



# Annual Report 2017-18

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## 1. Chair's Report



In an industry like agriculture we are always faced with new, or different, challenges but these next few years may pose some of the biggest challenges we have faced in a long time.

The UK's exit from the European Union in whatever form that may take, affords new opportunities for this industry to not only meet more of the demands from consumers in the UK for more home grown produce but also to expand our export markets both within Europe and the rest of the world.

To meet the expectations of consumers both here and abroad the industry must continue to demonstrate its commitment to best practice and environmental stewardship in the way we produce our food. The Voluntary Initiative (VI) is in the vanguard, allowing those within the industry, from farmers and growers to agronomists, sprayer operators and contractors, to have the most up-to-date information available on best practice and environmental stewardship under one banner.

I know, as a farmer in East Yorkshire, the pressures on our time. However, I also know that we all need to take a step back and try to avail ourselves of the latest information that will help us protect our sources of water, biodiversity on and around our farms and the environment more generally. Over the years, the VI has developed a comprehensive library of information on its website together with signposts to other organisations who are directly involved in offering best practice guidance and environmental stewardship.

It's vital that the VI does not rest on its laurels. As our world changes, so should the VI. Although in the future we may not be governed by the legislation developed in the European Union, Ministers have intimated that they do not wish to see any reduction in our environmental standards and, more importantly, that they want to see a greater reliance placed on the principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). As an industry this shouldn't worry us. In fact, most, if not all of us, already use IPM knowingly or otherwise. When we must take action to protect a crop from a pest, weed or disease, we do so by monitoring conditions in the field and taking advice from some of the best trained and qualified agronomists and advisers. But IPM doesn't finish there, and the VI is working with all our member organisations and interested parties, such as the water companies, to increase our knowledge of the environmental risks behind any decisions we may take to protect our crops. For example, many of the water companies have developed, or are developing, field risk maps that can help the farmer or grower better understand those areas of the field that need careful consideration before we take any specific action.

Whilst on the subject of the water companies, we have faced a year of extreme weather, particularly a long hot dry summer, reinforced the challenge of managing

water against growing demand and climate change. The voluntary approach taken by water companies to work with farmers at a local level is really encouraging. I know that there are some concerns that they are seeking to remove from the market some of the most important chemistry that goes to make up the final element in the IPM 'toolbox'. But nothing could be farther from the truth. I have met with a number of their representatives from across the country and I have seen their commitment to not only helping the farming industry better understand the pressures on our watercourses but also the advice, guidance and in some cases financial incentives they make available to support their aims. I hope the VI can continue to build on the good relations that already exists with the water companies so that we can continue to produce good, healthy crops whilst ensuring that we retain access to clean water.

Finally, I would like to place on record my thanks to my predecessor – Richard Butler – for all the work that he put in to making the VI the force that it is today and helping to show Government that voluntary measures can be as effective, if not more so, than regulation. I hope that I can show the same kind of leadership and demonstrate that there is a continuing role for the VI as we enter these exciting times where the professionalism of farmers, growers, agronomists, sprayer operators and contractors can help our industry to compete effectively on the domestic and world markets.

**Paul Temple**  
**VI Chairman**

## **2. The VI and its Stakeholders**

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)  
Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB)  
Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC)  
Association of Independent Crop Consultants (AICC)  
Assured Food Standards (AFS)  
BASIS (Registration) Limited  
British Crop Production Council (BCPC)  
Chemicals Regulation Division, HSE (CRD)  
City and Guilds (C&G)  
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)  
Crop Protection Association (CPA)  
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland (DAERA-NI)  
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)  
Environment Agency (EA)  
Farmers Union of Wales (FUW)  
Food Standards Agency (FSA)  
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)  
Lantra  
Linking the Environment and Farming (LEAF)  
National Association of Agricultural Contractors (NAAC)  
National Farmers Union (NFU)  
Natural England (NE)  
NFU Scotland (NFUS)  
Pesticides Action Network UK (PAN UK)  
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)  
The Scottish Government (SG)  
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 to humans and the environment.
- A reduced risk of further regulation or restriction on the use of pesticides.

### 3. Priorities

#### A. Water

Much of the VI work on water quality has been delivered through a partnership with Water UK and the various water companies. We receive the most up-to-date data on the monitoring programmes undertaken by the water companies and this information feeds in to our strategy for dealing with those pesticides that are appearing most regularly in these reports.

