

Development Plan for Grazing Animal Project in Northern Ireland



Andrew Upton & Rachel Bain - September 2006

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Executive summary

Agriculture has had a profound effect on the flora and fauna of the rural environment in Northern Ireland (NI), with much of the rural landscape reflecting centuries of agricultural activity. The effects of agriculture on the environment can be both positive and negative. In the past, overgrazing has been a significant problem affecting semi-natural habitats, especially in the uplands. However, the last few years have witnessed major reform in agricultural support policy with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform agreement of 2003, which is likely to lead to reduced stocking numbers within NI and abandonment of marginal grazing land in the future.

Agri-environment schemes have been developed by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in NI to encourage farmers and landowners to adopt environmentally friendly management practices. By June 2006, 10,000 agri-environment agreements were in place covering 46% of farmland within the province. However, many sites in NI including a significant number of ASSI's, have been found to be in unfavourable condition due to undergrazing or a lack of grazing, resulting in rank vegetation becoming dominant and/or scrub encroachment, with a particular concentration in the fens within Co. Down.

The Grazing Animal Project (GAP) was formed in 1997 to aid the development of conservation grazing in the United Kingdom (UK). It is a partnership project drawing representatives from both the nature conservation, agricultural and livestock sectors to help graziers, grazing managers and advisors to deliver biodiversity targets as part of integrated, viable and sustainable land management systems. GAP is largely funded by English Nature (EN) and run on a contract by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT).

GAP in NI is covered by a Local Grazing Scheme (LGS) Co-ordinator for Northern England, Scotland and NI. There are currently only 15 members of GAP in NI. However, two major developments happened during 2006 that should raise the profile and influence of GAP in the province.

Firstly, the GAPNI Steering Group was established and held its inaugural meeting during February 2006. The Group includes representatives from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), DARD, Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), non-government environmental organisations, and conservation graziers amongst others.

Secondly, in mid February 2006, Rachel Bain (Conservation Manager with the Ulster Wildlife Trust (UWT)) and Andrew Upton (Nature Reserves Manager with UWT) were employed by RSWT as Part-time GAPUK Co-ordinators on a temporary contract for seven months. The main focus was to produce a Development Plan for GAPNI, which will be agreed and signed off by the GAPNI Steering Group.

A consultation exercise was therefore carried out with the various stakeholders with an interest in developing GAPNI and a total of 48 responses were received. It identified a wide range of land managers and graziers currently involved in conservation grazing in NI, comprising 45 sites (the majority of which have some form of conservation designation) covering a total of 5,200 ha. The majority of stock grazing these sites were sheep with lesser numbers of cattle. While a third of cattle were traditional breeds, the proportion of traditional sheep was minimal.

There has been a general move away from traditional breeds of stock in NI to continental breeds, which are considered to be less suitable for conservation grazing. DARD has proposed a payment for local breeds in danger of being lost to farming such as the Irish moiled cattle, as part of new measures for agri-environment schemes. However, the numbers of traditional stock in NI is relatively few, and it should be remembered that any stock is better than no stock at all for conservation grazing.

During the consultation exercise, respondents were asked to identify constraints to conservation grazing. These included poor stock management facilities, animal welfare and biosecurity legislation, not enough stock available (especially traditional breeds) at the required times of year, lack of layback land, many sites are scattered unproductive units, lack of farming knowledge within the conservation sector, no central co-ordination of graziers and land managers, lack of financial incentives/insufficient profitability for tenant graziers, no niche market for produce, and multiple land ownership/ management.

The Development Plan includes a wide range of recommendations aimed at addressing these constraints. They include:

- There needs to be more open and effective lines of communication between the farming community and the conservation sector to highlight issues relating to conservation grazing
- Raising the profile of GAP and conservation grazing in NI
- Financial incentives specifically for graziers (especially tenants) for undertaking conservation grazing
- Layback land for finishing stock is required to ensure an integrated and viable approach to conservation grazing for graziers
- The employment of a full-time GAPNI Co-ordinator is required, who will be part of the GAPUK network
- GAPNI should focus initially on sites not covered by agri-environment agreements, especially those with conservation designations
- Local grazing schemes should be the main delivery mechanism for much of GAPNI's work
- Use of stock that is most suitable for grazing individual sites
- Agri-environment schemes play an important role in conservation grazing and funding for them should continue and increase
- Information and training on conservation grazing which is specific to NI should be widely available
- Potential partners should be sought in the Republic of Ireland to undertake conservation grazing throughout the island of Ireland.
- There needs to be effective marketing and branding of GAPNI added-value produce to establish a niche market

GAPNI will contribute to the NI Biodiversity Strategy, by assisting with the delivery of targets in relevant Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) and Species Action Plans (SAPs), and through the protection and enhancement of a wide range of NI priority habitats and species, and species of conservation concern. It will also assist with meeting targets imposed through the Nitrates Directive, Water Framework Directive, and Habitats Directive.

It is possible that conservation grazing may encourage new entrants into farming, at a time when the numbers of farmers is rapidly dwindling and the proportion of young/middle-aged farmers is getting less each year.

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Andrew Upton & Rachel Bain - September 2006

1) Introduction

1.1) Grazing Animal Project

The Grazing Animal Project (GAP) was formed in 1997 to aid the development of conservation grazing in the United Kingdom (UK). It is a partnership project of 26 organisations drawing representatives from both the nature conservation, agricultural and livestock sectors to help graziers, grazing managers and advisors to deliver biodiversity targets as part of integrated, viable and sustainable land management systems. GAP is largely funded by English Nature (EN) and run on a contract by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT). It is an initiative of FACT (Forum for the Application of Conservation Techniques) and the original 'Grazing Forum'.

GAP has three main work areas:

- Local Grazing Schemes (LGS) - GAP are involved at various levels in the co-ordination of around 100 LGS's across the UK. These schemes involve a wide range of partnership organisations, with an emphasis on delivering conservation objectives through the application of grazing to the benefit of local habitats and communities. Support to existing schemes and facilitation of new LGS's is provided by two Co-ordinators (one for Southern England and Wales and the other for Northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland)
- Removal of constraints to conservation grazing through development of the 'Constraints Tool Kit', including delivery of LANTRA accredited training courses (livestock husbandry for conservation practitioners), response to policy consultations, and production and updating of handbooks (i.e. Breed Profiles Handbook, LGS best practice guide, Guide to animal welfare in Conservation Grazing, Marketing Guide for Conservation Grazing schemes, and Practical Solutions Handbook)
- Assistance to GAP's 1,500 members through its 'Servicing and Networking Service' – this is supported by the UK GAP Co-ordinator and a GAP administrator, the latter based at the GAP office in Newark, Nottinghamshire, and includes: a website (www.grazinganimalsproject.org); regular field visits and workshops; quarterly newsletter 'GAP News'; e-mail discussion groups for resolving problems and sharing best practice ('Nibblers', 'Scrubnet' and 'Organnrs'); free advertising service for goods, services and grazing (www.ecolots.co.uk); working in partnership with Eurosite on a European context; a series of information leaflets; and a grazing issues query service for members. GAP membership is free

In the devolved countries, a grazing animal project (Pori Natur A Threftadaeth) commenced in Wales during July 2006. A Co-ordinator has now been appointed and will be employed for three years through grant aid from the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW).

1.2) GAP in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland (NI) is covered by Jane Wilson, who is the GAP LGS Co-ordinator for Northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and based in Hexham, Northumberland. However, one of GAPUK's aims is to secure a dedicated member of staff solely for Northern Ireland.

There are currently 15 members of GAP in NI, out of a total membership of over 1,500 in the UK. The majority of members are from environmental organisations who manage land through conservation grazing. Only two GAP members are individual graziers who actively graze conservation land with their own stock within the province.

The GAP Northern Ireland (GAPNI) Steering Group held its inaugural meeting on 15th February 2006 at the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) offices in Magherafelt. The second meeting was held on 12th April 2006, again facilitated by FWAG, and a third meeting was held on 3rd July 2006 at the Lough Neagh Partnership offices in Magherafelt. The next meeting is scheduled for 7th September 2006.

The Steering Group includes representatives from FWAG, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), National Trust (NT), Ulster Wildlife Trust (UWT), GAPUK, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Belfast Hills Partnership, Craigavon Borough Council, Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST), Ulster Farmers Union (UFU), Irish Moiled Cattle Society, Lough Neagh Partnership/Local Biodiversity Officers, South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association (SLNRA) and several farmers who actively undertake conservation grazing.

There has been talk amongst environmental organisations of establishing some type of grazing animal project in NI for nearly 20 years now, but nothing has ever happened (pers comm. P. Davidson, 2005). In November 2004, David Hawthorne from the National Trust held a developmental workshop in Murlough House. Over 30 people attended this event, with representatives from a range of organisations and graziers.

In mid February 2006, Rachel Bain (Conservation Manager with the Ulster Wildlife Trust (UWT)) and Andrew Upton (Nature Reserves Manager with UWT) were employed by RSWT as Part-time GAPUK Co-ordinators on a temporary contract for seven months (maternity cover). From the outset, it was decided to call the project GAPNI and several articles have appeared in GAP News. The main focus was to produce a Development Plan for a Grazing Animal Project in NI, which will be agreed and signed off by GAPNI Steering Group at the meeting on 7th September 2006.

A consultation exercise was carried out by GAPUK during March/April 2006 with the various stakeholders with an interest in developing GAP in NI. A total of 48 responses were received. Of these; 21 were classified as been landowners/managers interested in conservation grazing from the conservation sector, six were conservation graziers leasing land with their own stock, four were landowners/managers undertaking conservation grazing with their own stock, six were interested in policy relating to conservation grazing, five were interested in conservation grazing research, and six co-ordinated the management of conservation areas.

GAPUK/UWT submitted a funding application to the Rural Development Council (RDC) in mid May 2006 to employ a GAPNI Co-ordinator for two years. Unfortunately, RDC notified UWT in July 2006 that the application had been unsuccessful. An application will be submitted to Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) before mid September 2006.

It is also planned to run two LANTRA accredited GAP stock husbandry training courses for the first time in NI during October 2006; a one day 'lookers' course and a two day 'introduction to stock management for conservation grazing' course.

2) Overall Context

2.1) Past and current farming in Northern Ireland

Farming is the cornerstone of Northern Ireland's rural economy through its roles in food production and the protection and enhancement of the countryside. Agriculture plays a more important role in the economy of NI than is the case in the UK as a whole. Over a third of NI's VAT registered businesses are found in the agricultural sector compared with the UK average of 8.8%. However, the relative contribution of agriculture to the economy in NI has halved during the last 15 years (DARD 2006b). Of the total NI land area of 1.4 million hectares, approximately 80% is in agricultural use. 35% of NI's 1.7 million inhabitants live in a rural area (defined as a settlement with fewer than 4,500 inhabitants).

The first agricultural census in Ireland was conducted in 1847, in response to the need for information on the famine conditions at that time. The statistics below, relating to 50 year intervals, show how NI has changed from a mixed farming economy to one dependent on grazing livestock (DARD 2005a). The climate, soils and topography of NI are best suited to livestock production based on grass.

Crop areas (ha)	1855	1905	1955	2005
Cereals	279,000	155,000	106,000	36,000
Potatoes	89,000	72,000	47,000	5,000
Flax	22,000	15,000	4,000	0
Hay & pasture	655,000	802,000	729,000	811,000

Livestock numbers (head)	1855	1905	1955	2005
Cattle	717,000	804,000	904,000	1,666,000
Of which Cows	NA	NA	255,000	587,000
Sheep	209,000	355,000	870,000	2,145,000
Horses	118,000	118,000	28,000	9,000
Pigs	184,000	220,000	686,000	405,000
Poultry	1,655,000	4,658,000	11,272,000	17,614,000
Goats	NA	NA	NA	2,300

Agriculture in NI is now predominantly grass-based, with dairy, beef and sheep production accounting for 81% of NI aggregate gross margin. In 2005, the total area farmed in Northern Ireland was 1,029,500 ha (c.f. 1,083,800 ha in 1991), of which 811,400 ha was grass and 148,600 was hill or rough land. The Less Favoured Areas (LFA's), designated under European Union (EU) legislation, account for 70% of farmed land in NI. Some 80% of sheep in the region are farmed within the LFA, with

a similar proportion of the beef cows. This has helped the viability of hill and upland farms by providing headage payments for sheep and cattle, but has resulted in substantial increases in stocking densities and significant problems of overgrazing.

In 2005, there were 27,064 farms in NI, a reduction of 33% since 1980. This reflects the on-going restructuring of the industry in response to rising labour productivity and the decline in the relative price of agricultural commodities. Farm incomes declined steeply in the second half of the 1990's, followed by a period of limited recovery from 1999-2004. The level of aggregate agricultural income is tied very closely to the sterling/euro exchange rate. Other factors contributing to the income decline of the 1990's were the BSE crisis, falling demand in key export markets and declining world prices for many agricultural commodities. 84% of sheep produced in NI is exported, including 43% to Great Britain (GB) and 41% to France or others. 80% of beef produced in NI is exported to Great Britain (GB). However, this will now change with the decision to lift the ten year ban on NI beef exports to Europe on 8th March 2006, which was a much needed boost for the industry after the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis.

Cattle/Dairy Farming

In 1980, cattle were found on 70% of farms in NI, but by 2004, this had risen to 86%. In the case of sheep, the increase was from 18% to 32%.

In 2005, there were 4,058 dairy farms (c.f. 5,121 in 1998), 15,430 cattle and sheep farms in LFA's (c.f. 16,983 in 1998), and 4,619 lowland cattle and sheep farms (4,942 in 1998) in NI.

In 2004, NI produced 12.5% of UK milk production (c.f. 9.4% in 1994), suggesting milk production and marketing is more competitive than in Great Britain (GB). Productivity of dairy cows has grown by 35% in terms of average milk yield per cow over the past 20 years in NI (DARD 2006b). This has been achieved through improved cow genetics and livestock management techniques. The percentage of UK beef supplies produced in NI increased from 15.6% in 1994 to 19.7% in 2004. Good grass growing conditions in NI and lower total labour costs probably explain much of this increased competitiveness. There has also been a substantial increase in overall stocking densities from 0.91 Grazing Livestock Units (GSU) per forage hectare to 1.4 GSU/ha between 1960 and 1999.

There were 1,665,608 cattle on 23,491 farms in NI during 2005 (average herd size was 71).

The distribution of cattle farms in NI during 2005 was as follows: Antrim – 3,955; Armagh – 3,468; Down – 4,119; Fermanagh – 3,072; L'Derry – 2,940; and Tyrone – 5,937.

In 2005, there were 354,500 dairy cows/dairy heifers-in-calf and 327,000 beef cows/beef heifers-in-calf in NI, together with 17,200 breeding bulls and 966,800 other cattle (up to two years old).

Beef cow breeds 1973-2003 (Northern Ireland Agricultural Survey)

	1973	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003
Aberdeen Angus	24%	23%	22%	27%	23%	21%	18%	17%	16%
Friesian	18%	17%	20%	18%	11%	4%	2%	1%	1%
Hereford	28%	27%	25%	20%	16%	12%	9%	7%	6%
Shorthorn	23%	16%	12%	8%	6%	4%	3%	3%	2%
Simmental	-	11%	14%	17%	23%	29%	29%	25%	18%
Limousin	-	-	-	-	12%	16%	20%	25%	33%

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Charolais	-	-	-	-	7%	9%	12%	13%	12%
Others	7%	6%	7%	10%	2%	5%	7%	9%	11%

The table above shows that there has been a general move away from traditional breeds of cattle in NI to continental breeds, which are less suitable for conservation grazing. The majority of traditional cattle breeds now kept in NI tend to originate from Scotland, such as Aberdeen Angus, and to a lesser extent Belted Galloway and Highland Cattle. There are also a small number of cattle breeds that originate from the Irish Republic that are kept in NI, such as Dexters and Kerry. In addition, there are Beef Shorthorn which originate from Northumberland. Further details of these breeds and their suitability for conservation grazing can be found in the GAP 'The Breed Profiles Handbook'.

The only native breed in NI is the Irish Moiled Cattle, which is a traditional breed of ancient lineage with a long history as a dual purpose hardy animal, producing both high quality beef and milk. During the twentieth century, the breed declined in numbers as it was superseded by new specialised breeds. By the 1970s, it had been reduced to less than 30 females maintained by two breeders in NI. The Irish Moiled Cattle Society was formed in 1926 to develop and improve the breed. By June 2005, there were 670 Irish moiled cattle in existence. DARD has an initiative for new entrants to its agri-environment schemes, with farmers receiving £125 per head annually for keeping registered Irish Moiled Cattle. This is likely to lead to extra demand for the breed (pers comm. B. Elkin). However, only a couple of farmers will be eligible in NI as virtually all existing herds are managed under the existing CMS.

The National Beef Association (NBA) is worried about the enthusiasm amongst some environmental organisations (and some sections of Defra) (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) for the exclusive promotion of rare breeds and/or native breeds for specific environmental management, and the apparent absence to identify which breeds would be most suitable or the acceptance that some breeds, some of which are non-native and definitely not rare, can perform better in some areas than others. The reason some breeds have become rare is that their production/profit performance has become progressively uneconomic and that it is pointless keeping any type of cattle unless there is a place in the market for either their beef or the environmental goods (or both) that they can deliver. However, it must also be accepted that cattle will be required to do different jobs now that UK agriculture is faced with decoupling and that new roles for new types could soon emerge. Even if native cattle were the most suitable for the conservation grazing management, there is no great number of native animals. It would be wrong to ignore the ability of suitable Continental types or crosses to play their role in conservation grazing (Drovers Project Report 2005).

