



Annual Report 2020-21

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1. Chair's Report

As the year began, the Voluntary Initiative welcomed a new Chair and thanks Paul Temple, outgoing Chair, for his work over several years. COVID-19 was still prevalent and the continuation of online meetings brought both advantages and challenges. The benefits of more meeting attendees were countered by the reduction in practical on-farm meetings. The transition of the United Kingdom from a European Union member continued in earnest and the UK's plant protection regulation process along with the National Action Plan (NAP) for Sustainable Use of Pesticides began to gather momentum.

A considerable part of January and February was spent coordinating views from industry stakeholder for a response to the draft NAP. The role of integrated pest management (IPM), pesticide metrics and economics were prevalent in discussions and correspondence. The VI's core areas of activity around sprayer testing, IPM plans and the National Register of Sprayer Operator Scheme (NRoSO) continued to be challenging, as much of the activity had to be done online.

Engagement with UK Government Ministers and the Defra pesticides team continued to focus on the NAP but also highlighted that many of the solutions for responsible pesticide use lay with the industry and increased interaction from Defra could assist with positive results. As 2021 progressed there was more consultation with the industry and the VI on what an IPM Standard under the Sustainable Farming Incentive might look like. Those discussions carried on into the autumn of 2021 and beyond.

The VI's water and environmental protection webinars were well received and allowed us to carry on constructive dialogue within the agricultural sector. The VI Water Group continued to highlight water monitoring of pesticides and mitigation and stewardship strategies to reduce impacts.

The VI's role within Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is increasingly important and as the full impact of Brexit unfolds it will have continued significance. Welsh Water, Welsh Government, the Ulster Farmers Union, NFU Scotland and the Scottish VI were building stronger relationships during 2021. The opportunity to Chair the Pesticide Forum's meeting in October 2021 arose and this has led to closer links with the Chemical Regulation Division.

Whilst the VI continues to promote IPM through our growing network of VI Champions the role of sprayer operators and those applying plant protection products is a fundamental part of best practice application. COVID 19 has made it extremely difficult to collect continual personal development (CPD) points for the NRoSO scheme. The VI has worked with City & Guilds, who administer the NRoSO scheme, to address the delays caused by the pandemic and is particularly thankful to EI Operator (www.eioperator.com/) for their on-line training event courses set-up during 2021. The Cereals 2021 event saw over 1000 operators register for NRoSO CPD points in just 2 days.

The VI will continue to encourage positive IPM dialogue within the industry and with Defra and UK Government in 2022. Our commitment to UK sprayer operators will

ensure we encourage best on farm practice for environmental responsible food production.



Phil Jarvis
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 Stakeholder 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 (BASiS)
British Crop Production Council (BCPC)
Chemicals Regulation Division, HSE (CRD)
City and Guilds (C&G)
Country Land and Business Association (CLA)
Croplife UK (CPL)
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)
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
The Scottish Government (SG)
Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
Water UK (WU)
Welsh Government (WG)

The strategic aims of the VI are as follows:

- Ensure that industry demonstrates continued commitment to best practice in pesticide use through enhanced uptake of IPM
- Ensure the Voluntary Initiative (VI) is considered the vanguard on pesticide stewardship by government, industry and stakeholders
- Minimise the environmental impact of pesticide use and related farming practices on water and biodiversity
- Maximise the opportunities for the development of UK agriculture post-Brexit

The strategic priorities of the VI are:

- Show continued leadership in the principle of industry self-regulation that delivers world leading benefit to UK agriculture post-Brexit
- Encourage adoption of enhanced IPM principles and ensure the uptake of a holistic approach to crop protection through integration of quantifiable IPM measures within the proposed new Environmental Land Management System (ELMS) or equivalent and in line with the 25 year Environment Plan
- Improvement in water quality, ensuring implementation of IPM minimises the impact of pesticides through enhanced stewardship and collaboration between the Agriculture and Water Industries
- Introduce a network of Regional “VI Champion” farmers and advisers to drive through change in the industry
- Improved stewardship of pesticides, specifically insecticides, to reduce the risk to bees and other pollinators through appropriate use of IPM linking to government National Pollinator Strategy
- Ensure the VI is the key delivery mechanism for the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides as the plan is revised during 2019 and linking into wider pesticide policy development
- To simplify delivery of information through integration of messaging between initiatives and across relevant organisations.