The VI has been at the forefront in developing the latest 'oilseed rape (OSR) herbicides? Think water' campaign. Five key herbicides commonly used to manage blackgrass in crops of OSR continue to be detected in raw water. The campaign helps farmers to minimise the risk to watercourses. The VI campaign will focus in 3 target catchments: The River Kym, Mimmshall Brook and Instead Brook although the work will be applicable to all water companies facing similar problems. This year the campaign was simplified to try and stimulate uptake of measures (such as those below) by farmers, growers and their advisers. The success of the campaign has also encouraged those crop protection companies involved with the 'Metazachlor Matters' campaign to join in the 'OSR Herbicides? Think Water' campaign to ensure that there is a joined-up message for the industry.



We have also heard how the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group have been developing an enhanced stewardship programme that will sit alongside any re-authorisation of that active substance and we will work with the manufacturers in promoting that campaign.

Another success came from a meeting with Defra Minister – the Rt Hon George Eustice – at the annual VI Steering Group meeting where he was convinced of the need for the retention of 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.

*“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.”*

**Dr Dinah Hillier, Thames Water on behalf of Water UK**

## B. Biodiversity

One of the priorities of the VI is to minimise the risk to bees and other pollinators. Last year the CPA-funded spray alert system BeeConnected was launched. This web-based alert system enables operators to alert directly local beekeepers of their planned insecticide applications.



**BeeConnected**

However, uptake of the system by both farmers, growers, sprayer operators and beekeepers has been disappointingly low. The VI is working with the farming union's, Red Tractor and the other farm assurance schemes to increase awareness of the scheme as evidence of the 'Code of Practice for using Plant Protection Products' requirement to inform local beekeepers before using certain sprays in place of the previous telephone-based sprayer liaison network operated by the British Beekeepers Association.

*"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"*

**Paul Temple, VI Chairman**



## C. Meeting the Sustainable Use Directive

Although the United Kingdom will formally leave the European Union next year, the EU Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (SUD) has already been transposed into UK legislation and the Government has stated its intention to retain the general provisions of the SUD for the immediate future. 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 their particular weed, disease and pest issues. The challenge is now to continue to develop and enhance the Plan so that it remains relevant to all those responsible for using the plan, from farmers/growers to advisers/agronomists. Over the next few years, the VI are looking to work with the Government to further embed the use of the IPMP within British agriculture.
- For all operators to hold a specified certificate. The VI continues to raise awareness of the need for operators to hold a specified certificate. In this way, by ensuring operators are up-to-date not only with our current legislation but also the safe handling and stewardship of pesticides, we can continue to maintain the professionalism of the UK's sprayer operators as being amongst the best trained in the world.
- 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 continues to promote the Scheme and demonstrate that the UK has amongst the best maintained spraying equipment in the world.

### 4. 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)



Certain pesticide application equipment must hold a valid test certificate to comply with the national legislation implementing the SUD. The NSTS is a VI scheme managed by the Agricultural Engineers Association which encourages the annual testing of equipment to meet the requirements of many farm assurance schemes.

This year has seen the number of tests carried out drop to below 17,000, a decrease of 18% on the previous year. Some of this reduction may be an outcome of the SUD frequency of testing requirements. These requirements, which were implemented in November 2016, saw an initial increase in sprayer tests from those engaged in livestock assurance schemes and through awareness in the amenity sector. However, these sectors do not currently have a requirement for annual testing, instead most opt to have their equipment tested every three years in keeping with the requirements of the SUD. As a result, we can expect to see a cycle of higher and lower number of tests in future years. However, the VI will continue to work with all the farm assurance schemes, and other sectors, to try to encourage greater uptake of an annual testing programme.

## 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 422,290ha and Conservation Grade accounts for approximately 20,000ha.

Indicator	March 31 <sup>st</sup> 2016	March 31 <sup>st</sup> 2017	March 31 <sup>st</sup> 2018
<b>NRoSO members</b>	20,865	21,818	22,132
<b>NSTS tests<sup>(1) (2)</sup></b>	20,964	20,344	16,688 <sup>(3)</sup>
<b>IPM Plans<sup>(4)</sup></b>	4,667	5,720	1,639 <sup>(5)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Total number of tests for all types of pesticide application equipment (including: Liquid; Granular; Fogging; and Slug Pellet)

<sup>(2)</sup> Data based on calendar year (i.e. January to December)

<sup>(3)</sup> Figure is an estimate to the end of the year

<sup>(4)</sup> Data on hectarage is not collected anymore.