Sheep Farming

There were 2,145,084 sheep on 8,822 farms in NI in 2005 (average flock size was 243).

In 2005, there were 1,027,300 ewes in NI, together with 39,200 rams and 1,078,600 lambs under one year old.

The distribution of sheep farms in NI during 2005 was as follows: Antrim – 2,016; Armagh – 738; Down – 1,993; Fermanagh – 502; L'Derry – 1,624; and Tyrone – 1,949.

Virtually all the traditional sheep kept in NI are Scottish Blackface. It has been suggested that some of the Scottish Blackface sheep in the Mourne, Glens of Antrim and Sperrins exhibit their own characteristics and may be a distinctive breed (pers comm. B. Elkin). There are no traditional breeds of sheep native to NI.

Of the 27,064 farms in NI in 2005; 5,413 were under 10ha; 6,025 were 10-19.9 ha; 4,211 were 20-29.9 ha; 5,115 were 30-49.9 ha; 4,505 were 50-99.9 ha; and 1,795 were 100+ ha. The average farm size in NI is 38.5 ha – smaller than the UK average of 56.6 ha. In NI, 87% of farms are categorised as small or very small. Dairy farms account for the majority of large farms, whilst most of the very small farms are cattle and sheep farms in LFA's.

In 2005, there were a total of 51,100 farmers, spouses and other workers in NI (a 22% decline since 1980). Of these, 22,800 were full-time, 21,000 were part-time, and 7,300 were casual/seasonal. There has been a shift from full-time towards part-time and casual working patterns. Fewer farms in NI are now economically sustainable. In 2001/02, only 28% of farmers relied on farming for all their income, with a further 44% receiving half or more of their income from farming. Therefore, for many farmers, non-farm sources of income are vitally important. One source of non-farm income is diversification. In 2000, only 13% of farms were involved in a diversification activity, still a relatively modest figure. A survey in 2001/02 found that family farms in NI supported 107,100 persons (6.5% of the population). The median age of NI farmers in the same survey in 2001/02 was 50-54 years old (DARD 2002). In 2003, 52% of farmers were aged 55 and over, with only 26% under 45 years old. Due to the ageing population of the farming community in NI, DARD have introduced new entrance loans (with low interest) for farmers under 40 years age.

The average owner-occupied land as a percentage of area farmed in NI in 2005 was 68%.

About one-third of the land farmed in NI is let out through conacre. Conacre is a system of short-term lettings, nominally for 11 months or 364 days. It is peculiar to NI and allows landowners to claim tax back on capital items such as fencing and be exempt from inheritance tax on farmed land (pers. comm. B. Elkin). Land in NI is now treated as both a business and investment. Estimates suggest that there are around 40,000 SFP claimants and 27,000 farmers. It is suggested the reason why land prices are higher in NI than in GB, is because of a limited supply base which is reduced year on year with development/building etc. and a high demand for land by both farmers and developers. In 2004, agricultural land on average was valued at £16,286 per ha in NI.

Agriculture therefore has had a profound effect on the flora and fauna of the rural environment in NI, with much of the rural landscape reflecting centuries of agricultural activity. The effects of agriculture on the environment can be both positive and negative. Between 1990 and 1998, a number of semi-natural habitats have suffered in NI. For example, natural grassland has declined by 32% (c.f. 12% in UK) and bogland by 8% (c.f. 1% in UK). 87% of grassland in NI is classified as improved and often has little wildlife potential. There have been significant changes in forage storage. In 1965 approximately equal amounts of hay and silage were made in NI (0.72 and 0.90 tonnes respectively). By 1995 only 130,000 tonnes of hay were being made compared to 6.2 million tonnes of silage. Traditional hay meadows are widely acknowledged to be significantly more wildlife friendly than silage pasture.

2.2) Current and future policy/legislation specific to Northern Ireland farming

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reforms

The last few years have witnessed major reform in agricultural support policy with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform agreement of 2003, which was implemented in 2005. The decoupling of direct EU support from production has freed farming to respond to the demands of the market place. It is likely to lead to

significant restructuring and efficiency gains, with greater environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety delivered through cross-compliance. However, there is concern from some quarters, including the UFU, that this will not be the case. In fact they believe that since SFP is to be severely tapered, thus diminishing its influence as a source of farm income. Without it, many farms will cease to be viable and many of the benefits mentioned above will disappear as husbandry is replaced by outside full-time employment. The value of the SFP, through tapering and modulation, will not be sufficient to justify the extra measures necessary in order to fulfil compliance criteria and many farmers will simply forego claiming the payment. This situation is referred to under 'DARD Strategic Plan 2006-2011' where it states that, "In some areas, the abandonment of farming, or the reversion to very low input agriculture, could create serious environmental risks".

The resultant subsidy decoupling has meant that payments for beef, sheep and arable production have been replaced by the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme. The UK took the option of regional implementation of the SFP and therefore the way the scheme is applied in each of the regions is different and best suits the conditions of that region. The single farm payment in Northern Ireland is based on a combination of an historic reference amount and an area amount payment.

The new SFP scheme should create sustainable land management as an essential ingredient of farming and food production. SFP replaces the arable aid and livestock premium schemes. To be eligible to claim the SFP, the applicant must

- Be a farmer undertaking agricultural activity
- Have eligible agricultural land
- Meet Cross-compliance standards and requirements for all land on the holding
- Individual land parcels must be at least 0.1 ha
- The land must be at the disposal of the applicant for a minimum period of 10 consecutive months

The NI SFP set-aside rate for 2006 has now been increased to 6.9%.

Cross-compliance should place a reasonable ceiling on the numbers of stock which can be carried on farms. However, UFU do not agree to a ceiling as this would place too many restrictions on farmers and this ceiling would obviously differ depend on the type of land. Cross-compliance includes Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) Measures. For 2006, these include:

- Overgrazing – farmers must avoid overgrazing grassland, semi-natural habitats or archaeological sites with livestock in such numbers, which would damage the growth, quality or species composition of vegetation, or destroy the archaeological feature
- Undergrazing – farmers must avoid undergrazing by using appropriate grazing or cutting management, except where it is deemed necessary for environmental management, for example as part of an agri-environment agreement

The LFA Compensatory Allowance (LFACA) scheme was revised in 2004 and the objectives of the scheme are to contribute to the continuation of farming in the LFA's, to contribute towards the maintenance of a viable rural community, to contribute towards the maintenance of the countryside and to promote everyday use of good environmental practices complementary to maintaining sustainable farming. The scheme is directed to farmers involved in suckler cow and sheep production in the LFA's with a minimum stocking density of 0.2 LU/ha. The LFACA scheme is currently

available to 14,000 applicants, involving £22 million annually in support (covering at least 70% of the farmed area in NI).

Under CAP reforms agreed in 1999, Member states can reduce SFP payments to farm businesses by up to 20%, a measure termed 'modulation'. The resources saved could then be drawn down by matching government funding and then put towards measures such as agri-environmental schemes. Modulation represents the only means to inject significant funds into such schemes. These generally tend to favour the smaller farmers, as are found in NI. The UK government agreed to introduce modulation at a flat rate of 2.5% in 2001 rising to 4.5% in 2005. The rate set for NI currently is 8.5% for 2006 (4.5% voluntary and 4% compulsory) and 9.5% for 2007 (4.5% voluntary and 5% compulsory). The percentage of modulation available will depend upon the take up of agri-environment schemes in NI. The amount of money available for such schemes in NI as a result of modulation was estimated to be £2 million in 2001 (3% modulation) rising to £11.2 million by 2006. However, it must be set against loss in income to stock farmers initially. Currently, agri-environment schemes in NI receive half of their funding from UK government and half from modulation. This level of funding is expected to remain broadly the same for the duration of the RDP 2007-2013. In comparison, the total modulation rate in England will be 20%.

The EU Council budget deal on 17th December 2005 (still to be ratified by the European Parliament) has important implications for the funding of agri-environment schemes within the RDP 2007-2013. The EU Rural Development (RD) budget is much less than originally proposed, and the emphasis on funding for the New Member States puts particular pressure on the share of the RD budget that will be allocated to UK. However, a mechanism to modulate Pillar I payments under the CAP (mostly SFP's) at national level has been secured, and in theory this should be sufficient to roll-out agri-environment schemes to 2013.

The guiding principles for the EU agriculture and rural development policies, which were set out in 2001 and confirmed in 2003, are: "strong economic performance must go hand in hand with the sustainable use of natural resources and levels of waste, maintaining biodiversity, preserving ecosystems and avoiding desertification. To meet these challenges, the European Commission (EC) agrees that the CAP and its future development should, among its objectives, contribute to achieving sustainable development by increasing its emphasis on encouraging healthy, high quality products, environmentally sustainable production methods, including organic production, renewable raw materials and the protection of biodiversity". The underlying principle in CAP reform is therefore, the use of grazing as a management tool to meet conservation objectives, and not explicitly for food production. Between now and 2013, the possibility of further CAP reform cannot be ruled out in response to political, economic, budgetary and environmental pressures.

SFP is a temporary payment designed by the European Commission (EC) to be used as a bridging mechanism to wean the agricultural industry off the coupled subsidy that it has become addicted to. The EC would like SFP to be used exclusively as a capital fund from which they draw down investment they can use to make their businesses more cost effective and competitive so they can survive without it, or any other direct aid, after 2013 (Drovers Report 2005).

Market forces will inevitably shape the development of the agri-food industry in the coming years. Factors such as increased market competition (including cheaper produce from other countries), the growth of retail multiples, the expansion of the food service sector, demographic changes and changes in eating habits and

lifestyles will all exert a strong influence on the development of the industry. The move towards trade liberalisation will inevitably impact on NI, with increased competition from agricultural imports and a move away from subsidised exports. Direct intervention in the market is not an option for Government. The enlargement of the EU and the restructuring of Eastern European economies over the next few years may add to the sense of peripherality for small regional economies such as NI on the western fringes of the EU.

EU environmental regulations, in particular the Nitrates Directive and the Water Framework Directive in protection of water quality (plus the Habitats Directive), could necessitate significant structural and process adjustments within the agricultural industry.

Concerns relating to long-term changes in climate will undoubtedly influence future farming patterns and open up new possibilities.

DARD Strategic Plan, Rural Strategy and Rural Development Programme

The DARD Strategic Plan 2006-2011 confirms that sustainable development will be the overarching driver of change for the Department over the next five years. The vision is 'a thriving and sustainable rural community and environment in NI'. DARD's total budget for 2006/07 is £298 million and for 2007/08 is £266 million. The department has a target of realising total efficiencies of over £21 million by 2007/08. The RDP 2007-2013 estimates that the amount of European funding coming into NI during 2007-2013 will decline by 30-40%. Appendix 1 includes details of the relevant strategic goals and objectives of this plan. The Strategic Plan provides the overarching context and boundary for the Draft Rural Strategy 2007-2013.

While lead policy responsibility for the environment in NI rests with the Department of the Environment (DOE), DARD has a distinctive contribution to make by encouraging farming methods which are conducive to the conservation and enhancement of the rural environment in an environmentally sustainable way. DARD is working increasingly closely with DOE on issues of common concern to achieve a joined-up approach which is effective in achieving environmental improvement and sustainability without imposing disproportionate costs.

The DARD Draft Rural Strategy 2007-2013 states that 'protection of biodiversity and habitats is of increasing concern. High nature-value farming systems will clearly play an important role in preserving biodiversity and habitats, as well as landscape character and soil quality. In some areas, the abandonment of farming, or the reversion to very low input agriculture, could create serious environmental risks'. This draft strategy states that 'DARD is committed to facilitating the implementation of the recommendations in the NI Biodiversity Strategy 2002-2016'.

One of the key aims of the Draft Rural Strategy is 'Conserving and Investing in the Rural Environment.' Key objectives include; enhancing the environmental sustainability of farming, and conserving and enhancing the farmed landscape character through appropriate land management practices, particularly in more marginal areas. A key action is conserving and enhancing the farmed landscape, through sustainable land management. This can help reduce the risks linked to under-utilisation, particularly in less favoured areas where the economics of commercial farming are more marginal.

The draft NI Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 has the following measures (expected costs are given for the period 2007-2015):

Axis 1 – Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector

- Measure 1.1 Vocational training and information actions (£18m)
- Measure 1.2 Adding value to agricultural products and improving marketing capability (£24m). This measure will comprise two schemes providing support for the agri-food sector: the Agricultural and Marketing Grant Scheme and the Agricultural Marketing Grant Scheme

Axis 2 – Improving the environment and the countryside

- Measure 2.1 LFA's Compensatory Allowances Scheme (£198m)
- Measure 2.2 Management of agricultural land within Natura 2000 areas
- Measure 2.3 Agri-environment programme (£150m plus £261m for commitments carried forward). The CMS/ESA schemes include a payment for 'local breeds in danger of being lost to farming at 200 euro per livestock unit. The agri-environment programme for 2007-2013 will also encourage a landscape-scale approach to the environmental improvement of NI's countryside. To help achieve this, agri-environment schemes in 2007-2013 will identify regional and local priorities and encourage collaborative approaches
- Measure 2.4 Animal health and welfare planning scheme (£22m)
- Measure 2.5 First afforestation (forest expansion)
- Measure 2.6 Forest environments (total of £24m for forestry)

Axis 3 – The quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy (total of £78m)

- Measure 3.1 Diversification into non-agricultural activities
- Measure 3.2 Business creation and development
- Measure 3.3 Encouragement of tourism activities
- Measure 3.4 Basic services for the economy and rural population
- Measure 3.5 Village renewal and development
- Measure 3.6 Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage

The NIRD DP will be part funded from a combination of EU monies: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and compulsory modulation, both of which must be co-financed with national funds. The December 2005 EU budget settlement set the EAFRD for the seven year period 2007-2013 at 69.25 billion euro for the EU as a whole. Allocations for member states will be agreed later in 2006, so the UK share is still unclear at present.

The EU budget settlement in December 2005 also provided for the option of voluntary modulation, up to a maximum rate of 20%, to be applied by member states at their discretion. The EC has drafted legislation to give effect to the December agreement on voluntary modulation, which will have to be agreed by member states, also likely to be in the second half of 2006.

The Rural Development Regulation sets a number of parameters on how EAFRD including compulsory modulation, monies must be spent. The EAFRD is subject to the following rules:

Axis 1: minimum 10% of total EAFRD funding

Axis 2: minimum 25% of total EAFRD funding

Axis 3: minimum 10% of total EAFRD funding

In addition, at least 5% of the total EAFRD funds must be delivered through the Axis 4 locally based partnership approach.

The figures in relation to potential income for the NIRDP can only be very provisional at this stage. While previous levels of funding would suggest a potential income level of £500 million, this amount cannot be guaranteed. The potential expenditure for the 2007-2015 period (although NIRDP covers 2007-2013, EU rules permit the spending of programme funds for a further two years) is £775 million.

Working on the basis of the provisional figures above, there is likely to be a significant gap between potential income and the resources required for the programme. The following are possible options for bridging any gap:

- Option 1 – would be to determine expenditure through adjusting the number of measures included in the programme. However, consideration will have to be given to ensuring existing commitments are honoured
- Option 2 – would be to determine expenditure through keeping all the proposed measures but adjusting the resources allocated to each measure to come within spending limits. Consideration would have to be given to the scale of individual measures and the balance between them. Again, existing commitments will have to be honoured
- Option 3 – would be to increase income through the use of voluntary modulation at a certain percentage. It is estimated that each 1% of additional modulation applied could provide an income to the NIRDP of approximately £22.5 million over the nine year period of the programme

NI Governance

Northern Ireland is also experiencing major changes in how it is governed:

- The Review of Public Administration (RPA) has proposed creating seven 'super-councils' in NI by May 2009. There are currently 26 district councils. Some of DARD's responsibilities will be delivered by the super-councils under RPA
- The Review of Environmental Governance (REG) is due to produce its interim report during summer 2006, with final report following 12 months review period. NI is the only country in Europe (other than Albania) without an independent environmental agency
- Devolved assembly – the deadline for the restoration of the NI Assembly is November 2006. NI is currently governed by direct rule ministers appointed by Westminster

NI Biodiversity Strategy

The NI Biodiversity Strategy published in 2002 identified DARD as having the following responsibilities:

- The NI Biodiversity Group (NIBG) emphasised the major impact agricultural policy has on biodiversity and made the following recommendations:
 1. Make full use of CAP reforms to encourage environmentally sustainable farming
 2. Develop, monitor and enforce environmental conditions attached to EU support payments
 3. Tailor the approach to the 2000-2006 agri-environment programme to the priorities identified in habitat and species action plans
 4. Seek additional funding for agri-environment schemes, particularly through modulation
 5. Review countryside management policies and re-issue the 1990 Countryside Management Strategy
 6. Provide an appropriate and adequately resourced advisory service for farmers including environmental training, farm conservation plans and working demonstrations to raise awareness of biodiversity issues

- Reference to biodiversity commitments will feature in DARD's forward Business Plans. Also, DARD is reviewing its Countryside Management Strategy and this will include specific actions concerned with biodiversity. The Report of the Vision Group, established to make recommendations on the future development of the NI agri-food sector, recognised that the biodiversity strategy would have important implications for the industry and these will be taken into account as action on the report is taken forward

The NIBG produced their first report during 2005 on the NI Biodiversity Strategy. This stated that given the enormous impact DARD's functions have on NI's biodiversity and the fact that DARD itself is identified in the NI Biodiversity Strategy as having lead responsibility for a range of recommendations, there is no central initiative or implementation plan driven by DARD's core executive. The Group were also concerned that agri-environment schemes were not yet available to all farmers, not least because of budgetary constraints, and they are therefore competitive. NIBG have therefore made a number of recommendations:

- DARD executive should issue a clear statement giving direction to its component divisions and requiring compliance with the Biodiversity Strategy, and establishing lines of accountability to the Department and appropriate reporting systems
- DARD's Countryside Management Branch (CMB) should review conservation objectives in agri-environment schemes, relating these to priority species and habitats, and establish a robust monitoring system capable of identifying conservation benefits, and areas where improvement in prescription is required
- Consideration should be given to establishing closer co-operation and compatibility between CMB and EHS in delivering for biodiversity priorities and monitoring conservation status of priority species and habitats.
- Detailed co-ordination between CMB and EHS is required to ensure compatibility of requirements expected of farmers with ASSI's who have opted into agri-environment schemes to ensure favourable conservation status achieved as a priority

NIBG did recognise that CMB has taken a very proactive role

Biosecurity

DARD produced a Biosecurity Code for NI farms in 2004. It is a voluntary document and has no legal status, but many of the issues outlined are covered by legislation (refer to Appendix 2 for details of relevant legislation). There is a recognised need to maintain and improve the health and welfare of the NI's national herds and flocks. The code is a means of achieving progress, with emphasis on the merits of sector-wide adoption of animal health plans. The NI Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme already encompasses a farm biosecurity policy in its Animal Health plan requirements. This can significantly reduce the risk of disease spreading to farms, and may assist in reduction of existing diseases. Good biosecurity should encompass practices that are not just introduced at the time of an emergency, but should be an integral part of everyday farming (refer to Appendix 3).

