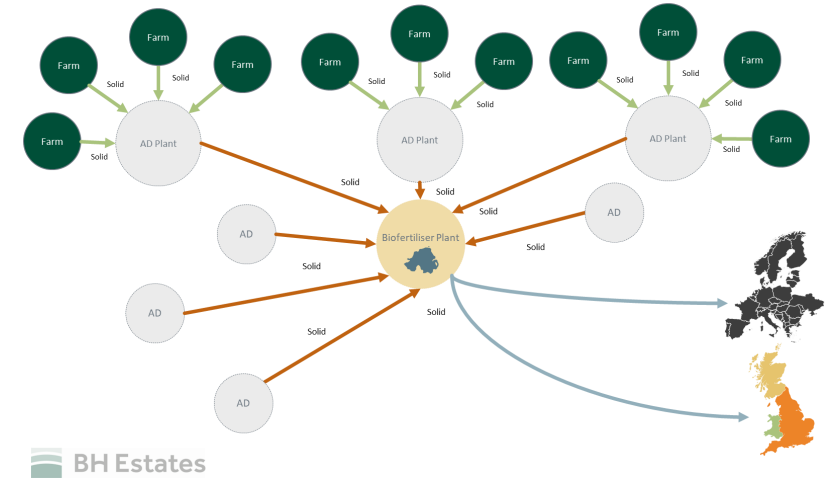
What about Waste?

Key point:

AD is a waste management technology but many AD plants don't have and can't get Waste Management Licenses.

Key action:

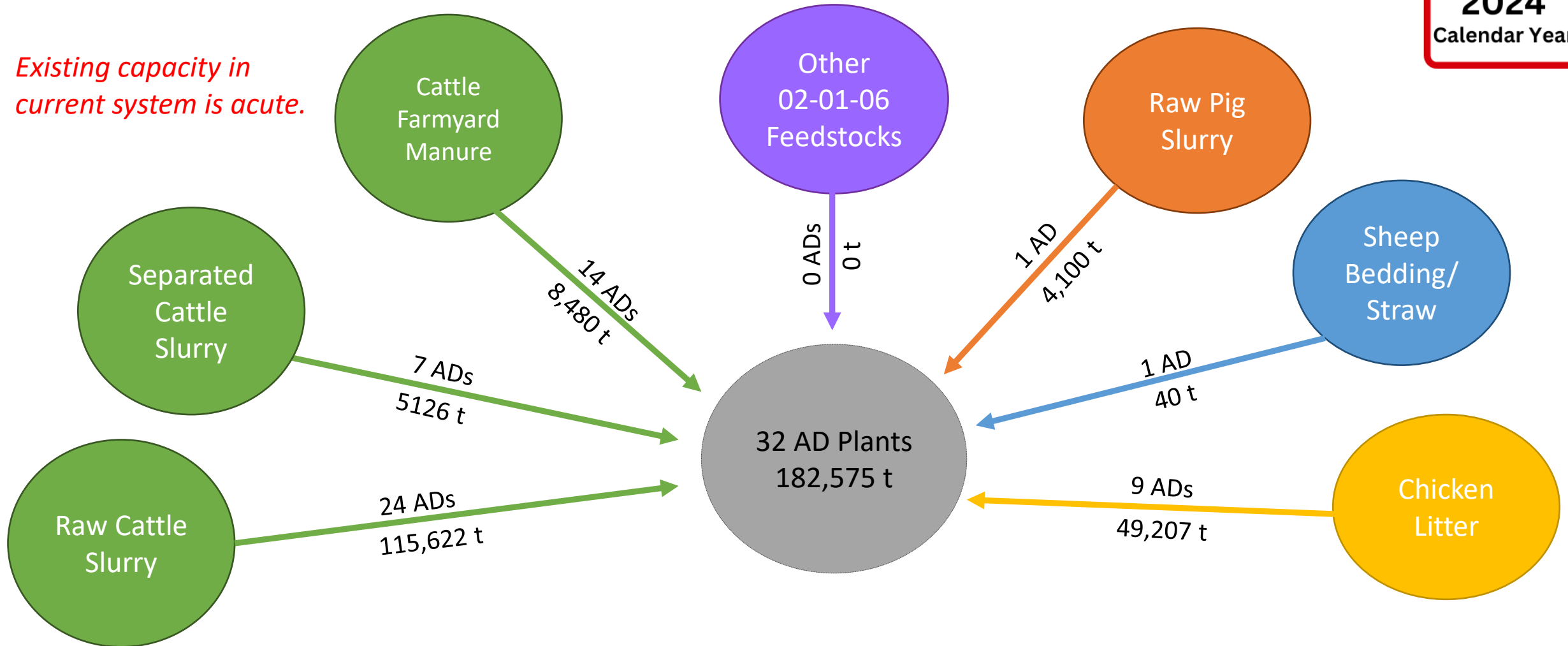
License AD plants to take 02-01-06 to increase the amount of manure and slurries being used as AD feedstock.