Adherence to best practice in pesticide use results in:

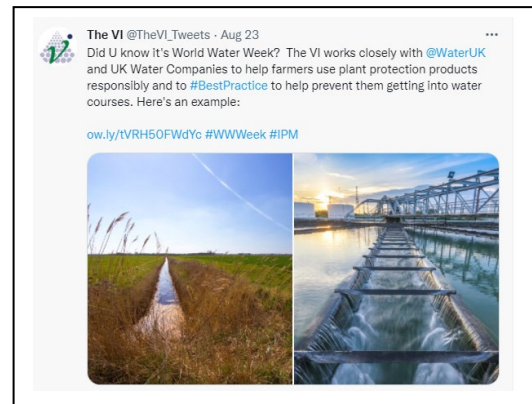
- Helping achieve the aims of the 25 year Environment Plan, by helping growers deliver “public goods” and to help achieve the goals for improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it

- Reducing risk to the aquatic environment and improved compliance with the Water Framework Directive
- Protection of biodiversity, specifically pollinators and other farm wildlife through greater engagement with key stakeholders
- Reassurance for the general public that pesticides are being used safely
- Increasing confidence of consumers and retailers about the safety of food produced in the UK
- Actively reduce the first stage of in-field and farm store food waste

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 into our strategy for dealing with those pesticides that are appearing most regularly in these reports. The data are delivered and discussed during the three VI Water Group meetings held throughout the year.



1. OSR Herbicides: Think Water? Campaign



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

focuses on 3 target catchments: The River Kym, Mimmshall Brook and Instead Brook although the work will be applicable to all water companies facing similar problems.

Following a third year of poor establishment and problems caused by Cabbage Stem Flea Beetle, less OSR grown was planted during the 2021/22 season than the previous season and this provided The VI and our project partners with an opportunity. The VI ran an early season campaign to encourage farmers to think more carefully about where OSR was sown, to actively encourage them to sow OSR in fields with the least risk of run-off to water courses, particularly with regard to fields with drains. The campaign used the hashtag #KeepItInTheField to highlight that any herbicide leaching into surface water is not only harmful, but also was not giving effective blackgrass/weed control and so was also not cost effective.

Below are the five key messages from the campaign that farmers were asked to consider to minimise the movement of herbicides to water:

- **FIELD SELECTION:** Although dictated by rotation to a degree, aim to grow oilseed rape on a field that is low risk i.e. doesn't slope to a watercourse, less susceptible to run-off or further away from a water course. Fields that are high risk include those that have underdrainage or slope down to a watercourse. High risk fields might also include those that have problem levels of black-

grass or other grass-weeds where metazachlor, propyzamide, and carbetamide may be used.

- **CULTIVATION AND TRAMLINES:** Cultivation is a key factor in managing risk. Considering appropriate establishment and direction of working travel are important factors in minimising risk according to soil type and topography. Lay out tramlines in order that they do not provide a direct route for water to leave the field e.g. enter the crop at the top of the field. Where possible, disturb surface compaction in tramlines. Those with GPS guidance on sprayers may like to switch off tramlining kits when drilling OSR.
- **BUFFERS:** Buffer zones next to watercourses can be effective in reducing run-off and soil particles that may contain pesticides reaching watercourses. A wider buffer zone is more effective. Cross compliance dictates a 2m minimal buffer zone, but the VI recommends establishment of a 6m buffer alongside watercourses if possible. Wider buffers are advisable in particularly vulnerable areas.
- **CHECK DESIGNATIONS:** Use the Environment Agency's Drinking Water Safeguard Zones Website (http://bit.ly/EA_WIYBY) to check whether planned oilseed rape fields are in a Drinking Water Safeguard Zone. Avoid growing rape, if it requires herbicides likely to move to water, in these areas if at all possible, particularly if they are high risk fields.
- **INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT:** It is important to only use pesticides when necessary and there are a number of ways to reduce reliance on pesticides including cultivations, drilling dates, regular crop inspections among others. Talk to your BASIS-registered agronomist to make sure that where possible you utilise herbicides less likely to move to water where there is a risk of this occurring. As always: use the right product for the job, at the right time and to best practice.

