



# Annual Report

## 2016-17

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## Chair's Report

This will be my last report as Chairman of the Voluntary Initiative (VI as I am standing down after six enjoyable years.

Throughout this time the VI has demonstrated that all sections of the crop protection industry, working together, can deliver real progress in promoting best practise in the use of pesticides. This has benefited not just water quality but also the wider environment. The recent ending of 'grandfather rights' has meant that all spray operators now have to have a specified certificate and have received appropriate training. In addition, the success of the National Register of Spray Operators (NRoSO, and in particular its annual training course, means that the 21,000 members of NRoSO continue to learn how to apply best practise and make good use of new technology in their work. With the exception of handheld sprayers, testing is now compulsory for all pesticide application equipment including slug pellet applicators.

The VI has worked closely with the NFU to update the integrated pest management plan (IPMP). This highlights to farmers all the comprehensive measures that they can use to complement, and in some cases, reduce their use of pesticides. This has become even more important as resistance to some actives used in crop protection becomes more widespread. Blackgrass resistance is just one example. Here an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan would highlight the advantages of later drilling of autumn sown cereals, use of a good rotation including spring sown crops and selecting the appropriate seedbed cultivation in crop establishment. In some cases use of a fallow break might also be considered. Promotion of the use of IPMP by farmers through Crop Assurance Schemes has been exceptionally helpful in encouraging uptake and is an important part of the UK pesticides National Action Plan.

The VI works closely with our industry regulators including the Chemicals Regulation Division of the HSE and the Environment Agency. The water companies play a major role in our committee work and help the VI to drive further improvement to reduce pesticides found at water abstraction points. It is essential that the farming and horticultural industry retain the availability of key actives for the future and our work with Catchment Sensitive farming to target problem water catchments is vital in this respect. The VI also works closely many other industry groups, for example The Metaldehyde Stewardship Group (MSG), which has recently launched a new stewardship campaign. Some key oilseed rape herbicides are also under threat and the 'OSR? Think Water' campaign is designed to meet this challenge.

Another key focus area for the VI is promoting best practise in the use of pesticides. Here the VI has taken the lead in promoting BeeConnected, a web based tool for farmers to send an alert to local beekeepers of planned insecticide spraying.

The VI operates across the whole of the UK and in the last year our strategy group has spent time in both Northern Ireland and Scotland looking at their specific pesticide issues. Pesticide Regulation operates across the whole UK and I believe the VI is well placed to help those who are involved in the use of agricultural pesticides wherever they are in the UK.

Finally, I must record my thanks to all those who have helped me over the past years. The VI industry sponsors have all worked together and transformed the organisation's work with our strategic plan and also ensured we have a strong financial position for the future. The work of the VI has never been more important as pesticide use has never been under more scrutiny from both the public and regulators. To compete in the post Brexit world, the industry needs decisions on pesticide registration to be based on sound science. This message has been emphasised to all the Defra ministers from the VI in several meetings over the past year. I believe the crop protection industry in the UK is among the most professional in Europe. It can be proud of its record which the VI can build on for the future to maintain public confidence in all our industry stewardship work. It has been a privilege to be Chairman of the Voluntary Initiative and I wish all our farmers, growers, spray operators, agronomists and their sponsoring organisations good luck and success in the future.

Richard Butler, VI Chairman

## The VI and its Supporters

The VI is an industry-led partnership that works with government, regulators and stakeholders to promote the responsible use of agricultural and horticultural pesticides.

The VI Steering Group oversees and coordinates the work of the VI and keeps Ministers informed:

Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA)	Farmers Union of Wales (FUW)
Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)	Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)
Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC)	Food Standards Agency (FSA)
Association of Independent Crop Consultants (AICC)	Lantra
Assured Food Standards (AFS)	Linking the Environment and Farming (LEAF)
BASIS (Registration) Limited	National Association of Agricultural Contractors (NAAC)
British Crop Production Council (BCPC)	National Farmers Union (NFU)
Chemicals Regulation Division, HSE (CRD)	Natural England (NE)
City and Guilds (C&G)	NFU Scotland (NFUS)
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)	Pesticides Action Network UK (PAN UK)
Crop Protection Association (CPA)	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland (DAERA-NI)	Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)	The Scottish Government (SG)
Environment Agency (EA)	Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
	Water UK
	Welsh Government (WG)

The strategic aims of the VI are as follows:

- To ensure that industry demonstrates continued commitment to best practice in pesticide use within the context of Integrated Pest Management with the aim of minimising environmental impact and ensuring the availability of crop protection solutions in the future.
- For the VI to be seen as the centre of excellence on pesticide stewardship and best practice by government, industry and stakeholders.