Slurries & Manure used in ADs as Feedstock in NI



Existing capacity in current system is acute.



*2023 NIEA total reported (02-01-06) waste tonnage for ADs with Waste Management Licenses (36 plants): 174,230t



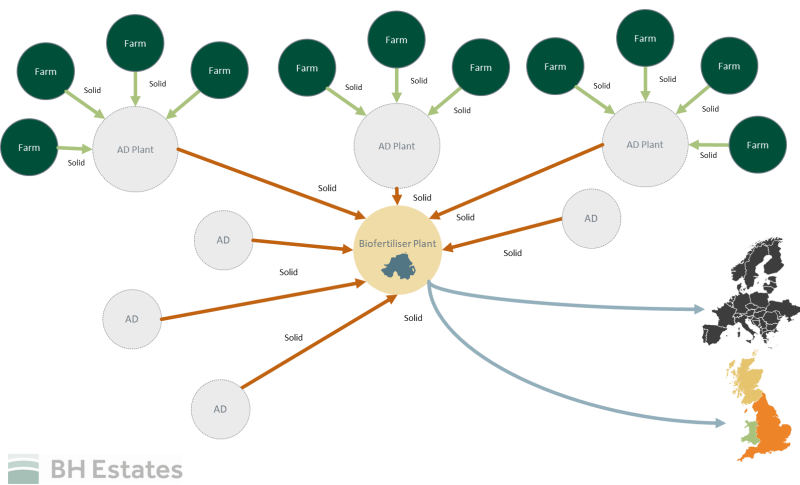
**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Research by: Karly Frederick,
MSc Leadership for Sustainable
Rural Development

Support provided by:
 BH Estates

Making Organo-Mineral Fertiliser – Current Possibility

(The exciting part)



Summary of Key Points – The opportunity for NI

Market (Customers)	Significant opportunity NI scale & market scale	Only an opportunity if we move quickly
Wide economic benefits	Business is shared venture with key partners	Starts to address nutrient challenges in NI Agri-food
Not re-inventing the wheel	Planning submitted and building in engineering design	Use established technology with patents Market is already there.
Quality of product made	Less air quality issues Less water quality issues	Competes (£) with mineral fert, but not from Russia Existing ag equipment is largely unchanged
Key Question	Can we deliver this in the time available given the barriers we face?	



Key Barriers:

NAP Key Action:

Regulations must encourage and support the capture of phosphorus by AD plants rather than penalise it.

Ammonia - Revised Operational Protocol Key Action:

NIEA should recommend granting of planning permission for nutrient recovery technologies in order to deliver reductions of nutrient pollution and other legislative requirements.

Waste Management Licensing Key Action:

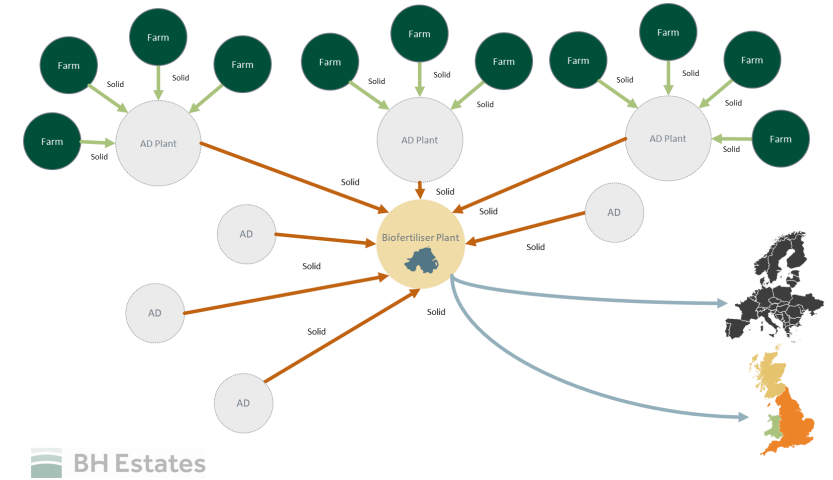
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Thanks

From [REDACTED]
Date Thu 26/06/2025 20:27
To +Comm Agri-Env-Rural Public Email <Committee.AgriEnvRural@niassembly.gov.uk>; Butler, Robbie <robbie.butler@mla.niassembly.gov.uk>
Cc [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

 1 attachment (1 MB)
AERA Slides Shared.pdf;

You don't often get email from jack@bhestates.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Janice and Robbie,

This is just a note to say thanks to the Committee Members and staff for taking the time to visit us today. We very much appreciate the time that was taken and the effort of committee staff members.

Please convey our thanks to the members, and please also convey the offer to members who were not able to make it to visit at a convenient date. We would also be happy to have follow up visits or discussions if that is of use.

[REDACTED] asked for some of the details to provide a write up and so I have attached the majority of the slide presentation for her.

With kind regards,

[REDACTED]

BH Estates

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

W: www.bhestates.com