However, the main focus of the 2021/22 campaign is to help growers effectively control the target weed pest, which in most cases was blackgrass. Helping growers maximise control by applying the right product, at the right time, as part of an IPM-based approach was vital. The importance of careful stewardship steps this season to help protect water and, as a result, the five actives themselves would be key. To do this, we will continue to use our VI Champions (see below), to work in tandem with water company Catchment Officers and Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers to drive the message home through peer-to-peer visits in catchment, naturally, socially distanced where required.

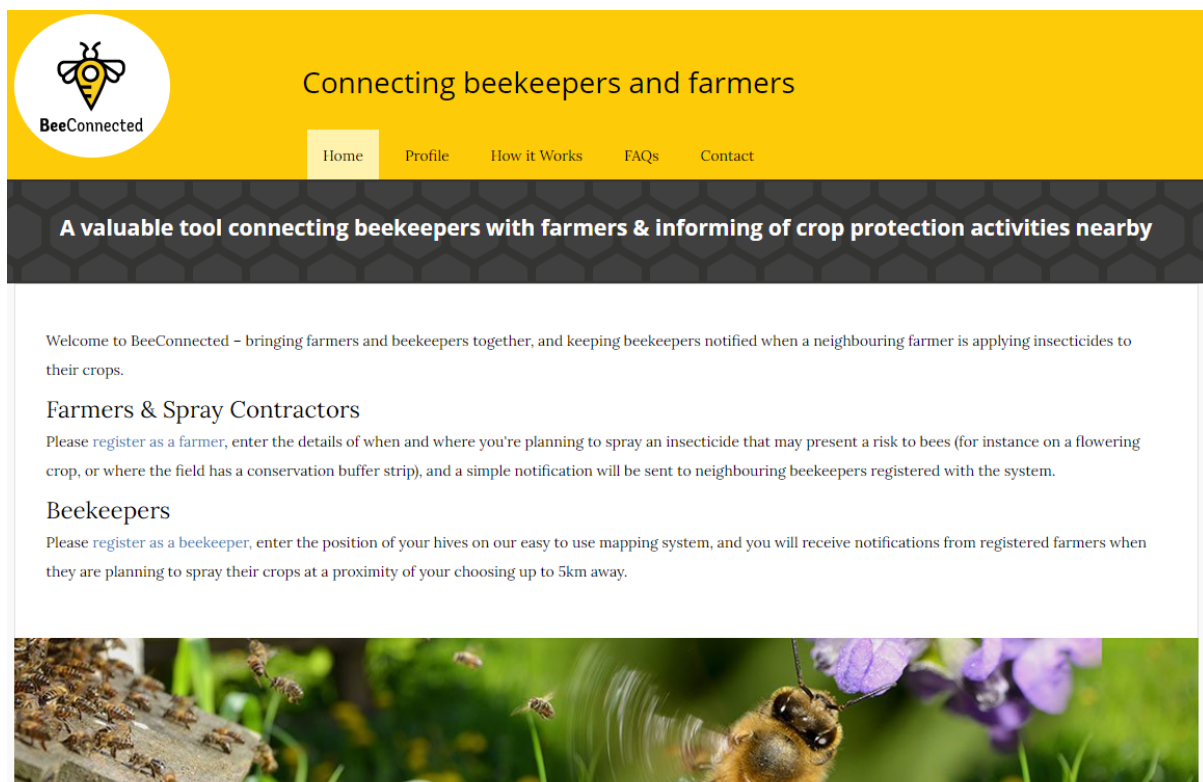
B. Biodiversity

One of the priorities of the VI is to minimise the risk to bees and other pollinators. In 2018, 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 lower than expected. 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. Featured at agricultural shows such as Cereals 2021 and CropTec 2021, BeeConnected also featured on the VI's and supporting organisations social media and figures are slowly increasing year on year.