The European Regulations on Feed and Food Hygiene which came into effect from 1st January 2006, have increased the need for primary producers to adhere to the advice given in the Biosecurity Code. These regulations are to do with animal foodstuffs, how they are stored and/or mixed and relate back to the transfer of BSE through animal feed.

The most relevant notifiable diseases in NI at present are; tuberculosis (TB), brucellosis, BSE/Scrapie, and Aujeszky's Disease. Of these, the first two remain of particular concern for cattle farmers (DARD 2004). NI was also affected by Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 (three widely scattered outbreaks). The Biosecurity Code outlines cattle farmers obligations to prevent the spread of tuberculosis and brucellosis (refer to Appendix 4). DARD's target is to reduce brucellosis outbreaks from 111 at March 2005 to 35 at March 2008, and the level of TB reactors from 13,219 at March 2005 to 7,225 at March 2008.

Animal Welfare

DARD produced 'NI Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock' for cattle and sheep respectively in 2005. Legislation relating to animal welfare in NI is provided in Appendix 5. The welfare of animals is considered within a framework that was developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (an independent advisory body established by the Government in 1979) and known as the 'Five Freedoms'. These are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst – by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour
2. Freedom from discomfort – by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease – by prevention or by rapid diagnosis and treatment
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour – by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals' own kind
5. Freedom from fear and distress – by ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering

DARD produced its NI Animal Health and Welfare Strategy in 2006, providing a more strategic approach on an all-island basis. The ultimate objective of an all-island animal health and welfare strategy is a policy which facilitates free movement of animals on the island, subject to EU rules. As the NI livestock industry relies on exporting animals and animal products, it is important that the approach to animal health and welfare is coordinated with NI's main trading partners. The vision is 'for a NI where the standards of animal health and welfare are amongst the highest in the world, and where all stakeholders fully understand and accept their roles and responsibilities'. The Strategy adopts five key themes:

- 1) understanding and accepting roles and responsibilities
- 2) working in partnership
- 3) a clearer understanding of costs and benefits of animal health and welfare
- 4) promoting the benefits of animal health and welfare – prevention is better than cure
- 5) ensuring effective delivery and enforcement

DARD published its consultation paper on the implementation of EU regulation 1/2005 during June 2006 on the welfare of animals during transport. The EU regulation comes into force on 5 January 2007, with requirements for competence certificates coming into force on 5 January 2008. It replaces current legislation – the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order (NI) 1997. The regulation aims to improve animal welfare through raising transportation standards.

The new rules will affect those organising journeys or transporting vertebrate animals 'in connection with an economic activity'. At a minimum, this will include farmers and livestock hauliers. There are no changes to the current rules on maximum journey

times (other than new restrictions) on moving young animals, feeding, watering and rest periods during a journey and space allowances. However, a number of new provisions come into force, as follows:

From 5 January 2007

- Those transporting animals for commercial purposes (in connection with an 'economic activity') on journeys over 65 kilometres (km) (40 miles) will need to have a specific licence and be competent. Stricter vehicle standards will apply.

From 5 January 2008

- Anyone commercially transporting farmed livestock or horses on journeys over 40 miles must hold a certificate of competence issued by DARD.

There are some exceptions to the regulation:

- Only Article 3 (General conditions for the transport of animals) and Article 27 (Inspections) apply to transport by farmers of their own animals in their own vehicles for a distance of less than 50 km (31 miles) from their holding, or for seasonal stock movements between pastures.
- Transporters undertaking journeys of less than 65 km from place of departure to place of destination do not require an authorisation nor are they required to use drivers/attendants who have been trained and hold a certificate of competence.
- A journey consisting of a single animal accompanied by a person who has responsibility for its welfare (or two animals accompanied by two people) are not considered to be an economic activity.

All journeys, whether under 50 km or single animal journeys, will remain subject to general welfare conditions which must be complied with including; animals being fit to travel, keeping journey times to a minimum, those responsible for transporting ensuring that animals are not caused any unnecessary fear, injury, or suffering.

2.3) Agri-environment schemes and other initiatives in Northern Ireland

2.3.1) Agri-environment schemes

Agri-environment schemes have been developed by DARD (www.dardni.gov.uk) to encourage farmers and landowners to adopt environmentally friendly management practices. The schemes are co-funded by the EU as part of their Rural Development Programme (RDP). Current schemes require farmers to attain standards of environmental management that are over and above those required under cross-compliance. Current agri-environment schemes are based on income foregone and costs incurred to cover a reduced gross margin due to compliance with schemes.

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) scheme was first introduced in 1988 and was the first farm programme designed to promote the integration of food with responsible management of the countryside. Uptake of the ESA scheme has been satisfactory – 64% of target area (Rural Community Network 2000). Biological and landscape monitoring has demonstrated its clear environmental benefits.

The ESA scheme applies only to land inside one of the five designated ESA areas in Northern Ireland – Mourne and Slieve Croob; Antrim Coast, Glens and Rathlin; West Fermanagh and Erne Lakeland; Sperrins; and Slieve Gullion. The ESA scheme covers 20% of Northern Ireland. The CMS applies to land outside ESA's.

The Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) was first introduced in 1999. This scheme encourages farmers to positively manage habitats, improve water quality, enhance the landscape and protect heritage by integrating good farming practice with care and protection of the environment. CMS is currently closed to new applicants, but may reopen in 2007.

Prior to CMS, DARD operated the Habitat Improvement Scheme (HIS). This targeted specific habitats such as buffer zones around woodlands and riverside margins. When it was closed in the late 1990s, there were 150 participant farms covering 882 ha including 633 ha of woodland in the scheme. There was also the Moorland Scheme at this time, which was aimed at compensating farmers to encourage them to reduce sheep numbers on hills and uplands. However, it was largely unsubscribed and was discontinued.

During the 1990s, there were a number of schemes providing grant aid towards the provision or restoration of environmental features. The Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme, the Agricultural Development Operational Programme, Special Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development, and the Farm and Countryside Enhancement Scheme supported capital investment totalling £41.4 million. All these schemes are now closed.

DARD's target is to have 20,000 NI farmers participating in agri-environment schemes by the end of 2006. At the end of 2005, 331,014 ha (27%) of farmland was registered in an agri-environment scheme in NI, similar to the UK average. By June 2006, 10,000 agri-environment agreements were in place covering 46% of farmland within the province involving £20 million. The average farm size in an agri-environment scheme is 37 ha. DARD's expenditure on agri-environment schemes has doubled during the period 2000-2006 to £88 million.

DARD's agri-environment monitoring work has shown that some habitats such as species rich grassland are becoming undergrazed, although most are smaller areas within a current working farm. Due to animal health issues, DARD's priority is to encourage the existing tenant to graze appropriately.

The application criteria for schemes is as follows:

- All farmers or landowners must own, and/or have on a five-year written lease, a minimum of 3 hectares (ha) of agricultural land
- A current DARD Business Reference Number

Both schemes adopt a whole farm approach, which means that all eligible land must be entered into the scheme. Scheme agreements normally last 10 years, although either party can opt out after five years.

A landowner and farmer may participate in both an agri-environment scheme and the Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme.

Payment rates for the ESA and CMS are identical. Annual management payments, based on £/ha compensate for the loss of income and costs incurred associated with adhering to the management requirements of the scheme. Additional payments can be made to undertake vegetation regeneration or control works to improve the environmental quality of the habitats under the scheme agreement. In addition to annual payments, funding is available for capital enhancement works to meet the management requirements of the scheme.

Details of the ESA/CMS payments for different habitats, including grazing management requirements and biodiversity objectives are provided in Appendix 6.

Under the RDP 2007-2013, there is unlikely to be any significant changes in agri-environment schemes in NI, other than some tweaking of the CMS/ESA schemes. However, the RDP does suggest the possibility of simplifying all agri-environment schemes in NI (including MOSS) into one scheme.

2.3.2) Management of Sensitive Sites (MOSS) scheme

MOSS is a voluntary scheme administered by EHS www.ehsni.gov.uk which is designed to ensure the positive management of lands within Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). In addition MOSS agreements can include land adjacent to ASSI's as well as within.

The key objectives for MOSS IS:

- To conserve and enhance the nature conservation interests of the land
- To conserve and enhance the diversity of plant and animal species found in each ASSI
- To introduce or continue a land management regime that will create the conditions necessary to ensure that the special interests are maintained or enhanced

Anyone who owns or manages land within an ASSI is eligible to join the scheme providing payments are not being received for the same area under any other government scheme for the protection and management of the environment. This includes payments from DARD under any of its agri-environment schemes.

MOSS agreements are for a minimum of five years. There is an annual payment per hectare at a standard rate for each habitat. Payments are calculated to reflect the type of management required on the land. This is done in the same way as CMS and ESA are costed using the Farm Business Data published by the Economics and Statistics Division in DARD.

There are also discretionary payments for one-off works such as fencing, dry stone walling, water troughs, and gates that will aid management of the site for wildlife. Assistance will normally be given at the 60% rate except where it can be demonstrated that the work is purely of conservation benefit alone and does not benefit the land manager outside the ASSI.

Where the ASSI land is primarily composed of grasslands, MOSS agreements contain specified grazing regimes where appropriate to prevent undergrazing or overgrazing. Grazing regimes specify stocking levels, grazing periods, and type of stock. No supplementary feeding is normally permitted within an ASSI. Stocking densities are calculated using Livestock Units (LU). Livestock units are defined as follows: 1 dairy cow/suckler cow and calf = 1.0 LU, 1 horse = 0.8 LU, 1 beef animal = 0.75 LU, and 1 ewe with followers = 0.15 LU.

Details of payments under the MOSS scheme for different habitats and grazing management requirements are provided in Appendix 7.

The MOSS scheme is now closed to new applicants, and existing five year agreements will not be renewed. EHS funding for ASSI's in future will be targeted specifically at sites that currently do not meet Favourable Conservation Status (FCS).

This is because one of EHS's objectives in its Natural Heritage Strategic Plan 2003 is to have all ASSI designation features in favourable condition. The strategic goal is to maintain or improve the conservation condition of 95% of the features underlying the designation of ASSIs by 2013. It has been suggested that ASSIs currently in the MOSS scheme and in FCS, will have the option of joining a DARD agri-environment scheme when the current MOSS agreement runs out.

It should be noted that the MOSS scheme is being phased out from its current format and an alternative scheme is still being formulated.

2.3.3) Organic Farming Scheme

Organic farming has been demonstrated to deliver benefits for many farmland biodiversity species.

Uptake of the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) has been much lower than originally predicted when it was launched in 2001. Land under organic management (about 90 agreements) in NI represented only 0.62% (c.f. 4.25% in the UK) of the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) in 2004. Prior to the OFS, DARD ran the Organic Aid Scheme. It was largely unsuccessful because of high compensatory amounts needed by participants during the conversion period.

The OFS offers payments to farmers in NI to aid them in converting to organic farming and to manage their land in some additional environmentally beneficial ways. It is jointly funded by DARD and the EC. The scheme seeks to increase the area devoted to organic farming in NI. The scheme will play a valuable role in helping to protect and enhance the rural environment, as well as assisting producers to meet consumer demand for organic produce. Before applying, applicants must agree a conversion plan and register land with an approved organic body. Agreements are for a minimum of five years and up to ten years, covering a minimum of 1 ha. The OFS may normally be combined with other agri-environment schemes. OFS payments are summarised below:

OFS Payments £ per ha	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Arable Area Payment Scheme eligible land & land in permanent crops	225	135	50	20	20
Other improved land	175	105	40	15	15
Unimproved land	25	10	5	5	5

Organic milk is currently attracting good premiums in NI, but there is little interest in organic beef and sheep (pers comm. B. Elkin).

The Organic Action Plan Group Northern Ireland produced an Action Plan in 2006. The group was established in 2005 to lead the strategic development of the organic sector in NI. Membership is representative of a wide range of interests, firmly rooted in organic NI. The group has the following strategic objectives:

1. To develop the market for organic produce
2. To develop the organic production base in NI in line with market requirements
3. To increase the efficiency of the organic industry in NI
4. Consider the establishment of a resource centre for the Organic Action Plan

3. Current conservation grazing in Northern Ireland

3.1) Land Managers and Graziers

The consultation exercise carried out identified a wide range of land managers and graziers currently involved in conservation grazing in NI.

As you would expect, several of the land managers are conservation organisations; Ulster Wildlife Trust (UWT), National Trust (NT), and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The other land managers that were identified are; Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), Ministry of Defence (MOD), Water Service (WS), Belfast City Council (BCC), and Craigavon Borough Council (CBC).

The graziers identified included some of the land managers who use their own stock on certain sites; EHS, CBC and UWT. The other graziers identified as 'conservation graziers', who provide native breeds for conservation grazing, are Oisín Murnion, Gary Davidson, Sarah Creaner, and Antrim Estates.

There are several other 'local' graziers throughout the country that provide stock for conservation grazing, through management agreements and leases with the land manager. Twelve such agreements were identified through the consultation.

In addition to this two other individuals were identified that were not directly associated to an organisation or a designated site; Michael Meharg and Tom McClelland both manage their own land respectively using conservation grazing techniques and native breeds.

3.2) Current Conservation Grazing Sites in NI

In Summary:

There are approximately 61 sites in NI currently practising conservation grazing, of these 39 have some form of designation, 10 have no designation and 1 is unknown, the approximate land area is 6223Ha.

The breakdown of the stock involved is:

	Approx number
Cattle	682
Sheep	4351
Ponies	24
Goats	26

With unknown stock and / or numbers on approximately 19 sites.

