

Northern Ireland Assembly  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

Dear First Minister and Deputy First Minister,

**RE: COP26 & Nature Friendly Farming**

We would like to draw your attention to a recent report called: “A Practical Guide to Climate & Biodiversity Restoration”, which sets out practical guidance for farmers on delivering better outcomes for climate change and biodiversity. We would be delighted to meet with you and welcome you on a farm visit to discuss the findings of the report and explore how we can support its implementation in Northern Ireland.

As the UK hosts COP26, it is vital that the Northern Ireland Executive leads by example and enacts a bold climate and nature agenda.

As farmers with the support of environmental organisations across Northern Ireland, we are urging you to take action before it’s too late.

We know that farming practices and the condition of our environment are inextricably linked. Elsewhere, Governments have promised to deliver new agricultural policies to ensure a sustainable sector that is capable of contributing significantly to environmental goals including addressing climate change and nature’s recovery.

With the climate crisis looming and nature in decline, we know that business as usual in Northern Ireland is not an option. Helping to mainstream nature friendly farming is essential to build thriving resilient businesses, repair our natural environment and ensure farmers can produce healthy, nutritious food.

As the report demonstrates, farmers across Northern Ireland (and England, Scotland and Wales) are already putting these systems in place. We represent a growing community within the sector who are ready to tackle the twin crises of the climate and nature emergencies by providing nature and public benefit in diverse and innovative ways. What is at the heart of our efforts is a belief that we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to re-purpose how farmland is used and managed. We are already demonstrating, across a range of farming systems, what the evolving role of a farmer looks like.

To achieve the necessary scale of change, farmers need to be supported through ambitious policies that reward them for delivering environmental



[www.nffn.org.uk](http://www.nffn.org.uk)

✉ [info@nffn.org.uk](mailto:info@nffn.org.uk)  
🐦 [@nffnuk](https://twitter.com/nffnuk)  
📷 [nffnuk](https://www.instagram.com/nffnuk)  
📘 Nature Friendly Farming Network



benefits that are not paid for by the marketplace, such as increasing wildlife habitats, ensuring clean watercourses, improving air quality, building healthy soil and improving carbon storage.



We urge the Northern Ireland Executive to implement the following measures so farmers are supported to make the changes that are desperately needed to deliver a healthy food and farming system:

- **Deliver on ambition** through a Northern Ireland Agriculture Act and help farmers move beyond basic good practice to drive genuine improvements in the natural environment.
- **Create structures** to enable broad stakeholder input to discussions around the development and implementation of future agricultural policy. For example, an Agricultural Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB) has been established in Scotland.
- **Set ambitious targets** in law for the restoration of nature and the environment in Northern Ireland. New targets should have clear timelines and should empower farmers by linking future incentives to the delivery of key environmental commitments.
- **Ensure fairness** - some farmers have been left disadvantaged by previous agri-environment schemes, which created a patchwork of support that only some farmers could access. Farmers should be fairly rewarded for the delivery of public goods and incentives should clearly promote and encourage evidence-based best practice.
- **Publish an ambitious Climate Change Act** for Northern Ireland with a challenging target to achieve net-zero emissions. This must be followed up by a Climate Action Plan, which will deliver the necessary actions across sectors to reach net-zero. The plan must include ambitious policies and proposals for agriculture. With the right support and incentives farmers can be key allies in the fight against climate change.
- **Prioritise climate- and nature-friendly farming systems** that can store carbon, enhance our environment and restore wildlife. This should involve ending direct payments and repurposing this funding to help support farmers through a just transition to sustainable environmental land management.
- **Quantify** how farming systems impact biodiversity and our natural environment by introducing transparency, traceability and clearer labelling on food products so consumers are better informed of food production measures and their contribution to public benefit.



WOODLAND TRUST  
NORTHERN IRELAND



The Northern Ireland Executive must embrace this crucial moment to transform farming for the betterment of our climate, nature and people.



We have the talent, ingenuity, knowledge and skills within the farming community in Northern Ireland to help realise the ambition of a truly sustainable food and farming system. We urge you to take action and demonstrate leadership to deliver positive change before it's too late.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Meharg". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Meharg, NI Chair, **Nature Friendly Farming Network**

Cc Edwin Poots, Minister for the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

This letter is endorsed by the following organisations:-

**RSPB Northern Ireland**

**Ulster Wildlife**

**Northern Ireland Environment Link**

**Woodland Trust**

**Plantlife**

**Soil Association**

**Bumblebee Conservation Trust**

**Friend of the Earth NI**

**Butterfly Conservation**

**Amphibian and Reptile Conservation**