BeeConnected

Connecting beekeepers and farmers

Home Profile How it Works FAQs Contact

A valuable tool connecting beekeepers with farmers & informing of crop protection activities nearby

Welcome to BeeConnected - bringing farmers and beekeepers together, and keeping beekeepers notified when a neighbouring farmer is applying insecticides to their crops.

Farmers & Spray Contractors

Please [register as a farmer](#), enter the details of when and where you're planning to spray an insecticide that may present a risk to bees (for instance on a flowering crop, or where the field has a conservation buffer strip), and a simple notification will be sent to neighbouring beekeepers registered with the system.

Beekeepers

Please [register as a beekeeper](#), enter the position of your hives on our easy to use mapping system, and you will receive notifications from registered farmers when they are planning to spray their crops at a proximity of your choosing up to 5km away.

C. Meeting the Sustainable Use Directive

Although the United Kingdom has now formally left the European Union, the EU Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (SUD) has 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 (NAP) for the sustainable use of pesticides. The NAP will be reviewed by government during 2022. Currently, 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. Both the UK and Scottish IPM Plans have been re-developed during the last year during Covid-19 lockdown so that they now consider not only agronomic aspects of IPM, but also some of the social aspects that might affect uptake and implementation of IPM. The revised IPM Plans also produce a score for the individual grower providing a metric to work against for the future. The challenge is now to continue to develop specific IPM Plans for grassland farmers (i.e. weed management plans) and the horticultural sector to make them more relevant to the different farming sectors. As part of ongoing work over the next few years, the VI are looking to work with the Government to further embed the use of the IPM within British agriculture.
- For all spray 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. The VI also actively encourages spray operators to join and participate in the National Register of Spray Operators (NRoSO) scheme (see below) and membership is a requirement for spray operators working for businesses that are Red Tractor assured (or some other assurance schemes, for example SQC).
- 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

Key measures and indicators

National Register of Sprayer Operators (NRoSO)



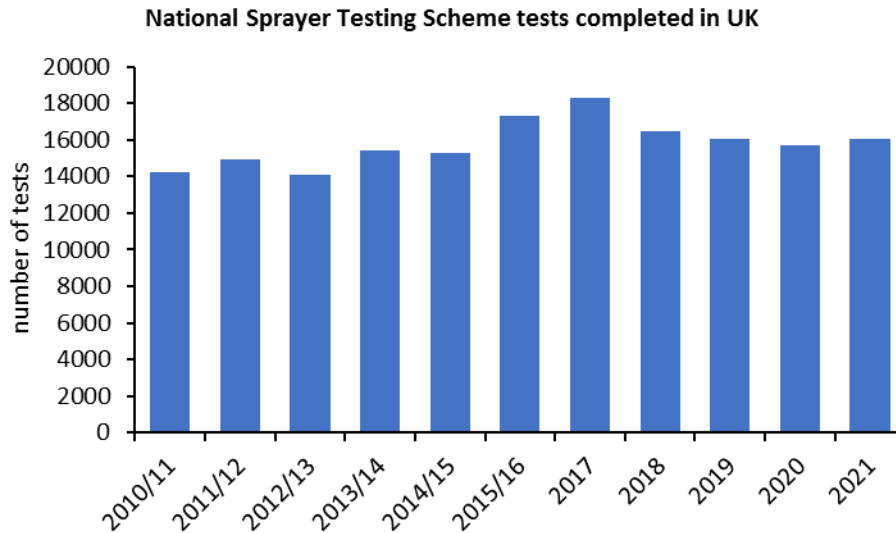
NRoSO is a VI scheme managed by City & Guilds. It is a central register of sprayer operators using Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as a means of ensuring ongoing training to ensure best practice. Members must be fully qualified and collect a minimum number of CPD points each year. Membership of NRoSO is a necessary requirement of many of the UK's farm assurance schemes. As of March 31st 2021 there were 20 841 NRoSO members. As with NSTS figures reported below, membership reflects the agricultural nature of the different UK regions with 86% of members being located in England, 10% in Scotland, 3% in Wales and 1% in Northern Ireland.