The strategic priorities of the VI are:

- The quality of water abstracted for drinking is the highest priority with a particular focus on herbicides used in oilseed rape and grassland as well as working with the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group on this pertinent issue.
- Insecticide stewardship to reduce the risk to bees and other pollinators and potential restrictions on insecticide use. This links to Integrated Pest Management, new approaches and the provision of messages on the use of a holistic approach to crop protection.
- National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides – the VI is a delivery mechanism for the UK NAP, reviewing and improving current measures and developing new approaches.
- Integration of messaging with other initiatives.

Adherence to best practice in pesticide use results in:

- Reduced risk to the aquatic environment and improved compliance with the Water Framework Directive.
- Protection of pollinators and other farm wildlife.

- Reassurance for people living adjacent to sprayed crops, bee keepers and the general public that pesticides are being used safely.
- Confidence to consumers and retailers that food produced in the UK is safe.
- A reduced risk of further regulation or restriction on the use of pesticides.

## VI Priorities

### 1. Water

Much of the VI work on water quality has been delivered through a partnership with Natural England's Catchment Sensitive Farming programme: this has included the provision of training courses for catchment officers, workshops for agronomists and the development of new advisory tools and materials as well as seasonal messaging. The VI's Catchment Support Service which provided local water quality data and weather related spray alerts was also delivered as part of this agreement. Following government cuts, the partnership with Catchment Sensitive Farming came to an end this year.

Another victim of cuts may be the Environment Agency's 'What's in Your Backyard' (WIYBY) website. This is an essential tool to enable farmers and advisers to understand the areas covered by Drinking Water Safeguard Zones and any associated pesticide issues. Its use is advocated by the VI as being the first step in identifying, understanding and so then being able to rectify local concerns about pesticides reaching water.

This year the VI launched the OSR Herbicides? Think Water campaign, funded by the CPA. Five key herbicides commonly used to manage blackgrass in crops of oil seed rape are being detected in raw water in increasing frequency. The campaign helps farmers to minimise the risk to water and will see work focus in 3 target catchments: The River Kym, Mimms Hall Brook and Instead Brook.

The VI also has concerns about detections in raw water following the use of MCPA to treat rushes in grassland areas.



*The VI examining approaches to Rush Management in Northern Ireland, where Northern Ireland Water has concerns about MCPA*

*"Advice, best practice guidance and awareness raising remain core activities in water company catchment management projects. The VI continues to provide these services to help water companies deliver their regulatory requirements, acting as a one-stop shop for pesticide stewardship."*

## 2. Biodiversity

One of the priorities of the VI is to minimise the risk to bees and other pollinators. This year the CPA-funded spray alert system BeeConnected was launched. This web based alert system enables operators to directly alert local beekeepers of their planned insecticide applications. Within a few months of the launch over 2000 farmers and beekeepers have signed up.

The VI attended the British Beekeepers Association's annual convention to promote the tool and has also been attending shows frequented by beekeepers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to help increase awareness of BeeConnected.

BeeConnected was selected as an excellent example of beekeepers and farmers working together to benefit bee health and we were invited to the European Parliament to showcase the tool and to explain how the initiative came about. The MEPs were particularly interested to learn how to encourage similar initiatives in other Member States.

The VI is now working with Red Tractor and other farms assurance schemes to make sure that use of BeeConnected can be given as evidence of the 'Code of Practice for using Plant Protection Products' requirement to inform local beekeepers before using certain sprays.

*"BeeConnected operates on a very simple, yet efficient, two-way process whereby farmers identify their fields and, in just a few clicks, are able to inform local beekeepers when they intend to spray an insecticide in particular fields. Beekeepers plot the location of their hives, and will then receive a notification ahead of when a farmer within their locality is planning to undertake a spray event. This is a great opportunity for all farmers and beekeepers nationwide to improve their communications, for a mutual benefit"*

Richard Butler, VI Chairman



# BeeConnected

## 3. Meeting the Sustainable Use Directive

The EU Directive on the sustainable use of pesticides (SUD) has been transposed into UK legislation. It aims to reduce the risks of pesticide use to human health and the environment. The VI and its schemes provide delivery mechanisms which help meet many aims of the SUD and the UK's National Action Plan for the sustainable use of pesticides. There are three main elements which affect farmers and sprayer operators:

- To encourage greater use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – economically and environmentally sustainable management of pests, weeds and diseases using cultural, chemical, physical and biological controls. The VI IPM plan has been adopted by the UK farm assurance schemes, ensuring IPM is used on farm. The VI in Scotland has developed a specific IPM plan to address the particular weed, disease and pest challenges.
- For all operators to hold a specified certificate. The VI worked with City & Guilds to produce a specific qualification for those who had many years of spraying experience but no approved specified certificate. The VI continues to raise awareness of the need for operators to hold a specified certificate, raising the professionalism of the UK's sprayer operators and ensuring operators are up to date not only with legislation but safe handling and stewardship of pesticides.