Within which there are;

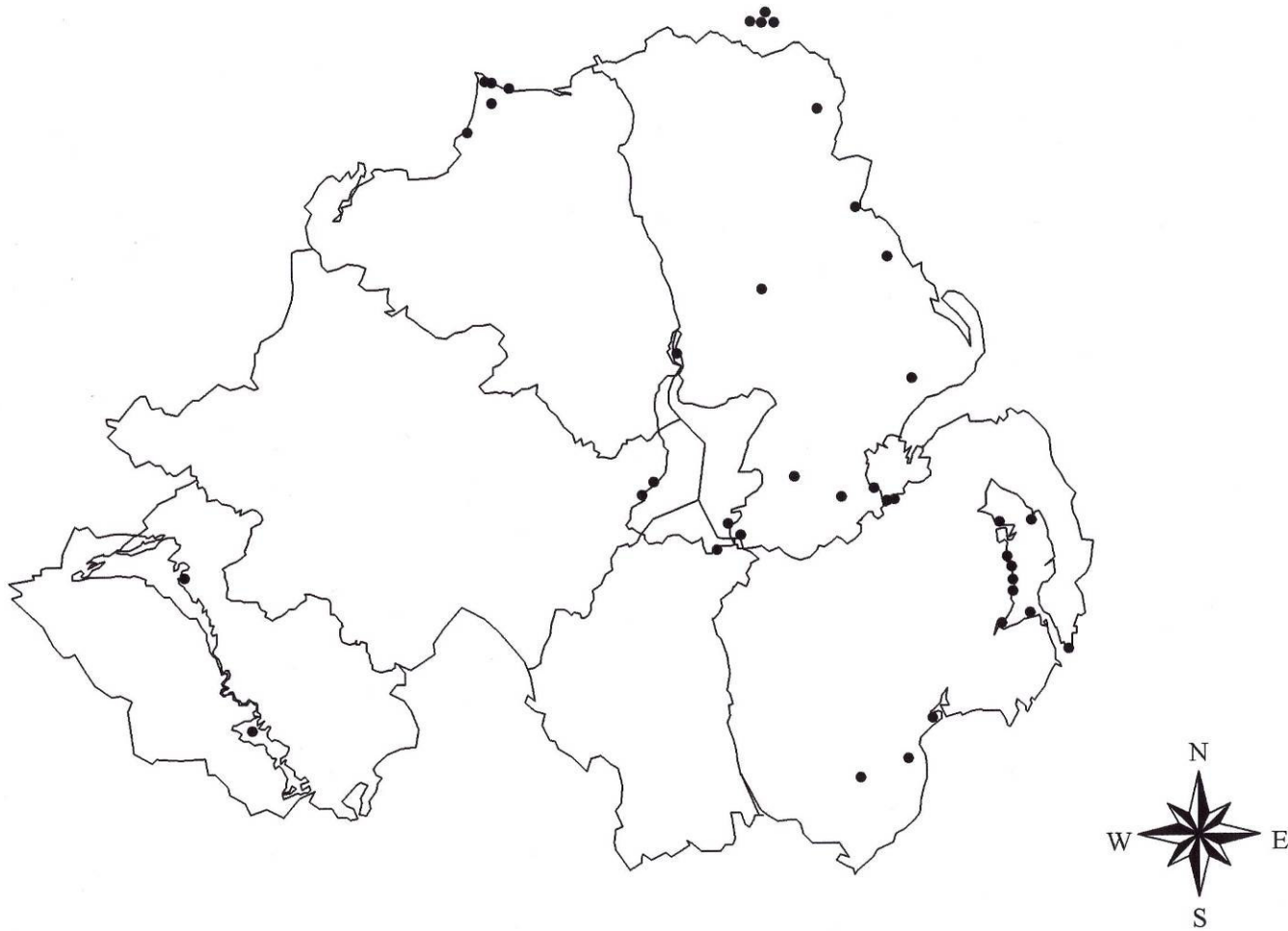
Cattle Breeds	Number
Dexters	58
Galloway	99
Irish Moiled	38
Bluegrey	5
Highland	10
British White Cross	3
Mixed Aberdeen Angus	?

Sheep Breeds	Number
Wiltshire Horned	21
Jacob	4
Blackfaced	100
Kerryhill crosses	36

Pony Breeds	Number
Exmoor	18

The map below illustrates the geographical spread of these sites.

Current Conservation Grazing Sites in NI - 2006



4. Potential conservation grazing in Northern Ireland

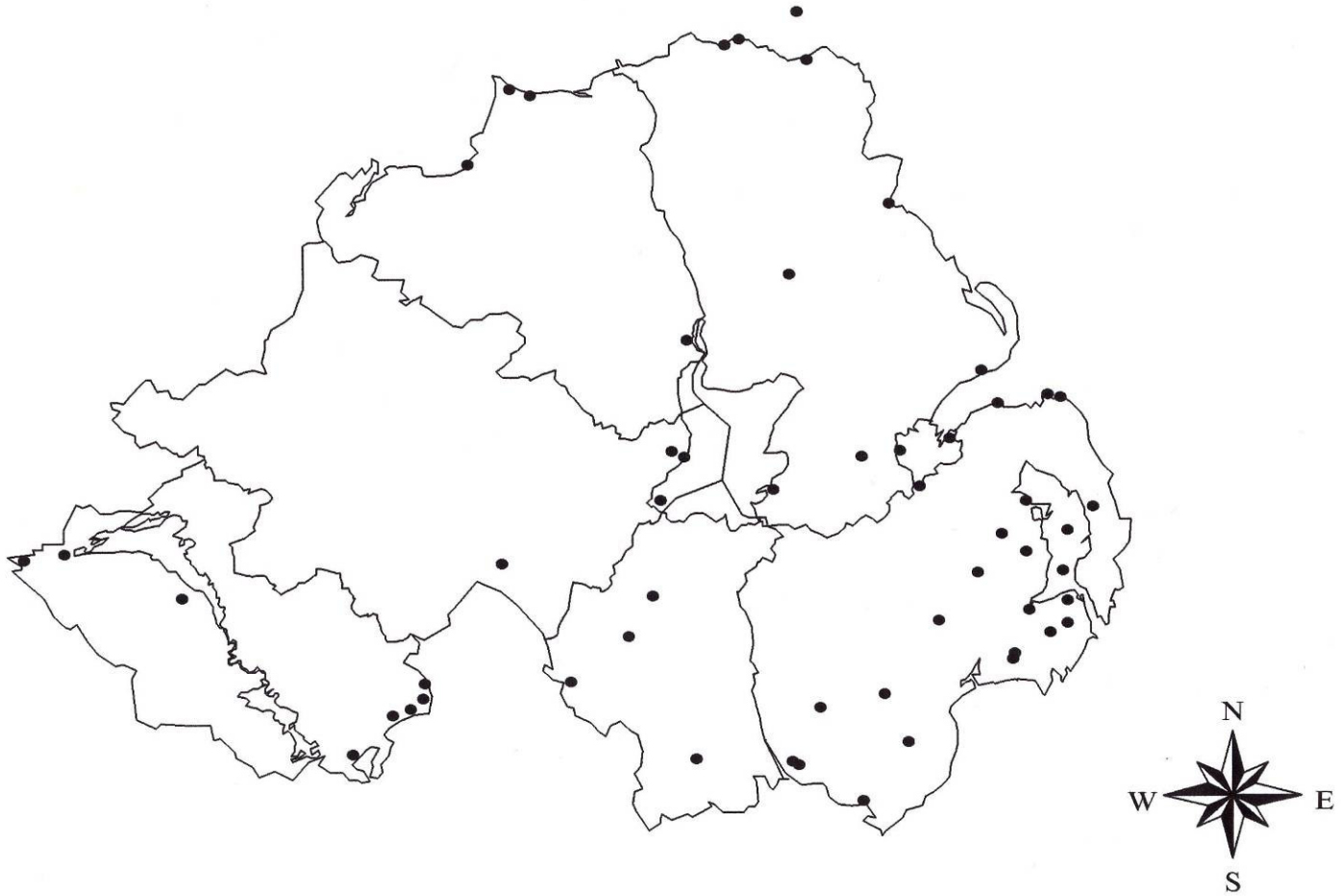
4.1) Sites currently requiring conservation grazing

In Summary

County	Number of Sites	Total Area of site (ha) – some or all of which requires grazing
Co Antrim	11	655
Co Armagh	5	88.1
Co Down	24	5177.5
Co Fermanagh	10	165.9
Co L'derry	4	951
Co Tyrone	4	206.1
Other	4	197

The map below illustrates the geographical spread of these sites.

Sites Requiring Grazing 2006



4.2: Graziers with stock available for conservation grazing in Northern Ireland

The following graziers have expressed an interest in providing stock for conservation grazing in NI:

- Oisín Murnion - Currently grazes at several NT properties in Co. Down: Strangford Lough (Gibb Island), Pawle Island and Castle Island) and Murlough NNR. Has additional 100 Galloway cattle. Would prefer to graze sites in Co. Down/Co. Antrim/Co. Armagh, but would consider anywhere in NI if site large enough to be profitable. Also, would be prepared to go into partnership with other graziers, who have a further 200 cattle available for conservation grazing
- Gary Davidson – Grazes five Blue Grey cattle at Bog Meadows, Co. Antrim. Interested in increasing the number of Blue Grey cattle up to 20 for possible GAP project. Also has six Irish moiled cattle. May increase stock numbers if sufficient sites available. Would be prepared to graze 30-40 miles from home, possibly further depending on whether someone could check stock
- Sarah Creanor – Owns a herd of 10 Exmoor ponies which are grazed at NT Murlough NNR, Co. Down
- Donnell Black – Would be interested in providing animals to graze conservation land in the Glens of Antrim. Would need to know land area available, locations, times of year requiring grazing, and whether it would be financially viable
- Thomas McKeefry – owns land at Kilcoo, Co. Down, and also has rights to shared common grazing in the Mourne. Has 25 Limousin and 15 belted Galloway cattle, 170 Mourne/Scottish blackface sheep, and five Welsh cob ponies (one stallion and four mares). Interested in increasing dry stock numbers if land available for conservation grazing. Would be interested in sites within 25 mile radius of Kilcoo, but would consider areas further afield if someone else able to check on stock
- EHS Regional Operations Unit – has a small number of stock (traditional sheep, cattle and ponies) already grazing a few of their sites. This could be expanded, although there are issues of cost and procurement procedures to overcome. May then be able to link up with others to provide either stock or land (as one of the largest owners of conservation land in NI)

5) Constraints to conservation grazing in Northern Ireland

5.1) Land Manager Views:

- Fencing / stock proofing costs – inadequate fencing. (ASSI consent required for fencing)
- Handling facilities
- Not enough stock available, especially at the required times of year. For example; on Strangford Lough there is the difficulty persuading tenants to graze the sites in the summer. Most of the tenant cattle farmers need improved pasture during that time. In essence what they really want the sites for is for out wintering cattle on relatively dry ground where they can supplementary feed
- Availability of correct density of correct stock at specific times for specific durations.
- Problems getting stock on and off site
- Lack of long term arrangements with graziers
- EHS agreements too restrictive and inflexible in places

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- Agri-environment scheme/MOSS restrictions need to be more flexible to ensure farming viability of the land
- Lack of dependable water supply - can determine what type of stock to use
- Choice of livestock and then choice of breed – not always being able to use the most appropriate type of stock and breed can affect the successful management of some sites
- The National Trust believes that unless it is backed by additional independent inspections/ higher conservation or organic standards, then the quality of grazing can be detrimental to a site
- National Trust Strangford Lough Islands: The 24 islands, covering 256 ha are grazed by sheep and cattle. The general problems associated with these islands are; cattle swimming off islands (electric fencing required), problems with accessing islands (acquired cattle barge for NT 5 years ago for £25,000 - free barge service; shared with non NT graziers, additional costs with grazing offshore islands (extra vet bills) and animal husbandry problems
- Rathlin - Low cattle numbers for graziers, no supplementary feeding, closed periods, limited stocking densities i.e. DARD 0.2 units per ha limit, when 0.15 units per ha is typical for island.
- Rules about use of systematic dosing, supplementary feeding and nutrition blocks etc on some sites can be restrictive
- Frequency of welfare checking in some remoter areas
- Basic incompatibility between needs of conservation grazing and requirements of mainstream farming practice
- Fragile sites in multiple ownership
- Not easy to get exactly what you need with grazier leasing your land. The agreement sets maximum stock numbers and maximum time, but can end up with not enough animals for too short a time. Need to set minimum requirements
- Reform of single farm payment, reduced availability of stock and stockmanship. Stock more likely to go to good agric land than species-rich grassland in need of specialised grazing
- Lack of availability of sufficient numbers of traditional breeds
- In some areas the lack of availability of layback land - fair number of stock required later in the season, but where do stock go before being allowed onto site
- Small parcels of nature reserve land scattered far apart which often have poor access - difficult to get graziers. Areas so small that they are not a productive unit
- Animals in areas with public (and dogs) access
- Poor co-ordination of effort especially in relation to marketing of produce
- Lack of farming knowledge within conservation sector
- Lack of funding for conservation organisations and farmers, including making the site suitable / safe for grazing, staff costs, graziers costs etc
- Lack of financial incentives for farmers
- Animal welfare (daily checking, water supply)
- Lack of training and information, absence of GAP in NI to date
- No central co-ordination of graziers and land managers
- Problems with movement of stock, including bio-security and transportation of animals between sites, management and organisation of whole process
- Current closure of CMS
- Restrictions on entry into MOSS scheme and current cutbacks with MOSS funding
- Perceived lack of interest from DARD

- Lack of marketing GAPNI produce
- Lack of incentives for rare breeds
- Multiple private ownership/ management of land does not favour effective conservation grazing - in uplands, several shareholder groups graze their animals

5.2) Graziers Views:

- Inadequate stock handling facilities – increased time spent rounding up stock
- Lack of substantial profit to make proper income, graziers may need to be paid for providing suitable stock. Conservation organisations must recognise that the farmers aim is to make a profit
- Farmers / graziers must recognise what it is the conservation organisation want to achieve on the site
- No compensation because once land is rented graziers are only tenants and landowner can stipulate who gets financial benefits
- Grazing considered to be unsustainable
- Problem with cattle where public have access
- Believe there should be more financial support for graziers from conservation organisations
- Landowners need to provide for or compensate / pay for costs for housing animals during periods they are not on conservation land
- Sustainability of a grazing herd - being flexible enough to remove and place stock when required and often at short notice
- Lack of appreciation by both parties of what the other requires
- Lack of rare/traditional breeds available to do the job required
- Seasonal demand for grazing animals
- Ground conditions, access to water, security, dogs, public insurance, animal welfare, disease and parasite control. Lack of dependable water supply, springs and water holes that can dry up in the summer
- No niche market for GAPNI produce
- Lack of financial viability of regime, transport costs and permits
- Having access to variety of land at all times of year
- Conservation bodies have no idea of management and handling involved in managing stock in these areas
- Graziers need financial assistance to ensure reasonable standard of living
- Graziers need to be respected and involved in management of sites
- Environmental schemes which pay money need to state what the grazier is entitled to by way of financial remuneration
- Inadequate fencing, animal welfare, and movement issues
- Overall lack of knowledge of GAP by possible participants
- Costs associated with conservation grazing (graziers lose money as stock in conservation grazing schemes loose condition)
- The presence of redwater and liverfluke on many of the sites
- There are problems associated with bulling cows on sites with public access
- There are often difficulties getting stock to some of the site, for example grazing islands, so when a grazier puts stock on these sites it is best to leave them there for as long as possible to minimize the cost

5.3) General Views:

- Need for a full-time GAPNI co-ordinator
- A need to improve co-ordination between graziers and land managers
- Need for public to be made more aware of the importance of grazing conservation areas with stock
- Financial incentives required. Funding is the most immediate constraint
- Need for local grazing schemes and local graziers
- Overall lack of co-ordination and links in conservation grazing
- Lack of knowledge amongst graziers of need for conservation grazing and of animal husbandry required for such challenging grazing
- Farmers in NI limited in production by size of farm and prohibitively expensive cost of expansion, in contrast to farmers in rest of UK where land prices are much lower. This means that low stocking rates are perceived as unacceptable and uneconomic by many farmers. The tradition here is that each last acre of ground is used for as much production as possible
- Benchmarking figures would indicate that conventional producers are losing more money than extensive graziers at present
- The owner/agencies are not passing monies on to tenant graziers
- Animal Health Issues; including concerns related to potential shared herd :
 - Worst case scenario (TB & BR); herds / flocks made up from several sources for part of the year only, with stock dispersed to several yards, and herd used province wide
- Best Practice:
 - Stock maintained in a specific closed herd, (no release to contributing herds at any time)
 - Herd use restricted to one area (e.g. 10 divisional veterinary areas within NI, or county basis rather than province wide)
 - Minimise linkage i.e. no contact, and linkage with other herds
 - Yard facilities available for break in grazing programme – not associated with other herds
 - Disease breakdown – herd to be locked down to one grazing area

5.4) Marketing Constraints

Three significant issues have been identified in marketing GAP produce:

- Loss of small abattoirs - many small abattoirs have closed in the past decade due to the prohibitive costs of adhering to animal hygiene and welfare legislation. Only large scale abattoirs now remain in places such as Lurgan, Newry, Ballymena, L'derry, Coleraine and Dungannon. There are a total of nine abattoirs in NI dealing with cattle and five abattoirs in NI dealing with sheep. Without a satisfactory network of slaughtering facilities, the chances of retaining adequate levels of integrity for local provenance meat will be slim. There has also been a concern over animals having to be transported greater distances to the nearest abattoir and increasing costs for graziers. However, there are still lots of marts and collection centres for finished stock, therefore there is not an infrastructure problem of getting stock away, even for small farmers (pers comm. J. Hania). However, one problem area has been abattoirs dealing with organic meat. In the past, the only abattoir that dealt with organic cattle in NI was in Newry (pers comm. B. Elkin). The situation is now changing and Dungannon Meats

is openly advertising for organic lamb (they are currently offering £8-9 extra per head). Meat cannot be sold as organic unless it has been slaughtered and processed at premises that have a current organic certificate. In addition there are two small scale abattoirs in operation in NI – Oakdale (or Robinson's) in Lurgan accepts everything apart from pigs and Stevenson's at Culleybackey which is solely concerned with pigs. It is vital that these remain operational since no other plant will readily deal with added value animals such as conservation-grazed Irish Moiled so that the owner can have the animal slaughtered, hung for a sufficient time and returned for further processing

- The Over-thirty Month (OTM) rule for beef introduced in 1996 following the BSE crisis. The rules are now been relaxed with the implementation of the Beef Assurance Scheme which allows cattle up to 42 months of age to enter the food chain. The OTM rule was finally lifted in November 2005
- Variations in taste and health quality between different breeds and cereal-fed versus grass-fed animals

6) Potential solutions to conservation grazing constraints in Northern Ireland

6.1) Introduction

The consultation exercise undertaken by GAPUK during March/April 2006 identified a number of ideas for conservation grazing in NI, which are summarised below:

General ideas

- A 'match-making' database should be maintained of sites requiring conservation grazing and graziers with available stock for conservation grazing
- It would be useful to have an accessible register of rare or traditional breeds of stock kept in Northern Ireland to so that animals can be sourced and genetic lines improved
- Raise awareness of GAPNI amongst farming community, conservationists and general public
- Light, hardy native and rare breeds suitable for conservation grazing should be promoted
- Provide additional support and advice to ensure that the land managers and graziers are aware of the full range of agricultural support subsidies and agri-environment scheme payments available for conservation grazing, and produce specific grazing plans for sites

Conservationists perspective

- Tenant farmers should be compensated for actual profit loss from grazing conservation sites. This could include: additional transportation and fuel costs; additional vet bills due to pre-movement testing; additional labour time spent moving and checking stock; potential greater risk of coming into contact with diseases such as TB through badgers; restrictions on supplementary feeding; requirement to use smaller and lighter breeds of stock; poorer nutritional value of conservation pasture; and difficulties of finishing stock off on conservation grassland
- Conservation organisations should be compensated through agri-environment schemes for additional infrastructure costs associated with ensuring conservation sites can be grazed appropriately: provision of boundary/internal fencing, temporary fencing, stock-handling facilities, mobile cattle crushes, installing water supplies and drinking troughs

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- Subsidies and agri-environment schemes should target financial incentives to farmers to continue grazing marginal land that is at greatest risk of abandonment
- Higher levels of financial support and agri-environment schemes should be available for farming that assists with achieving NI biodiversity targets (including NI Priority Habitats and Species, Habitat and Species Action Plans)
- The standard of grazing agreements needs to be improved to ensure compliance with stocking levels, types/breeds of stock, and grazing periods for appropriate conservation grazing management of sites
- Ponies are better suited to grazing fen areas than sheep or cattle in NI, while cattle are better on lighter soils than sheep for conservation grazing
- Grazing agreements need to be more flexible to reflect issues for farmers, particularly with regard to sites managed under the MOSS scheme
- Priority on ASSI's is to achieve Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) through appropriate grazing
- Active shepherding is an important management tools in areas such as the Mournes. It has two main roles: to 'heft' a particular flock of sheep to a given area, and to move the sheep around to ensure more even use of the available area including the less favoured areas

Farmers perspective

- Conservation grazing must be profitable and provide a reasonable standard of living to ensure that it is attractive to the farming community
- Tenant graziers should be paid for grazing stock on conservation sites by the conservation organisations who own the land
- Agri-environment schemes entered into by conservation organisations should stipulate what financial remuneration graziers are entitled to
- Additional payments should be available to graziers who keep native/traditional stock (especially rare breeds) through financial support and/or agri-environment schemes. The proposed headage payment for Irish moiled cattle under CMS should be rolled out to other rare native/traditional stock breeds
- Conservation organisations should acquire or provide good quality grazing land for finishing stock off for market, after the stock has been taken off conservation sites. This 'finishing land' could also potentially be managed for the benefit of wildlife too
- Grazing agreements need to be more flexible to reflect issues for farmers such as variations in weather patterns, pre-movement testing of animals, transporting stock, and obtaining land for grazing stock outside agreement period
- The management of the whole site should be discussed by all parties, both in respect of short and long-term objectives, and where possible a whole farm plan produced
- DARD stated that their priority is to encourage existing tenants to graze appropriately due to animal health issues
- LFACA scheme should be available to farmers who graze designated conservation sites (principally ASSI's) in lowland areas within NI
- There should be provision within the LFACA for areas where a stocking density of less than 0.2 LU/ha is required under GAEC measures

6.2) GAPNI Steering Group

The GAPNI Steering Group held its inaugural meeting on 15th February 2006 at the FWAG offices in Magherafelt. The second meeting was held on 12th April 2006 and a third meeting was held on 3rd July 2006, both again facilitated by FWAG. The latter meeting was held in the

Lough Neagh Advisory Committee offices in Magherafelt. Minutes were taken at all three meetings. A table of attendees at each meeting is provided in Appendix 8.

The Steering Group includes representatives from FWAG, DARD, EHS, NT, UWT, RSPB, Belfast Hills Partnership, Craigavon Borough Council, RBST, UFU, Irish Moiled Cattle Society, Lough Neagh Advisory Committee/Local Biodiversity Officers, South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association and several farmers who actively undertake conservation grazing.

The GAP Co-ordinator for Northern England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Jane Wilson) attended the Steering Group meetings in April and July (a presentation was given to the Group on GAP at the April meeting). The temporary, part-time GAPUK Co-ordinators (Andrew Upton and Rachel Bain) attended all meetings to date.

The GAPNI steering group meeting on 12th April suggested three specialist working sub-groups: marketing, funding and policy. As yet, none of these sub-groups have been formed. The proposed aims and objectives of GAPNI were presented to the Steering Group by FWAG at the inaugural meeting in February and it then went out to consultation to all members of the Group. The draft aims and objectives were then circulated at the second meeting in April, but have yet to be ratified.

The draft GAPNI aims and objectives are as follows:

Aims: To establish a GAPNI Steering Group that will oversee and set the direction for GAP in NI.

Principles:

- Start simple
- Build Local Grazing Schemes
- Use GAPUK
- Ideally have a part-time or full-time Co-Ordination officer for NI

Vision:

All land managers responsible for grazed conservation land in NI will be confident that their management is succeeding in ensuring the land achieves good conservation status. A GAP 'network' will be in place to ensure this happens and that managers will have access to good advice, help, livestock and mobile handling facilities.

Objectives:

- Establish a Steering Group for GAPNI – to include a broad range of organisations with interests in GAP from the conservation and farming sectors as well as those with responsibility for sites of conservation concern
- Identify needs of conservation land managers in terms of grazing and cutting
- Identify needs of graziers
- Interpretation of SFP and other subsidy implications for managers and graziers
- Co-ordination of graziers, contractors and land managers
- Dissemination of best practice knowledge on conservation grazing/cutting
- Access to training for volunteers, land managers and graziers

It was agreed by the Steering Group not to include an objective to establish a machinery ring in NI. At the meeting in July, it was agreed that there should also be a specific objective to marketing GAPNI produce.

6.3) GAPNI Co-ordinator

During the consultation exercise undertaken during March/April 2006 by GAPUK, the majority of respondents agreed that there was a need for GAPNI and that a Co-ordinator specifically for NI would be the most effective way to develop conservation grazing in the province, as the same model has worked so well in GB. Of 48 respondents, 28 said there was a need for a GAPNI Co-ordinator, while 6 said there was probably/possibly a need for a Co-ordinator and 14 were unsure. None of the respondents said there was no need for a GAPNI Co-ordinator.

Reasons given by respondents for a GAPNI Co-ordinator included: ensuring conservation grazing continues, bringing stakeholders together, co-ordinating and negotiating agreements between land managers and graziers, and providing training for land managers in stock management. One respondent questioned whether GAP would work in NI due to the land tenure system. A couple of respondents suggested that the Co-ordinator could be done on a part-time/temporary basis, depending on the area of land where conservation grazing required.

An application was therefore submitted to RDC on 19 May 2006 by GAPUK for Peace II funding towards setting up GAP in NI (GAPUK have offered to provide resources as well). The funding will include the employment of a GAPNI Co-ordinator for two years and costs towards setting up LGS's in NI. A copy of the job description for this post is provided in Appendix 9. The Co-ordinator will be employed through the Ulster Wildlife Trust and based in Crossgar, Co. Down. This follows the model in GB, which is widely acknowledged to have had such a positive impact on conservation grazing.

The specific objectives for the project will be:

- Employment of a GAPNI Co-ordinator to progress the project
- Establish LGS's in rural communities across NI and assist graziers offset additional costs of grazing conservation land
- Delivery of relevant training courses in stock management and conservation grazing
- Raising awareness of GAP (including increasing membership)
- Promotion of GAPNI through a series of advisory visits to landowners, farmers and interested organisations
- Encourage use of traditional/native/rare stock breeds for conservation grazing in NI
- Re-introduce appropriate grazing on ASSI's where undergrazing/lack of grazing is an issue and bring sites into favourable condition
- Raise awareness of graziers needs amongst land managers and visa-versa
- Provide advice and produce literature specific to conservation grazing in NI
- Maintain rural communities by reducing abandonment of marginal agricultural land
- Marketing opportunities for conservation grazing produce

The project will have the following outputs:

- A GAPNI Co-ordinator will be employed for two years full-time
- Three LGS's will be established in NI each year
- Two different LANTRA accredited training courses will be delivered annually
- GAPNI Steering Group will meet quarterly

- 15 new GAP members will be recruited annually in NI
- A GAPNI newsletter will be produced twice a year
- A GAPNI website and promotional literature will be produced

The project will have the following positive environmental benefits:

- It will help prevent further abandonment of marginal agricultural land and assist with protecting important rural landscapes such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- It will encourage use of traditional breeds of stock and retain the cultural heritage of rural communities
- It will target ASSI's which are currently undergrazed or lack grazing, to achieve favourable conservation status for the designation features
- It will assist with achieving targets set for NI and UK Biodiversity Action Plans for habitats (HAP's) and species (SAP's) managed through conservation grazing
- It will assist with protecting NI priority habitats/species and species of conservation concern (SOCC's) as identified by EHS
- Low impact conservation grazing will be in line with delivering the Nitrates Directive and Water Framework Directive

Unfortunately, the application for RDC funding was unsuccessful. UWT/GAPUK will submit an application to HLF before mid September 2006.

6.4) Local Grazing Schemes

Local Grazing Schemes (LGS's) have developed as the main delivery mechanism for much of GAP's work. They are based on a philosophy of co-operation and encourage conservation organisations within the same geographical locality to liaise with one another, and others in the livestock industry, to integrate and rationalise their grazing operations. There are around 100 LGS's across the UK, but none as yet in NI. GAP has produced a 'blue-print' for LGS's (see Appendix 10).

The section on sites requiring conservation grazing has clearly demonstrated that there are certain geographical areas in NI where concentrations of quality species rich habitats occur where both designated sites and non-designated sites require additional management.

The following are a selection of LGS initiatives which have recently been established in England through a variety of funding mechanisms:

- In North-east England, a co-ordinator was recruited during 2006 for the North East Grazing Scheme through £164,000 of funding from Defra's Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES). The project will cost a total of £212,000 over three years
- In Shropshire, the Shropshire Local Grazing Scheme (partnership between Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Rural Development Service and Shropshire County Council) was awarded a grant from Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF), allowing the appointment of a Grazing Project Officer during 2006
- In Cheshire, the Cheshire Wildlife Trust were successful in a bid to Defra through their RES scheme and this led to the appointment in May 2005 of a Conservation Grazing Officer

The following are some of the more high profile LGS's in England and Wales, and demonstrate what can be achieved:

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- The Pembrokeshire Grazing Network was established during 2000-2003 at a total cost of £80,000 (it is administered by the lead partner, but does not involve the employment of a specific member of staff). The costs include £40,000 of funding from the Environment Development Fund, a Welsh National Assembly scheme. The network has expanded to include 37 sites covering 312 ha, involving 11 different organisations and initiatives. With 16 graziers on the books, there is now more livestock available than sites that have been put into the network for grazing
- The Hampshire Grazing Project Phase 1 (1999-2003) is jointly funded by Hampshire County Council and English Nature. This involves a budget of £30,000 per year, plus £15,000 per year of grants to facilitate grazing. Phase 1 of the project has involved advice/support for 67 sites covering 1,213 ha, grazing solutions for 33 sites covering 614 ha, and grants for 16 sites covering 551 ha. It remains the leading LGS developed in partnership with GAP

DARD believes that the best practice in conservation grazing is through local solutions with:

- Stock maintained in a specific closed herd, with no release to contributing herds at any time
- Herd use restricted to one area, such as DARD's ten divisional veterinary areas within NI or on a county basis, rather than province-wide
- Minimise linkage, with no contact with other herds
- Yard facilities available for breaks in grazing programmes and not associated with any other herds
- Herd to be locked down to one grazing area

DARD Veterinary Service Policy Branch will be able to discuss best practice for herd management once GAPNI becomes established.

GAP has produced an information leaflet on developing a grazing policy. A conservation grazing policy is in effect a grazing management plan outlining what management is intended to achieve, when, by whom and with what resources. It encompasses all the information relevant to the keeping of livestock to assist the management of semi-natural habitats.

Grazing policies are important for a number of reasons:

- To ensure continuity of management over time despite high staff turnover for example
- To help with funding bids/as a requirement of a funding body
- To demonstrate best practice and transparency to others involved with conservation grazing, the general public, public and private bodies, inspection bodies, and complainants
- To gain the support and commitment of staff, volunteers, partner organisations and colleagues
- To enable sites to be managed for multiple uses without conflict
- To ensure legal compliance for the health and welfare of stock
- To allow continual objective appraisal and improvement of livestock system leading to improvements in performance, cost savings and increased skills of staff
- To ensure the desired management can be achieved with the resources available

Understanding and implementing grazing policies is especially important for any risk assessments.

High quality grazing agreements are required to ensure sites are grazed appropriately at the right time of the year, with the correct stock type/breed and stocking densities. Examples of such grazing agreements/leases are available from GAPUK.

6.5) Shared herd of stock

The response to a shared herd of stock for conservation grazing in NI during the consultation exercise by GAPUK in March/April 2006 was not as positive as for a Co-ordinator in NI. Of 48 respondents, 13 stated that there was a need for a shared herd, 15 said there was possibly a need in principle but highlighted various problems with the idea, 15 were unsure whether there was a need, and five said no to a shared herd.

The following issues concerning a shared herd of stock were highlighted:

- Demand for the herd could be seasonal, with high demand in late Summer/Autumn. There would be a need to identify whether there is sufficient land available throughout the year. If this were not the case, then other grazing land would be required to keep animals and housing may be required during the winter. There would need to be more flexibility regarding grazing periods on ASSI's
- There would be animal welfare and biosecurity issues (especially TB and BC) to consider if the same herd of stock was been routinely moved around NI
- There would be additional costs of moving stock regularly, including transportation, higher fuel costs and vet bills
- The issues of funding such a venture (including purchase of stock and employment of stockperson), responsibility for the stock, and co-ordinating movement of the herd all need to be addressed

EHS Regional Operations Section stated that they were working towards been self contained, and would like to acquire land of low conservation value to graze their own animals when not required for conservation grazing.

DARD regard a shared herd as posing veterinary risks, especially TB and brucellosis.

Other respondents suggested that it would be better to share existing stock within NI for use in conservation grazing by matching up landowners and graziers through a database. One respondent stated that they would prefer that each grazier owned animals and profited from conservation grazing to ensure it is financially attractive and viable in the future than having a shared herd. Another respondent stated that a shared herd could be detrimental to the local farming economy and would be a bad public relations exercise for the conservation organisations involved.

However, one respondent suggested that if rare, traditional breeds of stock were the preferred option for the shared herd, they would be much more suitable for conservation grazing and would be highly marketable.

Case Study: Scottish Wildlife Trust Grazing Project – 'Flying Flock'

In 2001 the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) successfully obtained funding from Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) to develop a grazing project in Fife for six of its sites (five species-rich grassland and one lowland raised bog). These were declining in condition as a result of difficulties in securing appropriate grazing management. Several sites had been grazed by local graziers but numbers of stock and availability were often unreliable and were not delivering positive management across the suite of sites. The basic infrastructure and livestock were secured in 2001 by the project shepherd and over five years of the project, all five SWT sites (plus a further three SWT sites outside Fife) have been grazed by the flock. In 2005, the flock was also used to graze two local authority LNR's in Fife and East Lothian.

The flock was grazed on the grassland sites in autumn and winter, and part of the flock was grazed at the raised bog site during the spring and summer, with the remainder grazed on layback land (including a 4 ha rented field). Vegetation monitoring has shown that autumn and winter grazing on grassland sites had a negligible effect on sward condition, but spring and summer grazing maintained a shorter, more open sward and encouraged grazing tolerant, positive indicator species. On the raised bog site, hard summer grazing has assisted in the control of birch seedlings. The condition of all the grazed sites improved during the short life of the project.

The 'Flying Flock' has generated significant public interest and demonstrated both the positive and negative aspects of stock management and conservation grazing. It has come at an annual cost of £185,000 over five years. 50 Shetland sheep were purchased in the first year of the project, followed by 55 Hebridean sheep in 2003. A Cheviot tup was brought to sire commercial lambs and both Shetland and Hebridean tups were borrowed for producing flock replacements. With lambing only taking place in 2004 and 2005, only a small income was generated from the sale of lamb for meat.

After the project funding ceases, SWT will be unable to support the entire project financially and it must become more financially viable through the generation of sufficient income to offset the annual running costs. The primary source of income will be from the sale of livestock and butchered meat and so there is a need to expand the flock and take on additional grazing sites until a sufficient level of production is achieved. The butchered meat provides a product with added value and SWT branded 'conservation lamb' could be sold directly to customers or through specialist outlets. An initial estimate of 3-400 lambs per year will need to be sold to generate a significant level of income (£20,000) to be augmented by additional sources of income (farming subsidies and agri-environment schemes). Funding has just been established for a further three years (17th August 2006).

6.6) 'Machinery Ring'

During the inaugural meeting of the GAPNI Steering Group on 15th February 2006, it was decided that setting up a 'machinery ring' in NI was not an immediate priority for the Group and it was removed from the objectives of the Group. Only one respondent to the GAPUK consultation exercise during March/April 2006 specifically mentioned the need for a 'machinery ring' in NI. Therefore this can be revisited and the need reassessed by GAPNI in the near future, perhaps when a project officer is appointed.