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.

- NSTS tested 16 071 machines in 2021.
- Tests were split between:
 - England: 13 749
 - Wales: 363
 - Scotland: 1585
 - Northern Ireland: 374
- In addition, 767 micro-granular applicator tests, 60 fogger tests and 475 (up from 2020) slug pellet applicator tests were conducted. The number of tests was down from 2020 for micro-granular and up for slug pellet applicators, and up for fogging equipment.
- The years in the chart have been corrected this year to reflect the fact that in 2017 the NSTS switched to calendar year reporting.

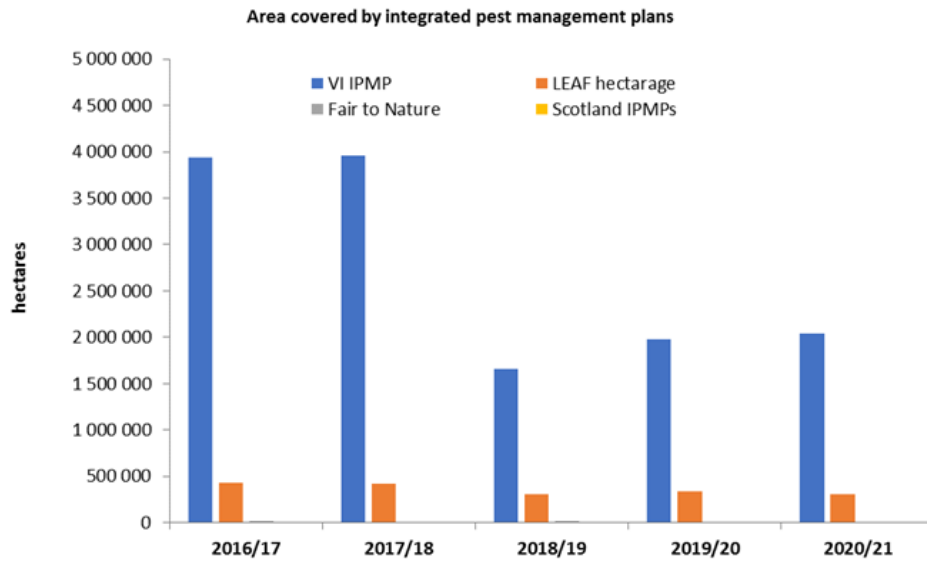


Source: NSTS

Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPMP)



1. IPM plans (IPMPs) were introduced in 2014 and are required for membership of farm assurance schemes, such as Red Tractor. In 2016, the Scottish VI group and NFU Scotland developed a specific IPMP for Scotland in collaboration with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).
2. IPMPs use a range of cultural, chemical, physical and biological controls to help ensure economically and environmentally sustainable management of pests, weeds and diseases.
3. LEAF Marque assurance scheme requires that an implemented crop health and protection plan, including IPM strategy, is in place as part of their members' annual audit.
4. The decrease in area covered by VI IPM plans between 2017/18 and 2018/19 does not correspond to any actual decrease in IPM delivered on farm. It is the result of the area prior to 2018/19 being estimated from farm size 'range' data provided in plans. Plans have been reviewed and improved such that since 2018/19 actual area data are provided.
5. The chart shows the area covered by IPMPs, including LEAF Marque, which meets IPMP requirements, and Scottish IPMPs.
6. Other schemes may also fulfil the objectives of IPM.



Source: National Farmers' Union (NFU)/Voluntary Initiative_(VI)/ Fair to Nature/LEAF/Scottish government

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 had been active with stakeholders throughout the winter of 2020/21 and had been working with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and the Scottish Farm Advisory Service (FAS) to further the message of good practice and IPM. The group welcomed Sarah Cowie who joined early in the year as the new National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) representative interacting with the VI and coordinating activities in Scotland. The Scottish VI was re-engaging with stakeholders and diversifying the group, for example, to include more stakeholders from the grassland sector.

The recent Scottish Parliamentary Elections had resulted in a reshuffling of ministers. Mairi Gougeon was the new Rural Affairs Minister. Previous Scottish VI Chair, Andrew Moir, was a constituent of Ms. Gougeon who had previously visited Mr Moir on farm and was aware of the VI and the ambitions for the Scottish VI group. The group also looks forward to working with Màiri McAllan, the new Environment Minister and hopes to get the Ministers out on farm to demonstrate the importance of best practice and IPM.

The Scottish VI Group September meeting was attended by VI Chair, Phil Jarvis and Operations Director Neal Evans which had resulted in focus on the need to recruit two new VI Champions, specifically based in grassland areas, to join the latest Scottish VI Champion to be added to the group, Alan Grant, a farmer from Strichen. Another outcome from the meeting and focus for the group was to provide guidance on metaldehyde, specifically about disposal, with the imminent removal of the product from use at the end of March 2022.

David Bell, VI Scotland Chair

Northern Ireland

Early in the year, activity from the Water Catchment Partnership (WCP) had been fairly muted, mainly due to the Covid-19 epidemic. However, significantly, it had been agreed that the weed wiper programme would be funded for another season. Other funding had been secured for the "Source to Tap" project and had been spent on a farming package. Through the scheme, there had been an exceptional 212 farm visits and 192 water environment management plans produced and issued to farmers with best practice communicated. Regarding water quality, the big issue was MCPA and through the WCP, there were three pilot catchments across Northern Ireland (NI) and in each of those, water quality had generally improved.

However, the NI protocol had been causing major problems within the agriculture sector since it came into effect at the start of 2021. Amongst various challenges for plant protection products (PPP's), problems have arisen such as access to product (both short-term, medium term and especially long-term), registration issues,

extended use issues, off label issues and approvals. In addition, there is 'uncertainty and lack of clarity' with regard to Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) due to continued divergence within EU rules.

The lack of financial viability and additional costs relating to PPP labelling for NI supply is also a major concern and is likely to result in severe restrictions in product availability. Daera had contracted out their work to CRD on the UK mainland. Ulster Farmers Union (UFU, VI Sponsor) had been meeting with Daera and Defra to try to find solutions for some of these issues, but progress was slow and protracted.

The Balmoral Show had been run in June where the WCP featured heavily and was well attended, although numbers were understandably reduced from a normal level due to Covid-19 uncertainties. Planning had started for the 2022 show, back in the normal May slot in the agricultural calendar year.

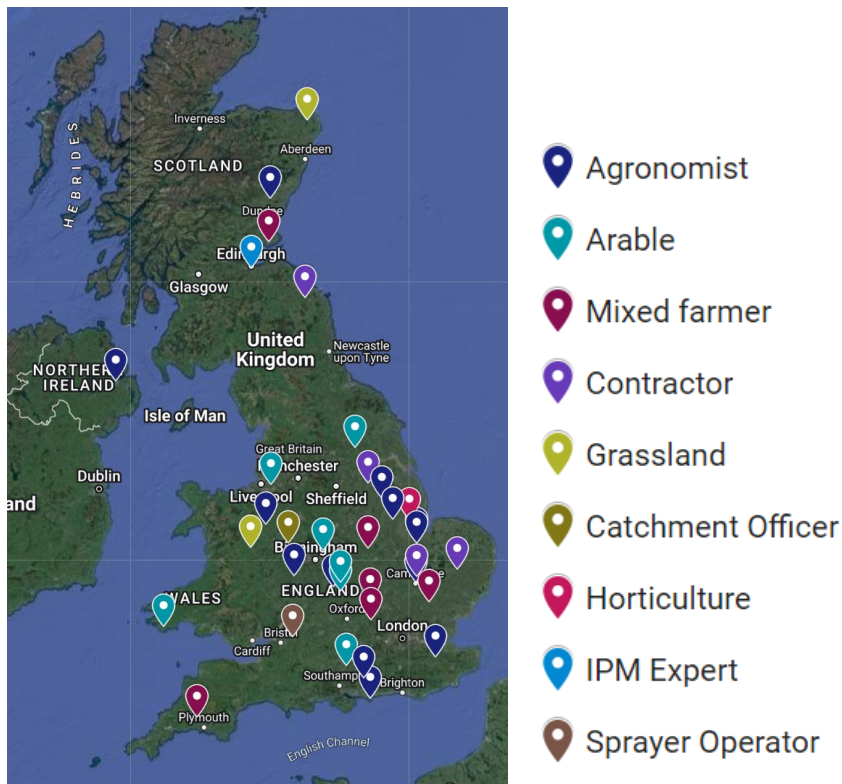
Bruce Steele, VI Representative, Northern Ireland

Wales

The VI works closely with the Welsh Pesticides Partners group that is made up from a wide range of stakeholder organisations. During 2021 the group were involved in promoting Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water's "PestSmart" campaign which featured a number of initiatives. In addition to free advice, this initiative built on weed wiper trials that began in 2015 to offer free weed wiper hire. The PestSmart initiative also funded a free and confidential pesticide disposal programme aimed to remove unwanted, revoked or out-of-date pesticides which was targeted at farmers, growers, foresters and land managers. PestSmart was due to conclude in December 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic which significantly impacted activities during 2020, Welsh Government agreed to extend the project to December 2021 and the work, primarily the pesticide amnesty continues.

7. The VI Champions

In autumn 2019, the VI introduced a new initiative, the VI Champions. Taking the message further than “best practice” and “safe stewardship” of pesticide use, the VI was moving to a message of integrated pest and crop management to drive change across the industry, working towards the visions encapsulated in the 25 year Environment Plan. We continue to recruit a team of experienced and passionate growers and advisers to provide knowledge and peer-to-peer learning.



The VI message of an IPM-based approach to sustainable farming requires close interaction with on-farm decision makers. Champions deliver VI IPM-focused presentations and messages, to lead active dialogue to challenge current practice and drive through a commitment to farming in an environmentally sustainable way.

The 35 VI Champions recruited to date (see map), farmers/advisors/ catchment officers are held in high esteem within the agriculture and water industries for advocating forward-thinking farming practices. Each has a good understanding of VI core values with regard safe and responsible use of pesticides and they will all have received media training. All are advocates of the need to move to environmentally sustainable farming through the adoption of an IPM-based approach.



See Richard Heady (VI Champion based near Milton Keynes) and some of our VI Champions on YouTube to see why IPM means so much to them, click on the image to view.

8. 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

Metaldehyde Stewardship Group (MSG)

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. As we work towards the final deadline for disposal, storage and use of existing stock on the 31 March 2022, the VI continues to work closely with the MSG to address these issues. 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. www.thinkwildlife.org

Catchment Sensitive Farming

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) and the VI 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 and expand for the next few years, will result in more partnership working.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution>



Championing the Farmed Environment

As well as working in partnership on issues affecting pollinators and wider farm biodiversity, the VI has provided the CFE with VI Champion speakers to aid local CFE delivery. Together the VI and CFE launched a best practice document for arable and grassland farmers. CFE relaunched during 2019 and the VI hopes that there will be continued close co-operation between the two organisations. 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



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 closely together on common aims and objectives. www.amenityforum.co.uk

9. The VI CIC

The Voluntary Initiative registered with Companies House as a Community Interest Company (The VI-CIC) in 2009. The VI-CIC has 9 directors, including the eight organisations that sponsor the VI and one independent Board Member:





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