- For equipment to be tested. Since November 2016, certain pesticide application equipment is required to hold a valid test certificate from the National Sprayer Testing Scheme. The majority of equipment in regular use is already tested voluntarily on an annual basis, as the UK farm assurance schemes have long championed this as best practice. The VI has been raising awareness of the new need for tests and will continue to do so.

## Key measures and indicators

### National Register of Sprayer Operators (NRoSO)

NRoSO is a VI scheme managed by City & Guilds. It is a central register of sprayer operators using Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as a means of ensuring ongoing training to ensure best practice. Members must be fully qualified and collect a minimum number of CPD points each year. Membership of NRoSO is a necessary requirement of many of the UK's farm assurance schemes. As of March 31st 2017 there were 21,818 NRoSO members, an increase over last year.



### National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS)

The NSTS is a VI scheme managed by the Agricultural Engineers Association. In the last year 18,269 tests were carried out, an increase of 19% on the previous year. Since November 2016, pesticide application equipment must hold a valid test certificate to comply with the national legislation implementing the SUD.



### Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPMP)

The VI's IPMP is was developed by the NFU. In 2016, the Scottish VI group and NFU Scotland developed a specific IPM plan for Scotland. LEAF also provides a plan as part of their member's annual audit and Conservation Grade farmers also fulfil the objectives of integrated pest management. IPM plans help ensure economically and environmentally sustainable management of pests, weeds and diseases using a range of cultural, chemical, physical and biological controls. The plans are used by 16,820 farmers across approximately 4.4 million hectares. Of these figures the LEAF Sustainable Farming review accounts for 433,631 ha and Conservation Grade accounts for 20,000ha.



Indicator	March 31 <sup>st</sup> 2015	March 31 <sup>st</sup> 2016	March 31 <sup>st</sup> 2017
NRoSO members	21,672	20,865	21,818
NSTS tests	15,290	15,394	18,269
IPMP	2,664,652 ha	2,912,182 ha	4,387,010

Regional uptake of VI schemes is as follows:

Region	NSTS tests	NRoSO members	IPMP completed
England	15,165	18,687	16,085
Scotland	2,131	2,277	522
Wales	362	653	187

Northern Ireland	361	194	92
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## The VI around the UK

Through its national groups the VI provides a UK wide framework for promoting best practice at the local level.

### Scotland

Over the course of the year, the Scottish VI Group met on three occasions. Amongst many other things, useful discussions were had on how to assist the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Scottish Water efforts to reduce diffuse pollution from plant protection products, how to promote the Bee Connected tool, and on the content and promotion of the new Scottish Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan. The IPM plan went online during this period, and the Scottish VI Group expressed thanks to the VI for promoting it.

May 2016 saw the VI Strategy Group meet at NFU Scotland's head office in Edinburgh. Prior to the meeting, the strategy group members enjoyed a fascinating and insightful tour of the impressive facilities at Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA). They were shown the state-of-the-art laboratories where pesticide residue testing is carried out on foodstuffs, as well as glasshouse and field trials. The feedback was very positive, with many participants stressing the importance of field-realistic science underpinning regulation and guidance for farmers.

The chair of the Scottish VI Group, north east arable farmer Andrew Moir, represented NFU Scotland – as well as the Scottish VI Group – at the various VI meetings. Andrew found the meetings a useful opportunity to bring a Scottish perspective to the table, as well as learning of the many VI initiatives south of the border. He ensured the Scottish stakeholders were well informed of VI work, and prompted them to think of ways in which Scotland can better contribute to and benefit from the VI.