In England there is kontak (www.kontak.org.uk), a web-based machinery ring service which puts land managers, machine owners and operators in touch with each other for the purpose of facilitating the hire of machines, equipment and labour relevant to nature conservation works and environmentally sensitive agricultural operations. The service encourages owners and providers of machinery and labour to submit details of available resources. These details are then displayed via an on-line, searchable database which anyone can access through the website.

The service was initially concentrated in Derbyshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire. However, from April 2005, it will be rolled out to cover all parts of the UK. It is funded by EN and is an initiative of FACT. A steering group oversees the service, with representatives from EN, Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), National Trust for Scotland (NTS), and DOE NI.

6.7) Training and information needs

The consultation exercise carried out in NI by GAPUK during March/April 2006 has identified the need for training, information and research about conservation grazing. Of the 48 respondents; 25 requested some form of training or information provision on conservation grazing, 11 did not require training or information on conservation grazing, and 12 respondents did not clarify whether they required training/information.

The following issues were highlighted by respondents as needing further training, information or research in NI:

- Animal welfare, transportation of stock, loading/unloading stock, spotting illness within stock, stock requirements, and sharing stock
- Stock handling, and health and safety issues of working with stock
- Stocking levels, grazing periods, types of stock, and breeds of stock (especially rare or native breeds)
- Conservation grazing management for different habitats, and managing undergrazed sites
- Familiarisation of existing conservation grazing projects in NI, best practice elsewhere in GB, and information exchange/discussion forum
- Addressing gap in knowledge, and promoting understanding and good lines of communication between land managers from the conservation sector and the farming community (graziers to receive training in managing conservation sites and conservationists to receive training in farming practice)
- Benefits for flora/fauna from conservation grazing compared to conventional farming

Some organisations within NI already have expertise in some of these areas, including DARD, EHS and FWAGNI. EHS Habitat Survey team may be able to provide advice on habitat definitions, grazing practice and specific requirements for priority habitats. They are also able to give updates to GAPNI from UK habitat Lead Co-ordination Networks and Habitat Action Plan (HAP) groups on research and policy. EHS Biodiversity Unit is able to provide policy advice where HAP's and Species Action Plans (SAP's) implementation requires grazing for correct habitat management. DARD Policy Branch is able to offer advice on animal welfare and biosecurity issues relevant to GAP.

The plan is to run two LANTRA accredited conservation grazing training courses for the first time in NI during October 2006. These courses will initially be run by GAPUK staff from GB. However, the intention is to train a number of individuals in NI, including the proposed GAPNI Co-ordinator, to deliver the courses in future years. The courses will initially be run at the NT Murlough NNR in Co. Down, but it is envisaged that they could be rotated in future years at other sites where best practice in conservation grazing is achieved, for example: Lower Lough Erne Islands (RSPB/EHS), Magilligan ASSI (EHS/UWT), and Belfast Hills (UWT/NT).

All stakeholders involved in GAPNI were approached in May 2006 by GAPUK to determine the level of interest in these training courses. To date, up to 27 people have expressed an initial interest in the one day 'Lookers' course, and up to 24 people are interested in the two day 'Introduction to stock management for conservation grazing' course. All of those who have expressed an interest in the courses are staff from conservation organisations within the province.

Further details of the two LANTRA conservation grazing courses is provided in Appendix 11. LANTRA Awards specialises in qualifications and training for people in the land-based sector through a network of local approved centres and training providers (www.lantra-awards.co.uk).

6.8) Marketing GAPNI produce

GAP has produced a marketing guide for conservation grazing schemes, which is intended to promote and assist the development of new and better approaches to marketing produce from conservation grazing systems. Effective marketing is a vital component of achieving economic sustainability; securing it depends on understanding the complex structure and workings of the market and utilising all the opportunities. GAP encourages a 'whole chain' marketing approach from grass blade to meat joint'.

All schemes agree in their feedback to GAP, about the need to enhance sustainability by improving their financial viability through optimal marketing of grazing livestock and livestock products. It is vital that the income generated from sales of produce be maximised if the graziers who deliver these specialist grazing services on behalf of LGS's are to be properly rewarded for their efforts.

The lifting of the ban excluding cattle over thirty months (OTM) from the human food chain could provide new opportunities for conservation grazing by creating a market for mature, grass-fed beef from native breeds reared in low-input, wildlife-friendly schemes.

One opportunity is the growing consumer interest in specialist and locally produced food as suggested by the growing demand for organic and rare breed meat. Nature conservation is another topic that the UK public values highly, given that five million subscriptions are taken out to such charities annually. If these two concerns could be combined by stimulating active support for saleable products that come specifically from nature reserves, the farmers, who have helped deliver conservation objectives, should be able to benefit financially.

At the Drovers Project Discussion Seminar in May 2005, delegates (sample was 40 people) tasted comparable beef from three breeds. The overall breed preference was for the sample from the Aberdeen Angus, with the Belted Galloway a very close second. Despite been a perfectly good piece of beef, the Limousin received no votes at all for overall preference. However, it was suggested that the results may have been different if delegates did not know which breed sample they were eating, and the Limousin may have been slightly overcooked.

An increasing proportion of farmers are selling the meat from their livestock directly to the public (rather than to supermarkets, butchers or the food service industry) through a variety of means ('added value') usually involving off-farm facilities, on a contract basis, to slaughter and butcher the animals. There are a variety of direct selling methods: farm gate/farm shop, farmers markets, internet/direct mail sales, product directories, food co-operatives, box schemes, and community supported agriculture. The GAP Marketing Guide for Conservation Grazing Schemes provides details of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these options.

Differentiating GAP produce and developing a unique selling proposition to command an added value premium can be achieved in a number of ways:

- Geographical provenance of the product
- Product quality

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- Animal welfare standards
- Assurance scheme recognition e.g. NI Farm Quality Assurance Scheme
- Method of production e.g. organic
- Type of breed e.g. The Traditional Breeds Meat Marketing Scheme (TBMMS) established by RBST
- Environmental benefits

Although there is no general scheme or label yet that indicates products are 'wildlife friendly', a few of the national environmental charities are looking at this area and have launched some initiatives, such as 'White and Wild' operated by the Wildlife Trusts. It costs 6p more than normal milk, 3p goes to the farmer to help fund wildlife-friendly improvements on their land and 2p goes to the Wildlife Trusts.

In England, the Countryside Agency during 2005 looked at the development of a Landscape Quality Mark to market and add value to products from Conservation Grazing schemes. The study concluded that a single national Landscape Quality Mark is not currently appropriate, but that schemes should be encouraged and supported in the development of high quality and distinctive products based on the variety of landscape character.

The GAPNI Steering Group is looking at setting up a number of specialist sub-groups. One of these will be look at how GAPNI produce can be developed and marketed as a premium product.

The concern over lower stocking densities, as a result of CAP reforms, depressing farm incomes could be offset by higher premiums on value added GAPNI/organic produce which has been produced in an environmentally sensitive manner on a sustainable basis.

There are two rural development grant schemes that the Supply Chain Development Branch of DARD deal with, that may be able to fund a producer led marketing group:

- EU Marketing of Quality Agricultural Products (MQAP) – this is non-capital support available for those engaged in the marketing of agricultural produce.
- EU Agricultural Processing and Marketing Grants (PMG) – this scheme is part of the NI Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity.

6.9) Funding and costings for GAPNI

An application was submitted in May 2006 to RDC for £150,000 of funding towards developing GAPNI over two years. This funding is through the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in NI and the border region of Ireland, under PEACE II, Measure 1.11 Rural Reconciliation and Regeneration. Unfortunately, RDC notified UWT/GAPUK that the application had been unsuccessful as 'it did not meet their funding criteria'.

Other potential funding sources for developing GAPNI include:

- EHS grant aid – this programme re-opened in late June 2006. However, only existing projects will be funded during this financial year due to cutbacks in government spending. Given the broad support that GAPNI has received to date from EHS, it is hoped that the project will receive grant aid in the future
- DARD – is the lead agency for conserving rare breeds in the NI Biodiversity Strategy. Under the draft RDP 2007-2013, DARD is proposing to introduce a headage payment for registered Irish moiled cattle of £125 per year for new CMS applicants

- Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) – supports many community led food and health projects. An application will be submitted by GAPUK/UWT by September 2006
- INTERREG – would involve cross-border partnership(s)
- EU Life funding – currently closed at present
- Esmee Fairburn Trust – a charitable trust that currently funds FWAG in NI. It has also funded several local food projects that support sustainable development
- Lough Neagh Partnership – EU funded. Restricted to Lough Neagh basin

One respondent to the consultation exercise, undertaken by GAPUK during March/April 2006, suggested that GAPNI should be self sustaining in the long-term without direct funding.

6.10) Cross-border opportunities

There are a number of opportunities and partner organisations who may be interested in a Grazing Animal Project for the island of Ireland:

Teagasc

The equivalent of DARD in the Republic Of Ireland is Teagasc (www.teagasc.ie), who provide integrated research, advisory and training services for the agriculture and food industry in Ireland. It is a semi-state organisation established under legislation by the Irish government. It is a client-based organisation who operate with all sectors of the agriculture and food industry and with rural development agencies. Around 75% of Teagasc's yearly budget comes from the Irish exchequer and EU funding with the balance generated from earned income. Some 40% of the budget is devoted to research with the remainder split half and half between advisory and training services. Teagasc employs 1,500 staff at over 100 locations throughout Ireland.

Teagasc with its countrywide team of enterprise advisors, planners and environmentalists supported by specialist and research staff provide a comprehensive range of environmental services. These include the Rural Enterprise Protection Scheme (REPS), which is a scheme designed to reward farmers for carrying out their farming activities in an environmentally friendly manner and to bring about environmental improvements on existing farms. Teagasc advisory services focus on increasing awareness of biodiversity. This includes the importance of designated areas from an environmental point of view and how to adapt farming practices to protect them.

The Objectives of REPS are to:

- Establish farming practices and production methods which reflect the increasing concern for conservation, landscape protection and wider environmental problems
- Protect wildlife habitats and endangered species of flora and fauna
- Produce quality food in an extensive and environmentally friendly manner

Over 45,500 farmers joined REPS in Ireland during 1994-1999, which represented 33% of the utilisable agricultural area. Over 590 million euro was paid out to Irish farmers during this period under REPS. During 2000-2006, the number of REPS farmers in Ireland is anticipated to reach over 53,000 and projected expenditure is 1.9 billion euro. REPS is co-financed 75% by the EU and 25% by the Irish Exchequer.

Others:

Birdwatch Ireland (www.birdwatchireland.ie)

Irish Wildlife Trust (www.iwt.ie)

An Taisce (www.antaisce.org)

National Parks and Wildlife Service (www.npws.ie)

7) Future Recommendations for GAPNI and Conservation Grazing

Publicity & Profile

1. The profile of GAP in NI needs to be raised significantly if it is to be successful. The project needs to be widely publicised, including through farming journals, organisations and events, and through the media
2. GAP membership in NI remains very low. The benefits of membership, which is free, needs to be more widely publicised
3. The number of graziers in NI with a specific interest in conservation grazing remains very low, due to insufficient financial rewards and incentives, and to a lesser extent a lack of awareness
4. GAPNI should hold an open day once every 1-2 years on a site demonstrating best practice within the province, in order to raise awareness amongst the farming community, environmental organisations, advisors and general public of the advantages (and disadvantages) of conservation grazing

GAPNI Steering Group

5. The GAPNI Steering Group needs to ratify its aims and objectives by the end of 2006
6. GAPNI Steering Group meetings should be held on a quarterly basis
7. The GAPNI Steering Group should nominate a chairperson and secretary
8. The GAPNI Steering Group should establish three sub-groups as previously suggested: policy, funding, and marketing
9. UWT will organise GAPNI Steering Group meetings in the short-term. However, this responsibility will be taken on by the Co-ordinator (once funding is secure)
10. The location for GAPNI Steering Group meetings should continue to be in Magherafelt due to its central location, in Lough Neagh Partnership office (if available)
11. At least one GAPNI Steering Group meeting per year should include a site visit to look at best practice or a problematic site
12. A member of GAPUK staff should be invited to attend all relevant GAPNI Steering Group meetings, when a GAPNI project officer is appointed this should be reviewed.

Information & Training

13. The one day 'lookers' course and two day 'stock management' course should be run annually in NI (if there is the demand) and adapted if required to be NI specific. This courses will be aimed specifically at the conservation organisations to raise the standard of animal husbandry in the conservation sector
14. Some members of the GAPNI Steering Group should be trained up to deliver these courses in NI
15. Information and training on best practice in conservation grazing should be readily available to the farming community. This could be incorporated into agricultural courses run through Greenmount College for example. Current organisations with expertise in this area (DARD, FWAGNI and EHS, in addition NT are also developing course) should be approached about delivering training. A National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in conservation management could be developed for graziers

Grazing agreements & LGS

16. GAPNI will concentrate on sites not covered by agri-environment schemes or management agreements that require conservation grazing. Priority will initially be given to designated sites such as SAC's, ASSI's and SLNCI's
17. The solution to implementing conservation grazing in NI is through Local Grazing Schemes. This could be done on a county or 'super-council' basis, landscape areas i.e. the Mourne, or 'hotspots' identified in Section 4.1 of the plan. This would address some of the concerns from DARD in relation to biosecurity and animal welfare issues
18. Herds can be moved around from site to site as part of a LGS in NI. However, mixing of herds should be avoided for biosecurity reasons. A shared herd for the whole province is not an option due to animal welfare and biosecurity issues. A GAPNI co-ordinator could revisit the idea of a shared herd, but for local areas. GAPNI should work closely with DARD to ensure any proposals comply fully with current animal welfare and biosecurity legislation
19. The standard of grazing agreements needs to be raised in NI, especially where financial support is dependent on agreements been adhered to. This should include an accreditation scheme for conservation graziers which could lead to long term grazing agreements being developed. This accreditation could be linked to marketing of GAPNI produce
20. Shepherding should be encouraged and funded through agri-environment schemes and management agreements on common land, as it may be cheaper than installing miles of fencing and can achieve better results
21. Grazing agreements within agri-environmental schemes need to have some degree of flexibility to reflect the variables associated with farming practice
22. Land managers (including conservation organisations) may have to only request 'peppercorn' rents from graziers in the future if the demand for rented land dwindles as predicted or have to provide financial incentives

23. Tenant graziers should be compensated for additional actual costs associated with conservation grazing and any actual loss in profit margins. Existing payments must continue to land managers for managing conservation grazing sites. This could be a three-way partnership between the grazier / land manager / DARD and or EHS utilising agri-environment schemes, (and LFACA) fully and management agreements
24. There needs to be more open and effective lines of communication between the farming community and the conservation sector to highlight issues relating to conservation grazing
25. The importance of having layback land for finishing stock off needs to be promoted within the conservation sector to ensure an integrated and viable approach to conservation grazing for graziers

Rare Breeds

26. The use of native/light/hardy breeds of livestock should be encouraged wherever possible. Currently, the numbers of such stock in NI are relatively few, and it should be remembered that any stock is better than no stock at all for conservation grazing. However many of our old breeds are just ticking over without the demand for progeny. Were the demand there, the required numbers could be produced in a short space of time. The use of hardy breeds able to overwinter outdoors could reduce costs of indoor housing and supplementary feeding
27. The priority is to use stock that is most suitable for the site in question, native breeds should be encourage, but where they are not available other alternatives should be looked at. The problem of grazing wetlands such as fens, could be overcome by using specific stock such as Konik ponies or water buffalo that thrive in such environments. Such animals would generate a lot of publicity for GAPNI
28. The proposal to include a headage payment in the draft RDP 2007-2013 for Irish Moiled Cattle is welcome. However, there are concerns that this is only available to new CMS entrants and thus only a couple of herds will be eligible. It has been suggested that DARD should consider rolling out this payment to all breeds on the 'UK Endangered List'

Policy & Agri-environment schemes

29. The main responsibility for conservation grazing in NI at a policy level will remain with DARD through their agri-environment schemes, together with EHS through their management agreements. There is also a responsibility taken on by the practitioners; graziers, land managers / owners
30. In the past, agri-environment schemes have tended to focus on the problem of overgrazing, particularly in the uplands. With the recent changes in agricultural subsidies, undergrazing or lack of grazing is likely to become a major issue as stock numbers are reduced, especially for marginal farmland areas. Agri-environment schemes will have to tackle this as a much higher priority in the future
31. GAPNI steering group recognises the benefit to conservation grazing made through agri-environment schemes, and recommends that agri-environment funding is continued and increased

