

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is it?

This is a Biodiversity assessment tool which is designed for farms across Northern Ireland (NI) ranging from lowland to upland and grass to arable situations.

2. What is the tool for?

The tool provides a method to assess the intended or unintentional provision for nature on a farm. The tool will also provide some suggestions on how your farm could be developed further for biodiversity.

3. What assessments does the tool give?

The tool looks at quantity & quality. It firstly assesses the % of the farm that provides some form of semi-natural habitat and secondly looks at what management practices occur, as a means of assessing quality of provision. Neither quantity nor quality on their own are adequate to impact biodiversity.

4. Who is the tool and my score for?

The tool is for your use and the results, hints and opportunities given are unique to your farm. We are not recording individuals' results; however, we do want to provide ranges and averages to farms in similar situations, e.g., lowland dairy, mixed stock & arable, upland sheep.

5. How good or bad will my score be?

Complete the assessment as quickly and honestly as you can. The lower your initial score, the easier it is to improve! Just as food production levels vary by over X10 between farms so will biodiversity services. The % semi-natural habitat on farm will range from 1 – 90% and the habitat management score will range from 10 – 90%.

Table 1: Percentage Habitat Score for CAFRE Farms

CAFRE Farms	% Habitat Score	Comments
Dairy & Crops Unit, Greenmount	15	Lowland including 30Ha of estate woodland
Beef & Sheep Unit, Greenmount	7	Lowland farm with mainly hedgerows and woodland habitats.
Beef & Arable Sub-Unit, Greenmount	16	The score was only 4% in 2020 before margins, agroforestry & winter stubble developments.
Hill Farm Centre, Glenwherry, Ballymena	81	Upland farm dominated by semi natural grassland & blanket bog

6. What are other countries doing?

Other regions are looking at % farm habitat. The EU has a target set for all farms to have 10% semi-natural habitat by 2030. Wales has set a target for 10%. Ireland has a major farm biodiversity audit programme due to commence and is moving to measuring habitat %. NI policy is currently under development.

7. Isn't all my land a habitat?

Yes – all land is a habitat, however whilst below ground there can be plenty of biodiversity, above ground in an intensive perennial ryegrass or arable crop it is fairly sterile due to the monoculture & a lack of resources for invertebrates at the bottom of the food-chain. The small areas of hedges, margins and woodland are semi-natural with a diversity which allows invertebrates to have more chance of completing a lifecycle thus providing food for those creatures higher up the ecosystem food chain.

8. Why is connectivity important?

Small habitats on their own are known as island habitats. These have difficulty sustaining many species over their entire lifecycles especially if genetic diversity is limited due to a small population. Connecting hedges with woodlands or margins with farm ponds or connecting with neighbouring farms hedges & woods allows movement for food resources at different times of year and movement for breeding genetic diversity which allows populations such as a butterfly species to continue rather than crashing every few years.

9. Is it a competition?

No – it's to give you a base level assessment and prompts you to investigate how you could develop your farm to provide an increased biodiversity service. (If you enjoy being competitive then why not treat it as a competition for yourself against the average!)

10. Do I have to return the spreadsheet?

The more that are returned the more feedback we can give to everyone and the more accurate the range and averages become for each section whether low or high. Please return your completed spreadsheet and retain your own copy for future amendments.

11. Do I need to walk round my farm?

No this is a computer-based exercise. You can complete this BioTool at the kitchen table with a copy of your farm map.

12. How long will it take to complete?

Depending on your farm size and if you use the Northern Ireland averages for the field boundary calculations or add up your own, the survey should take approximately 20 to 60 minutes.

13. If I have more than one farm, should I record them together or separately?

Either is fine. If they are quite different the results would be more tailored to each farm if you recorded them separately. We have tried both at CAFRE farms.

14. Why should I not include fields that are less than 0.2ha?

We have assumed that most small fields or riparian strips will be fenced rather than hedged or walled. To allow the BioTool to automatically calculate the average field size and estimate the total length of habitat field boundary we are excluding small, fenced fields or strips from this calculation. If, however, your fields are less than 0.2ha and are surrounded by hedges or stone walls, please include these fields in the question.

15. Should I use the NI averages for hedges & other field boundaries?

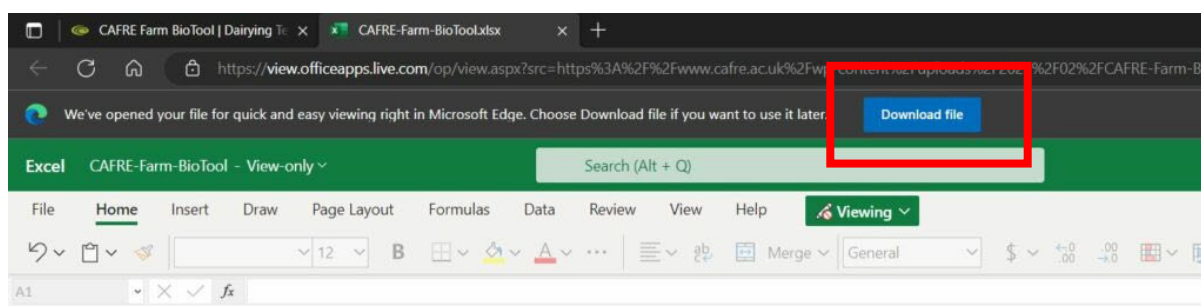
We have tested the NI average field boundary calculation on 5 different farms and it's a reasonable estimate. The formulas estimate the total length of your field perimeters based on your average field size, then take off a fraction for shared perimeters & the NI average for fenced only boundaries. Three of the farms tested matched the actual field boundary lengths, 1 underestimated the field boundaries by 0.6% in terms of farm % semi-natural habitat area, 1 overestimated by 1%. Due to the linear nature of hedges whilst extremely important to biodiversity their footprint usually varies from 1-4% of the farm total.

16. How do I make my field boundary calculations more accurate than the NI average?

Eventually farms will get data from the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS) giving hedge lengths and areas, but this will not be for a few years as the focus is on nutrient status initially. Using the [NIEA Arc GIS map viewer](#) or DAERA mapping system you can measure your hedge lengths or you may have a record of your Ecological Focus Areas (EFA) hedge lengths from Single Farm Payment (SFP) applications several years ago. For small farms it does not take long to measure the boundary features but for larger units it will take several hours. We encourage where possible to measure your own field boundaries, but the NI average estimate will be within + or - 1% of the actual figure in terms of % farm habitat.

How to complete the tool:

- Begin by downloading and saving the document to your computer. When you open the document, "Enable Content" or "Enable Editing" may appear at the top of the page, please select Enable for both, this will allow the document to work correctly.
- If the BioTool opens in another web page, please click "Download File" along the top (see screenshot below), this will download and save the BioTool to your computer and allow you to complete the BioTool.



******To begin...******

If the button "Enable Content" or "Enable Editing" appears above, please enable both. This will allow the calculators to work correctly.

If the BioTool opens in another web page, please click "Download File" along the top, this will download and save the BioTool to your computer and allow you to complete the BioTool.



- Please read all hints and tips as you work through the BioTool, this will help you successfully complete the tool.
- The tool is made of a series of questions, you will either select your answer from a drop-down list or you will enter your own information into an empty box.

CAFRE Farm BioTool FAQs

- To move between the questions, please use the right arrow key on the keyboard or scroll using the mouse. To navigate between the different pages, please click on the blue boxes.
- On the % Habitat Score page you will enter information regarding your farm size, enterprises, hedgerow and boundary lengths and areas of habitats. This information will automatically be transferred to the appropriate areas throughout the tool, if you wish to make amendments to these figures, please return to the % habitat page to do so.

If you require assistance, please send an email to: CAFREFarmBioTool@cafre.ac.uk