VI Strategy Group being shown around the facilities at SASA

Andrew Moir, VI Chairman, Scotland

## **Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland continue to play a pivotal role within all VI structures, and hosted the VI Steering Group for their meeting in early May 2017. Members of the Group attended the CAFRE research/demonstration farm at Glenwherry in County Antrim to see the work on the pilot 'rush' control project that was recently launched by Northern Ireland Water in association with the Water Catchment Partnership. As a result, farmers in one drinking water catchment were encouraged to sign up to a free weed wiping service. An outside contractor has been engaged to undertake the treatment using a weed wiper to apply the glyphosate. Nearly 50 farmers have signed up to the pilot and the wiping is due to take place during June, July and August 2017. A follow-up treatment is due in 2018. The NI Water Catchment Partnership and the VI fully support this initiative which aims to replace MCPA with glyphosate as the chemical control method of choice. As well as the important business element of the two day event, the group members were invited to visit the beautiful Glenarm Castle in County Antrim.

The Crop Protection Association (CPA) officially launched the BeeConnected Initiative in Northern Ireland in May 2017. Representatives of the Ulster Bee Keepers were in attendance for the launch which took place at the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society's Balmoral Show. Northern Ireland arable farmers are actively using this very useful tool which demonstrates responsible use of pesticides as well as reassuring beekeepers and the public that farmers in the region take bee health extremely seriously.

This past year has seen a lot of important work go on in the region and Tim McClelland, the Chair of the Northern Irish VI, continues to emphasise that farmers in Northern Ireland are fully committed to the concept and ideals of the Voluntary Initiative believing it to have an important role to play in ensuring that the industry always seek to use Plant Protection Products responsibly.

Tim McClelland, VI Chairman, Northern Ireland

## **Wales**

The VI has worked with Welsh Water to develop the PestSmart water source campaign, an initiative to encourage all users of pesticides, including farmers to adopt techniques that reduce the impact of pesticides. The campaign includes a disposal scheme in 6 target catchments and free weed wiper hire in 3 target catchments for the application of glyphosate to rushes, under special approval.

## Working with other initiatives

The VI is committed to working with, bringing together and championing other initiatives in this area.

### Nematicide Stewardship Programme



The Nematicide Stewardship Programme promotes best practice, helping to ensure the responsible use of nematicides; a vital tool in tackling potato cyst nematodes - the biggest pest threat to the potato industry. The VI supports this group and its objectives. [www.nspstewardship.co.uk](http://www.nspstewardship.co.uk)

### Metaldehyde Stewardship Group

Metaldehyde in raw water is a particular problem in catchments used as drinking water sources. The aim of the group is to promote and encourage best practice use of metaldehyde slug pellets, to minimise environmental impacts and in particular protect water. The VI works closely with the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group to address these issues. [www.getpelletwise.co.uk](http://www.getpelletwise.co.uk)



### Metazachlor Matters



Active substances including the oilseed rape herbicides metazachlor and quinmerac are increasingly under the spotlight. The focus of this company initiative is on agronomic best practice and changing on-farm practices to maintain their long term availability. [www.metazachlormatters.co.uk](http://www.metazachlormatters.co.uk)

### Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use

The VI has strengthened links with the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use which promotes best practice and training for the use of rodenticides among all professional users including farmers. A new stewardship initiative was launched in 2015, which the VI has been promoting. [www.thinkwildlife.org](http://www.thinkwildlife.org)



### Catchment Sensitive Farming



**A clear solution for farmers**

CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING

The VI has had a Strategic Partnership (renewed annually) with Catchment Sensitive Farming since 2009, which sponsors guest speakers at farmer meetings, seasonal media releases and topical briefing notes, agronomist workshops and training courses for Natural England and Rivers Trust staff. A weekly text messaging service and monthly water quality data collection service is also provided.

### Campaign for the Farmed Environment

As well as working in partnership on issues affecting pollinators and wider farm biodiversity, the VI has provided the CFE with speakers to aid local CFE delivery. Together the VI and CFE launched a best practice document for arable and grassland farmers. [www.cfeonline.org.uk](http://www.cfeonline.org.uk)



### Tried & Tested



This initiative addresses the issues associated with nutrient management – particularly the use of manures and slurries; one of its aims is to help keep nitrates out of watercourses. As water protection is a key theme for both initiatives the VI and T&T work together where possible. [www.nutrientmanagement.org](http://www.nutrientmanagement.org)

The Amenity Forum promotes and encourages proper and responsible use of both pesticides and integrated methods to amenity users of professional plant protection products. The VI and Amenity Forum work together on common aims and objectives. [www.amenityforum.co.uk](http://www.amenityforum.co.uk)





**The  
Voluntary  
Initiative**

**Promoting responsible pesticide use**

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# The Voluntary Initiative Community Interest Company

The Voluntary Initiative registered with Companies House as a Community Interest Company (The VI-CIC) in 2009. The VI-CIC has 10 directors, including the eight organisations that sponsor the VI:

