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*“We need agricultural policies that have nature friendly farming at their heart. We need the government of Northern Ireland to commit to the development of a nature friendly agricultural bill to make this happen”*

Phil Carson, NFFN Sustainable Farming Lead for Northern Ireland

supporting farming for nature and carbon, but they have yet to lay out a plan for how they will make this a reality. Much more must be done. The government of Northern Ireland needs to ensure that farmers are being supported to deliver benefits like greenhouse gas emission reductions, biodiversity, clean air and water, which are crucial for food production.

**Develop land use strategies for food and environment.** Northern Ireland currently has no land-use strategy. The government needs to develop a strategy to guide how land is used in Northern Ireland. A land-use strategy is a crucial mechanism in unlocking farming’s potential by making wiser decisions about land use.

**Champion a global nature-positive food system through trade policy.** Northern Ireland is heavily reliant on imported soya and other proteins to feed livestock.<sup>120</sup> Northern Ireland currently has the highest stocking density of livestock in the UK with over 25 million poultry birds and pig rearing at a 10-year high.<sup>121</sup> This level of livestock production drives deforestation and land-use change in other parts of the world where ingredients for feed are grown. NI needs to ensure that livestock production is sustainable by reducing its dependence on external feedstock.

**Fund farmer peer-to-peer learning.** NI passed its Climate Act in February 2022.<sup>122</sup> This Act includes a provision to fund a just agricultural

transition.<sup>123</sup> Support for farmers for knowledge sharing, based on the principles of nature friendly farming, needs to be provided as part of this transition framework.

**Support research into nature friendly farming approaches.** Northern Ireland is in the process of surveying soil health and organic carbon stocks across the country.<sup>124</sup> This data collection process will play an important role in developing a baseline carbon assessment. This surveying also needs to include up to date habitat surveys and biodiversity audits to ensure that measurement is holistic and not only focused on carbon management.

**Facilitate collaboration to drive sustainable dietary change.** Livestock is one of Northern Ireland’s biggest areas of production. There is a need to transition to a more sustainable approach to livestock in the country. Northern Ireland has an opportunity to pioneer this transition.

**Lead by example in procurement.** Northern Ireland needs to have specific public sector procurement targets to support nature friendly food production.<sup>125</sup> The current Food Strategy Framework mentions the need for better procurement; however, this is too vague and unlikely to deliver tangible change. Specific government procurement targets should be adopted to support a local market for nature friendly produce.

## Key Asks for...

# Northern Ireland

Agriculture is one of Northern Ireland’s most important industries. 75% of Northern Ireland’s land is used for agriculture.<sup>117</sup> Beef, sheep and dairy are the industry’s largest sectors, making up 80% of the country’s agricultural output.<sup>118</sup> While many farmers have embraced nature friendly farming practices, farming and land use accounts for nearly a third of Northern Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>119</sup> As such, farming in Northern Ireland will play a critical role in addressing the biodiversity and climate crises, building resilience in the food system and promoting healthy, sustainable diets. To achieve these three aims, we ask the government of Northern Ireland to undertake the following actions:

**Lead with holistic, pro-nature food strategy.** Northern Ireland is currently the only part of the UK that hasn’t committed to developing its own legislation on agriculture. We need to see the current agricultural strategy and framework documents turned into law to support nature friendly farming practices at scale, while providing a clear pathway for the future.

**Support a just transition to payments that support nature friendly farming.** Northern Ireland have rolled over area-based subsidies and have only committed to very incremental changes to the existing BPS subsidy scheme. The government has verbally committed to