32. All conservation grazing sites should have an element of site quality monitoring to ensure appropriate grazing regimes are in place to deliver biodiversity targets
33. DARD should continue to provide support and publicity to ensure agricultural support payments and agri-environment schemes are fully utilised by the farming community. DARD should also promote the benefits of these agricultural support payments to the general public.
34. GAPNI Steering group policy sub-group will look at commenting on any consultations relevant to conservation grazing. The Group will submit a response to the draft RDP 2007-2013 in August 2006
35. LFACA scheme should be available to farmers who have designated conservation sites (principally ASSI's and SLNCI's) in lowland areas within NI. There should be provision within the LFACA for producers (e.g. graziers of conservation lands only) who cannot achieve the LFA scheme minimum stocking density of 0.2 LU/ha due to conservation grazing restrictions on specialist habitats
36. DARD should be encouraged to revise its Countryside Management Strategy, and specifically incorporate conservation grazing requirements. The DARD currently employ Queens University Belfast (QUB) agri-environment monitoring team to measure the impact of agri-environment prescriptions on schemes verses non scheme land, in addition DARD should consider adapting its agri-environment schemes to follow the lead taken by Defra in England and Wales, by recommending farmers undertake biodiversity monitoring on their land as part of the scheme
37. Financial support for GAPNI should be sought from EHS, as the project will greatly assist EHS with its target of having all ASSI designation features in favourable condition (particularly for habitats such as lowland meadows and fens)
38. Conservation grazing will also contribute to the NI Biodiversity Strategy, by assisting with the delivery of targets in relevant HAP's and SAP's, and through the protection and enhancement of a wide range of NI priority habitats and species, and species of conservation concern
39. Conservation grazing will assist DARD with meetings its targets imposed through the Nitrates Directive, Water Framework Directive, and NI Biodiversity Strategy

GAPNI Co-ordinator

40. There should be a single point of contact for conservation grazing in NI. Until a Co-ordinator is employed, this will have to be done by the GAPNI Steering Group with support from GAPUK staff
41. A Co-ordinator is required for GAPNI on a full-time, permanent basis. This individual will act as a match maker, bringing together graziers with available stock and land managers with sites requiring grazing. The Super Councils proposed under the RPA could be a good partner for establishing LGS's, particularly as they will possess new responsibilities for biodiversity conservation. The Co-ordinator would represent NI as part of the GAPUK network

42. The Co-ordinator would be responsible for developing advice and literature on conservation grazing that is specific to NI, including grazing agreements and lease payments. This would include a website and newsletter
43. A machinery ring is not a priority at present. However a GAPNI co-ordinator will look at facilitating a machinery ring for NI, creating a database for contracting conservation services with man and machine hired together
44. A GAPNI co-ordinator could work along side the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Officers to integrate conservation grazing in to the LBAPs and deliver conservation grazing on the ground
45. In the current climate, GAPNI is unlikely to be self sustaining and funding will be required in the short/medium term at least, especially to employ a Co-ordinator. A application will be submitted this year by GAPUK/UWT for HLF funding towards establishing GAP in NI (including funding a Co-ordinator). Information and costings are now available 'off the shelf' as a result of the funding application to RDC. Letters of support for the project are required from the GAPUK, and the individual member organisations of the GAPNI Steering Group.
46. Funding applications must include provision of grants to facilitate LGS's
47. Potential partners should be sought in the Republic of Ireland to undertake conservation grazing throughout the island of Ireland and take advantage of European funding available (INTERREG). Many landscape areas cut across the border i.e. Cuilcagh Mountain in Co. Fermanagh/Co. Cavan

Marketing of produce

48. For conservation grazing to be financially attractive to farmers, there must be effective marketing and branding of GAPNI produce. This could be done in conjunction with one of the conservation organisations and would address two concerns of the public: nature conservation and the demand for quality, traceable local produce. The 'added-value' produce could help offset the additional costs associated with conservation grazing and thereby increasing profit margins
49. The marketing sub-group should produce a strategy for marketing GAPNI produce, identifying the most appropriate outlet for produce and determining what branding would be most effective. The sub-group should apply to one of DARD's marketing grant schemes to fund such a venture

General

50. It is possible that conservation grazing may help retain farm families and part-time farmers, at a time when the numbers of farmers is rapidly dwindling and the proportion of young/middle-aged farmers is getting less each year
51. Efforts should be made to encourage new participants; graziers, land managers, etc, into conservation grazing, as this is a specialised form of grazing that requires skill, training and technical support

52. The GAPNI steering group should initially review this development plan annually to monitor progress. Once a GAPNI co-ordinator is appointed they will have a 5 year work plan that will reflect this development plan, which will be review regularly

8) Summary

There is currently a great deal of interest and support for establishing a Grazing Animal Project in Northern Ireland, with many sites already benefiting from conservation grazing and many more in need.

Overall it is agreed that there is a need for a full time GAP Coordinator for NI to help maintain and increase conservation grazing in NI through many avenues, such as establishing Local Grazing Schemes, providing training, maintaining 'match making' data base of land managers and graziers, providing best practise guidance, acting as a broker between landowners and graziers, promotion of GAP, etc.

There is a real need for financial support to establish and operate GAP in NI effectively, to fund a co-ordinator, to establish LGS's, to overcome some of the issues of grazing sites such as fencing and stock handling facilities, incentives for the graziers, to provide training and support materials, to market the product, etc.

In addition, one of the strongest threads that have come out of this process is the need for co-operation of all parties involved, building a better relationship and understanding of everyone's needs, and where possible creating flexible agreements to accommodate the needs of all parties involved.

Overall, with the continued support of all parties involved and putting into practise the recommendations of this report, especially the funding of a GAPNI Coordinator, the Grazing Animal Project will become well established in NI, developing and supporting conservation grazing long into the future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: DARD Strategic Plan 2006-2011 – Relevant strategic goals and objectives

Goal 1 – To improve performance in the market place

- Strategic objective 1 – Farm-gate sales and ancillary land based industries to be competitive in a reformed market
- Key action 3 – Implement the NI Fit for Market food strategy
- Key action 4 – Deliver sectoral strategic plans and support in line with industry needs
- Key action 5 – Deliver the SFP

Goal 2 – To strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas

- Strategic objective 1 – A joined up approach to rural policy
- Strategic objective 2 - A diversified rural economic base
- Key action 2 – Implement a new Rural Development Regulation Plan
- Key action 3 – Support economic diversification opportunities

Goal 3 – To enhance animal, fish and plant health and welfare

- Strategic objective 1 – complementary animal health and welfare strategies for NI and the island of Ireland
- Strategic objective 2 – Eradication or considerable reductions in the level of animal diseases that have significant public health or economic consequences
- Strategic objective 5 – Enhanced attention to welfare
- Key action 1 – Deliver the NI and All Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategies
- Key action 2 – Deliver an effective education communication Strategy to promote biosecurity and the prevention of animal diseases
- Key action 3 – Implement disease control to eradicate or reduce the level of serious endemic animal diseases
- Key action 4 – Improve surveillance, and maintain robust preventative controls and contingency plans for preventing and controlling major epizootic animal disease outbreaks
- Key action 5 – Further develop animal traceability systems
- Key action 7 – Undertake research programmes to underpin animal health policy objectives
- Key action 8 – Secure a greater sharing of the costs of animal health and welfare policies
- Key action 9 – Update Animal Welfare legislation

Goal 4 – To develop a more sustainable environment

- Strategic objective 1 – Adoption by the agri-food sector of environmentally sustainable farming methods
- Strategic objective 2 – Compliance by the agri-food sector with EU environmental directives
- Strategic objective 3 – Further conversion of farmland to woodland and forest
- Key action 1 – Deliver the environmental component of the NI Rural Development Regulation Plan, 2007-2013
- Key action 2 – Collaborate with DOE on managing the implementation of environmental policies
- Key action 5 – Maintain contingency plans to deal with environmental threats
- Key action 6 – Deliver education programmes to support environmental policy
- Key action 7 – Undertake research programmes to support environmental policy

Appendix 2: Northern Ireland legislation relevant to farm biosecurity

1) Identification, registration and movement of animals, and the registration of herds and flocks is covered by:

Cattle

- Cattle Identification (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1998 S.R. 1998 No. 279 (amended by S.R. 1999 No. 324)
- Cattle Identification (Notification of Births, Deaths and Movements) Regulations (NI) 1999 S.R. 1999 No. 265
- Cattle Identification (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 1998 S.R. 1998 No. 27
- Cattle Passport Regulations (NI) 1999 S.R. 1999 No. 324

Sheep/Goats

- Identification and Movement of Sheep and Goats Order (NI) 1997 S.R. 1997 No. 173 (as amended by S.R. 1998 No. 393)

2) The keeping of animals is covered by the:

Animals Records Order (Northern Ireland) 1997 S.R. 1997 No. 172 (as amended by S.R. 1998 No. 27 and S.R. 2000 No. 344)

3) The disposal of fallen animals, foetuses and afterbirths, and animal by-products is covered by:

The EU Animal By-Products Regulation (EC) No 1774/2002 and the Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003 S.R. 2003 No. 495

4) The transport of animals and disinfection of vehicles used in animal transport is covered by:

The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order (Northern Ireland) 1998
Transport of Animals and Poultry (Cleansing and Disinfection) No.2 Order (Northern Ireland) 1997 S.R. 1997 No 466

5) The welfare of animals is covered by the:

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972
The Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 S.R. 2000 No. 270 (as amended by S.R. 2002 No. 259)

6) The legislation for the control of tuberculosis is:

The Tuberculosis Control Order (NI) 1999 No. 263
The Tuberculosis (Examination and Testing) Scheme Order 1999 No. 264

7) The legislation for the control of brucellosis is:

The Brucellosis Control Order (NI) 1972 No. 94
The Brucellosis Control Order (NI) 2004 (Statutory Rule 2004 No. 361)
The Brucellosis (Examination and Testing) Scheme Order (NI) 2004 (Statutory Rule 2004 No. 364)

Appendix 3: DARD Biosecurity Code – General preventative measures

The Code includes the following actions that can be taken to reduce the spread of animal diseases:

- Provision of isolation facilities plays an important part in controlling the entry of, and spread of disease on farms
- Maintain a closed herd/flock or, if not feasible, only purchase from a small number of reliable sources
- When sourcing animals, the testing history and disease status of the animals and herd/flock from which they came, should be established
- Comply with animal movement legislation
- Do not share bulls between herds
- New or returning stock should be placed in isolation for 21 days
- At first signs of illness, isolate sick animals
- Dispose of dead animals promptly, hygienically and in accordance with relevant legislation.
- Avoid nose to nose contact with neighbouring stock
- Farm boundaries should be secure, with at least a three metre gap between neighbouring stock
- Comply fully with rules on movement notifications and movement licenses
- Where common grazing is used, stock should be isolated for 21 days upon return
- Livestock must only be transported in vehicles that have been cleaned and disinfected
- Avoid sharing trailers and other machinery
- Keepers of cattle, sheep and goats must be registered and animals identified in accordance with the law
- There are legal requirements to maintain stock breeding and movement records
- Avoid grazing field which contain badger setts if possible
- Fence off badger setts to prevent access by cattle
- Raise troughs and drinkers off the ground to minimise access by badgers
- Clean feed and water troughs regularly
- Use mains water wherever possible
- Fence off watercourses and stagnant ponds

The Biosecurity Code also states that walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and other countryside users should:

- Never feed animals or leave food lying around
- Avoid contact with farm animals
- Respect any official signposting in the event of a disease outbreak
- Use disinfectant footpads or baths where provided, particularly in the event of a disease outbreak
- Follow biosecurity advice given by the farmer

Appendix 4: DARD Biosecurity Code – Preventing the spread of tuberculosis and brucellosis

With regard to tuberculosis (TB) and brucellosis (BR), the Biosecurity Code states that cattle owners must:

- Obey all animal movement regulations and any restrictions
- Ensure all animals are identified in accordance with legal requirements, and records of breeding and movement are up to date at all times (rapid traceability is important for effective disease control)
- Co-operate with scheduling of TB and BR tests (failure to do so is an offence), as an aid of early detection and elimination of reactor animals
- Isolate reactor(s) and inconclusive(s) and animals reported as high risk
- Maintain fences adjoining neighbouring land to prevent contact between cattle herds
- Carry out pre-movement testing for BR. Pre-movement testing should also be carried out for TB
- Cattle owners should maintain a closed herd, or where not possible, only purchase from a small number of reliable sources
- Badger setts should be fenced off to prevent access by cattle. If possible, fields containing badger setts should not be grazed. Water troughs and drinkers should be raised to prevent badgers getting access. Badgers should not have access to farm buildings, feed and feedstores

Appendix 5: Northern Ireland legislation relevant to cattle welfare

- Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966
- Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 1972
- Noxious Weeds (NI) Order 1977 – S.I. 1977 No. 52
- Artificial Insemination of Cattle Regulations (NI) 1988 – S.R. 1988 No. 339 (as amended)
- Bovine Embryo (Collection, Production and Transplantation) Regulations (NI) 1996 - S.R. 1996 No. 389 (as amended)
- Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations (NI) 1996 – S.R. 1996 No. 558 (as amended)
- Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order (NI) 1997 – S.R. 1997 No. 346 (as amended)
- Cattle Identification (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 1998 – S.R. 1998 No. 27
- Welfare of Calves at Market Regulations (NI) 1998 – S.R. 1998 No. 202
- Cattle Identification (No. 2) Regulations (NI) 1998 – S.R. 1998 No. 279
- Cattle Identification (Notification of Births, Deaths and Movements) Regulations (NI) 1999 – S.R. 1999 No. 265
- Cattle Passport Regulations (NI) 1999 – S.R. 1999 No. 324
- Welfare of Animals (Staging Points) Regulations (NI) 1999 – S.R. 1999 No. 326
- Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (NI) 2000 – S.R. 2000 No. 270
- Transport of Animals and Poultry (Cleansing and Disinfection) Order (NI) 2000 – S.R. 2000 No. 293
- The Veterinary Surgery (Rectal Ultrasound Scanning of Bovines) Order 2002 – S.I. 2002 No. 2584
- Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003 – S.R. 2003 No. 495
- Identification and Notification of Cattle Regulations (NI) 2004 – S.R. 2004 No. 420

Appendix 6: ESA/CMS habitat management – grazing requirements and biodiversity objectives (DARD 2006c)

1) Grasslands

- *Unimproved grassland (£50/ha)*
(permanent grassland which has not been cultivated for some years).
Grazing requirements: must be maintained by grazing, although no grazing period, stock type or stocking density specified. Supplementary feeders must be rotated to avoid excessive poaching.
Biodiversity objectives: NI Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species will benefit, including Irish hare and skylark.
- *Species-rich dry and species-rich calcareous grassland (£155-£170/ha)*
Grazing requirements: Option 1: Year round grazing at a stocking density of 0.5 livestock units (LU) per ha or Option 2: No grazing between 1 May – 31 July. Stocking density must not exceed 0.75 LU/ha between 1 August – 30 April. Supplementary feeding sites are not permitted.
Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including chough, coastal sand dunes, and calcareous grassland.
- *Species-rich wet grassland (£155-£170/ha)*
Grazing requirements: no grazing permitted 1 January – 15 May. Grazing permitted between 16 May – 31 December at a maximum stocking density of 1.0 LU/ha. Supplementary feeding sites not permitted.
Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including redshank and lowland meadow.
- *Species-rich grassland cut for hay (£155-£170/ha)*
Grazing requirements: spring grazing (April/May) is permitted where this is traditional practice. Fields must be closed up by 15 May and hay not cut until after 31 July. The aftermath must be grazed. Grazing is not permitted between 1 November – 31 March. Supplementary feeding sites are not permitted.
Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including meadow cranesbill.

Wetlands

- *Fen, swamp and reedbeds (£90/ha)*
Grazing requirements: No grazing permitted 1 January – 31 May. Between 1 June – 31 December, stocking density must not exceed 0.075 LU/ha at any time. Supplementary feeding sites are not permitted.
Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including lapwing, blue-eyed grass, reedbeds, and fens.

Moorland and raised bog

- *Heather moorland (£50/ha)*
Grazing requirements:

Heather moorland type	No grazing period	Stocking density & grazing animal	Grazing period
Dry heath	1 Nov – 28/29 Feb	0.30 LU/ha sheep	1 Mar – 31 Oct

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	or 1 Sept – 31 May	0.30 LU/ha cattle	1 June – 31 Aug
Wet heath	1 Nov – 28/29 Feb	0.25 LU/ha sheep	1 Mar – 31 Oct
	or 1 Sept – 31 May	0.20 LU/ha cattle	1 June – 31 Aug
Blanket bog	1 Nov – 28/29 Feb	0.075 LU/ha sheep only	1 Mar – 31 Oct
Degraded heath (dry)	1 Nov – 28/29 Feb	0.30 LU/ha sheep and/or cattle	1 Mar – 31 Oct
Degraded heath (wet)	1 Nov – 28/29 Feb	0.25 LU/ha sheep	1 Mar – 31 Oct
	Or 1 Sept – 31 May	0.20 LU/ha cattle	1 June – 31 Aug

Supplementary feeding sites not permitted

Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including hen harrier, small cow wheat, blanket bog, upland heathland, and montane heath.

- Rough moorland grazing (£50/ha)*
Grazing requirements: stocking rate restriction of 0.75 LU/ha all year. Supplementary feeding permitted, but feeding sites must be regularly moved to prevent trampling and overgrazing damage.
 Areas of common grazing will be eligible provided all graziers/shareholders agree to follow the relevant management requirements.
Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including curlew, purple moor grass and rush pastures, and upland calcareous grassland.
- Lowland raised bog (£50/ha)*
Grazing requirements:

Vegetation type	Stocking density	Grazing period (sheep)	Grazing period (cattle)
Fen/swamp	0.075 LU/ha	1 June – 31 Oct	1 June – 31 Aug
Wet heath	0.25 LU/ha	1 June – 31 Oct	1 June – 31 Aug
Semi natural grassland	1.0 LU/ha	1 June – 31 Oct	1 June – 31 Aug
Woodland (>0.2 ha)	0.20 LU/ha	1 June – 31 Oct	1 June – 31 Aug
Woodland (<0.2 ha)	0 LU/ha	1 June – 31 Oct	1 June – 31 Aug

Supplementary feeding sites not permitted.

Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including lowland raised bog and marsh fritillary.

Woodland, scrub and parkland

- Woodland – mixed ash woodland, oak woodland and wet woodland (£85-£120/ha)*
Grazing requirements: no grazing option OR light grazing option; during 1 June – 30 September stocking density must not exceed 0.50 LU/ha at any time. No grazing permitted 1 October – 31 May. Supplementary feeding sites not permitted. Use mature cattle if possible, but sheep or horses may be used.
Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including wet woodland, mixed ash woodland, oak woodland, wood cranesbill, yellow bird's nest, and red squirrel.

- *Scrub (£85-£120/ha)*
Grazing requirements: small areas of scrub must be cut annually to ensure at least 50% of field area is capable of being grazed. Grazing period, type of stock and stocking density not specified.
Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including yellowhammer.
- *Parkland (£65/ha)*
Grazing requirements: nothing specifically mentioned other than no supplementary feeding sites.
Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets, including lowland wood-pasture and parkland.

Other

- *Bird breeding, feeding and nesting sites*

(1) Breeding wader sites (£80-£130/ha)

Breeding wader sites are fields of improved, unimproved or rough pastures with at least one breeding pair of curlew, redshank or snipe.

Grazing requirements: option 1 - no grazing permitted 15 April – 30 June. No stocking density restrictions from 1 July – 14 April, however cattle should be grazed at some point during this period OR option 2 – from 15 April to 30 June, stocking density must not exceed 0.75 LU/ha for cattle or sheep. No stocking density restrictions from 1 July – 14 April, however cattle should be grazed at some point during this period.

Cattle must not be directly released onto breeding wader sites after been wintered indoors. Supplementary feeding sites between 15 April and 30 June require written permission from DARD.

Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets for curlew, redshank, and lapwing.

(2) Chough option

Available to farmers within a targeted area along the north Antrim coastline (within the ESA).

Grazing requirements: grassland fields must be grazed to create a sward height of less than 5 cm. This includes mixed grazing and grazing some fields all year through.

Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets for chough and Irish hare.

(3) Lapwing breeding sites – optional (£150-£515/ha)

Lapwing sites are fields of improved or unimproved grassland with at least one breeding pair of lapwing. Sites with lapwing and other breeding waders are classed as 'breeding wader sites).

Grazing requirements: graze during the winter or early spring to produce a short sward 3 centimetres (cm) by mid March. From 1 April to 15 June, stocking density must not exceed 0.75 LU/ha to produce a sward height between 3-12 cm. Cattle must not be released directly onto lapwing sites after being wintered indoors and must be outside for at least one week before being put onto lapwing breeding sites. Supplementary feeding sites require the written permission of DARD.

Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets for lapwing.

(4) Winter feeding sites for swans and geese – optional (£120/ha)

Winter feeding sites for swans and geese are field of improved grassland (and winter cereals or winter oilseed rape) that are regularly used for grazing, by a minimum of 25 migratory swans and/or geese per ha during the period October – March. Only migratory swans and geese can be included in the count.

Grazing requirements: no grazing on improved grassland sites from 1 October – 31 March. No grazing restrictions from 1 April – 30 September. Sward height must be between 5-10 cm by 1 October each year. If grassland has suffered extensive poaching and grazing damage caused by grazing swans/geese, the damaged area may be re-seeded after 31 March.

Biodiversity objectives: contributes towards the NI BAP targets for pale-bellied brent goose.

- *Archaeological features (£335/ha)*

Grazing is permitted within the protected area and grass cover must be maintained on and around the archaeological feature, but they must not be used for supplementary feeding sites.

Appendix 7: MOSS scheme grazing management for habitats and payments (EHS 2002)

- 1) Woodland
 - Grazing not allowed unless specified in agreement. No supplementary feeding.
 - Upland mixed ash, upland oak, or wet woodlands - £95/ha
 - Lowland woodlands, pastures and parklands - £50/ha
- 2) Heathlands
 - Grazing at low stocking levels, with no winter grazing at all. No supplementary feeding.
 - Dry or wet heath - £50/ha (1-100 ha) or £25/ha (>100 ha)
 - Montane heath - £50/ha
- 3) Peat bogs
 - Grazing may be allowed, but only on blanket bogs. No supplementary feeding.
 - Raised bog - £70/ha
 - Blanket bog - £50/ha
- 4) Grasslands
 - Grazing will be allowed at certain stocking levels. No supplementary feeding.
 - Purple moor grass and rush pastures, lowland dry acid grassland, lowland meadow and pasture - £140/ha
- 5) Calcareous habitats
 - Grazing should continue using the grazing regime and livestock traditionally used on the site. No supplementary feeding.
 - Upland calcareous grassland - £140/ha
- 6) Fens
 - Grazing may be allowed where ground conditions permit. Grazing is not permitted between 1 April – 15 July to prevent trampling of ground-nesting birds. No supplementary feeding.
 - Fens and reedbeds - £110/ha
- 7) Coastal
 - Grazing may be permitted e.g. on coastal maritime cliff and slopes. No supplementary feeding.
 - Maritime cliff slope, coastal sand dunes, and coastal salt marsh - £80/ha
- 8) Special payments
 - Breeding wader sites – no grazing from start of January to mid June
 - Winter feeding sites for swans and geese

Appendix 8: Attendance of GAPNI steering group meetings

Attendee	15/02/06	12/04/06	03/07/06
Ruth Ruddell (FWAG)	Y	Y	
P. J. Mullan (FWAG)	Y	Y	Y
Sean Convery (FWAG)	Y	Y	
Andrew Upton (GAPUK)	Y	Y	Y
Rachel Bain (GAPUK)	Y	Y	
Barrie Elkin (UWT)	Y	Y	
Olive Mercer (RBST)	Y		
Bryan Irvine (DARD)	Y	Y	Y
Oisin Murnion	Y	Y	
Seamus Burns (Lough Neagh Advisory Committee / LBAP)	Y	Y	Y
James Warnock (EHS)	Y		
Alistair Church (EHS)	Y		
Michael Morgan (EHS)	Y		
Jim Bradley (Belfast Hills Partnership)	Y	Y	
Marcus Malley (Craigavon Borough Council)	Y		Y
Sandra Riley (Craigavon Borough Council)	Y		
Hugh Thompson (Craigavon Borough Council)	Y		
Jane Wilson (GAPUK)		Y	Y
Donnell Black		Y	
Darrell Stanley (EHS)		Y	
Barry Ferguson (Mourne Heritage Trust)		Y	
Freda Magill (RBST)		Y	Y
Ian Simpson (UFU/Irish Moiled Cattle Society)		Y	Y
David Hawthorne (NT)		Y	
Gary Davidson		Y	
John Scovell (RSPB)		Y	
Noel Mitchell (Craigavon Borough Council)			Y
Brad Robson (RSPB)			Y

Apologies

15/02/06: Brian Poots (Woodland Trust), Maxime Sizaret (Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT)), Darrell Stanley (EHS), Sean Murray (Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association), Aileen Smith (UFU), David Hawthorne (NT), Brad Robson (RSPB), Gary Davidson, and Donnell Black.

12/04/06: Brian Poots (Woodland Trust), Roger Pollen (British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) NI), Maxime Sizaret (CCGHT), Marcus Malley (Craigavon Borough Council), Olive Mercer (RBST), Kerrie Mackie (WWT), James Warnock (EHS), and Michael Morgan (EHS).

03/07/06: Roger Pollen (BASC NI), Giles Knight (RSPB), Rachel Bain (GAPUK), Barrie Elkin (UWT), Oisin Murnion, Jim Bradley (Belfast Hills Partnership), and John Scovell (RSPB).

Appendix 9: Draft GAPNI Co-ordinator job description

Reporting to: Director of Programmes
Located: Ulster Wildlife Centre, Crossgar
Hours: 37.5 hours per week which will include some weekend and evening work.
Leave: 24 days per annum plus NI public holidays
Contract: Dependent on funding
There will be a 3-month probationary period.
Salary: Technical Officer scale (plus 4% employer's pension contribution) depending on qualifications and experience

This is a new post, facilitating a high standard and profile of developing the Grazing Animal Project (GAP) in Northern Ireland (NI). The GAPNI Co-ordinator will be responsible for promotion and facilitation of conservation grazing throughout NI. This will include provision of training for practitioners, setting up local grazing initiatives, and creating and maintaining a database of graziers and land managers. This is a high profile position, and will require skills related to both farming and conservation, and working with people at a wide range of levels.

Responsibilities:

1. Establishing Local Grazing Schemes (LGS's) in rural communities across NI and assisting graziers offset additional costs of grazing conservation
2. Delivering relevant training courses in stock management and conservation grazing, and providing advice/literature specific to conservation grazing in NI
3. Raising awareness of GAP and increasing GAP membership through a series of advisory visits to landowners, farmers and interested organizations such as Farmers Unions. This will include one to one visits, talks and meetings to provide links, support and information for landowners, farmers and graziers
4. Encouraging the use of traditional/native/rare stock breeds for conservation grazing in NI and developing marketing opportunities for conservation grazing produce
5. Re-introducing appropriate grazing at designated sites such as ASSI's, where undergrazing/ lack of grazing is an issue, and bring sites into favourable condition, helping to maintain rural communities by reducing abandonment of marginal agricultural land

Miscellaneous

1. Prepare progress and other reports as required.
2. Adhere to the policies and practices of the Ulster Wildlife Trust at all times and respect the policies and practices of project partners.
3. Co-operate with and support Trust volunteers.
4. Ensure that contact with others is of a style and quality consistent with the Trust's ethos.
5. Undergo training and appraisal as required.
6. Represent the Ulster Wildlife Trust publicly and in the media as required.
7. Carry out other appropriate activities as considered necessary by the Ulster Wildlife Trust.

Personal Profile

A candidate **MUST** be able to prove in the application papers and further demonstrate at an interview that they meet all the principal criteria below and as many as possible of the secondary criteria listed.

The essential criteria are:

1. A degree level environmental qualification and a minimum of 2 year's full-time relevant experience
or
at least 5 years full-time equivalent relevant experience in nature conservation and farming & wildlife management
2. A demonstrable ability to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing, to a wide range of audiences
3. A current clean full driving licence and access to own transport
4. Ability to deliver a project on time and within budget, and to prepare written and verbal reports
5. A good level of computer literacy, with proven experience of using Microsoft Office software
6. A proven ability to work on own initiative and without direct supervision

The desirable criteria are:

1. An ability to identify elements of the flora and fauna of Northern Ireland
2. A demonstrable understanding of practical, contemporary environmental issues, including agricultural policies and rural issues

The closing date for completed applications is XXX. If you are unsuccessful no correspondence will be entered into. Canvassing will disqualify.

The Ulster Wildlife Trust is an Equal Opportunities Employer

Appendix 10: A 'blue-print' for Local Grazing Schemes

The following is an initial checklist to establish the most inclusive and appropriate set of options for delivering LGS's through a regionally co-ordinated structure.

- 1) Identifying regional constraints:
 - Inventory of sites needing more effective or more sustainable grazing (SAC, NNR, ASSI, SLNCI). BAP habitats & species that would benefit. Establish grazing database describing conservation condition
 - Inventory of site owners/managers; government agencies, local authorities, non-government organisations (NGO's), private landowners/tenants
 - Inventory of existing or potential graziers and sources of livestock (species, breeds and production classes). Resume of farming systems in the region, identifying agri-environment scheme agreement holders, organic farmers and members of Traditional Breeds Meat Marketing Scheme (TBMMS), FWAG, or other relevant farm assurance schemes
 - Inventory of livestock infrastructure components; abattoirs, meat processors, wholesalers, producer groups/buying groups, co-operatives, auction marts, retail outlets, farm relief services and contractors, machinery rings, extension/advisory services, training groups, business consultants, and IT provision
 - Inventory of farming organisations; UFU, NIAPA, FWAG, breed and herd or flock book societies, Soil Association, organic farmers and growers, and RBST

- 2) Identifying Regional Opportunities:
 - Identify and contact existing LGS's and establish channels of communication. Assess progress achieved
 - Identify and contact other grazing projects; establish operational detail and lines of communication
 - Identify sources of livestock and husbandry (from 1)
 - Identify sources of financial support for start-up; HLF, EHS grant aid, DARD, other environmental funds (e.g. Landfill Tax)
 - Identify added-value markets for sustaining project; retailers interested in sourcing locally, farm gate sales, farmers markets, organic outlets, TBMMS accredited butchers, box schemes, community supported agriculture projects, and local food works project
 - Identify sources of training/advice/services (from 1)

- 3) Forging/improving links:
 - Getting together; explaining systems and relationships to interested parties/grazing projects, identifying common objectives, establishing dialogue, agreeing to co-operate
 - Building a partnership; collective assessment of objectives, constraints and potential solutions, building consensus, prioritising needs, clarifying roles, agreeing working structures, quantifying resources (available and required)
 - Identifying solutions; utilising available information (from 1 & 2), recognising gaps, seeking new ideas (from GAP national network), considering all options, assessing practicalities, establishing contacts, organising demonstration visits, securing sources of advice, funding, income and training (from 2)

4) Implementing best practice

- Designing LGS systems; planning grazing regimes, collating livestock systems, identifying and quantifying produce for potential markets, promoting other outputs (education, interpretation, recreation), encouraging collaboration between adjoining LGS's/other grazing projects (e.g. sharing expertise, securing resources and supplying markets)
- Undertaking action; practical delivery of grazing projects will be the responsibility of conservation staff, farmers and landowners; GAP's role in co-ordinating them on a regional basis will be to provide feedback on the progress achieved towards combining delivery of biodiversity targets with attaining commercial viability
- Reviewing progress; helping to resolve unforeseen difficulties by pointing practitioners to appropriate sources of advice and information. Keeping financial performance under review using whatever appropriate bench-marking measures are available from within the GAP national network and beyond. Addressing economic issues to help maintain LGS viability

5) Developing the Network

- Expansion; helping to attract new participants (farmers and site managers) to join existing LGS and other grazing projects wherever needed
- Consolidation; identifying gaps in the regional network for new LGS's and promoting the idea amongst relevant individuals and organisations. Helping to plan and implement proposals as necessary
- Integration; seeking solutions to issues affecting the region from within the national network, pursuing these through the different channels (newsletter, website, discussion groups, demonstration events, project co-ordinators, executive committee). Communicating experience gained within specific regional context back to GAP's national network and helping to apply it elsewhere in the UK

Appendix 11

National GAP Stock Husbandry Training Courses

Courses will be delivered regionally to minimize travel requirements.
Both courses are accredited by Lantra.

Course 1: Lookers (1 day)

Intended audience:

The target audience is volunteer and other lookers who will not necessarily have a background in nature conservation or animal care. By the end of the course they need to be confident in their ability to undertake daily stock checks, complete a monitoring form, and take appropriate actions if the need arises.

Content:

- 1. Introduction to course**
- 2. The role and responsibilities of the looker:**
 - a. *What a looker should and should not do*
 - b. Responsibilities and action plans**
 - c. Responses of animals to humans
- 3. Background to the lookers role: including Health and Welfare**
- 4. How to looker:**
 - a. Approaching the Stock
 - b. Call out procedure in the event of an animal needing attention:
 - c. Checking the infrastructure
- 5. Demonstration of the looking process and techniques in the field**
- 6. Key point summary and feedback**

Cost: The price will be in the region of £60 (depending on venue)

Course 2: An introduction to stock management for conservation grazing **(2 days)**

Intended audience

Course 2 is aimed at two groups of people:

- Those who have some hands-on responsibilities for livestock but do not have overall responsibility (i.e. do not own the animals).
- Those who are considering getting their own stock and need an introduction.
(NB this course is not intended to equip someone with all the knowledge they will need to own livestock).

By the end of the course students will be able to prepare an Action Plan, complete a Risk Assessment and produce an Animal Health Plan in conjunction with a local vet.

Content

Introduction

- 1. Grazing Ecology and Physiology on natural and semi-natural habitats:**
 - a. Principles*
 - b. Grazing abilities of different types of livestock*
- 2. Health and Welfare Regulations:**
 - a. Legislation including transporting stock, buying, selling*
 - b. Update of new legislation*
- 3. Responsibilities of the keeper:**
 - a. Administration and record keeping*
 - b. Biosecurity*
- 4. Responsibilities to others:**
 - a. Insurance*
 - b. Information*
 - c. Other considerations*
- 5. Practical handling session:**
 - a. Rounding up and penning*
 - b. Handling equipment*
 - c. Hands-on checking techniques*
 - d. Hygiene standards to minimise disease transmission*
- 6. Design of Grazing Systems:**
 - a. Infrastructure*
 - b. What to include*
- 7. Health and Welfare in Practice:**
 - a. Five Freedoms*
 - b. Risk Assessments*
- 8. Action Plans:**
 - a. Design*
 - b. Implementation*
- 9. Animal Health Plan:**
 - a. Producing a plan*
- 10. Site visit:**
 - a. Looking requirements*
 - b. Observations*
 - c. Monitoring impacts*
 - d. Practical handling exercise*
 - e. Risk Assessments and Health Plans*
 - f. Herbage availability and sward assessment both from the point of view of animal and ecological requirements*
- 11. Conclusions and feedback**

Cost

The price will be in the region of £170, depending on venue (not including overnight accommodation).