<sup>(5)</sup> New applicants only, registered growers update existing plans and these revisions are not captured.

## 5. 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

The Scottish VI Group continue to meet regularly. They learned that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) published with the Land Use Policy Group a report on 'Transitions to agroecological approaches: farmers' experience' - <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-land/farming-and-crofting/role-agroecology>. They also plan to publish between 5-10 case studies of farmers who have engaged in agroecology.

There also heard that SNH expected to publish research into: Post Brexit agri-environment; Review of pesticide use in nature conservation; and a Synthesis of bracken control trials in Scotland

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 enjoyed bringing a Scottish perspective to the table, and continues to build his knowledge of the many VI initiatives in the rest of the UK. He works tirelessly to keep the Scottish stakeholders informed of VI work, and continued to encourage them to think of ways in which Scotland can better contribute to and benefit from the VI.

**Andrew Moir, VI Chairman, Scotland**

### Northern Ireland

2018 saw Northern Ireland as a region deepen our involvement with the Voluntary Initiative. With VI support and encouragement, an enhanced range of activities were undertaken. Within NI as a region, The Water Catchment Partnership remains the umbrella body with respect to cross industry cooperation on pesticides and water quality. Within the Partnership, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has a vital role.

The 'Rush Solution without Pollution' weed wiping trial was a two year NI Water initiative within the Seagahan catchment in County Armagh. MCPA was the 'go to' chemical solution for rush control which resulted in exceedances of this active ingredient within watercourses in some areas of Northern Ireland.

During 2017 and 2018 NI Water funded a weed wiping trial using Glyphosate instead of MCPA. Five hundred acres in one area of County Armagh were treated resulting in 320 litres less MCPA per year being applied. The result: MCPA detected in raw water is less than half of average levels for the previous 5 years within the treated catchment. Wider rollout through other catchments in the Province are planned such has been the success within Seagahan.

Continuing with the 'Rush control' theme, The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) hosted four events throughout Northern Ireland during 2018, with 200 plus farmers in attendance. In addition, the Water Catchment Partnership

engaged with farmers through attendance at the Balmoral, Omagh and Enniskillen agricultural shows.

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.

As a region Northern Ireland looks forward to working with the new Chairman and Operations Director during 2019. The work of the VI has never been more important for our industry. The gains and successes of the past should, and I believe will, spur us on to even greater achievements in future years.

**Tim McClelland, VI Chairman, Northern Ireland**

## **Wales**

The VI works closely with the Welsh 'Pesticides Partners group that is made up from a wide range of stakeholder organisations.

In 2015 the group established a weed wiper trial during April to October in three target catchments. The trial was supported by the production of best practice guidance; introduction of a pesticide disposal scheme; and the creation of an agricultural advisory group. Weed wipers were chosen because of the ability to apply the herbicide directly to the target weeds, which reduced the amount of chemical being used, there was also no spray drift and importantly the wipers were licensed for use with glyphosate. The result of the most recent weed wiper trials in 2017 showed there had been 197 hires of the weed wipers that covered 1,840 hectares which the group calculated had prevented 4,048 litres of MCPA being used.

The group also oversaw a pesticide disposal programme aimed to remove unwanted, revoked or out-of-date pesticides and was targeted at farmers, growers, foresters and land managers. The names, addresses and amount of pesticide collected was kept confidential except to the waste disposal companies. The scheme collected 1,662kg of pesticides ranging from 0.5kg – 148kg. Most importantly, all the participants said they would recommend the scheme.

The group continues to meet regularly and the VI attends those meeting whenever possible. The Chair of the group – Bob Merriman – wants to build closer links with the VI and other stakeholders to ensure that Welsh farmers, growers, agronomists and sprayer operators continue to benefit from this close co-operation.

## **6. 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)

### **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**

Although the VI Strategic Partnership with Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) formally ended last year, both parties continue to work together wherever possible to help disseminate information for each other. It is hoped recent developments, that will see funding for CSF activities continue for the next few years, will result in more partnership working.

### **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). CFE are currently undertaking a review of their work and planning for the future and the VI hopes that there will continue to be a close co-operation between the two organisations.

### **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)

### **Amenity Forum**

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)

## 7. The VI CIC

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:





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