Horticulture Pilot Scheme 2025

1. What is the aim of the Horticulture Pilot Scheme?

- The aim of the Horticulture Pilot Scheme is to determine the feasibility of a full horticulture programme to increase the output of the Northern Ireland production horticulture industry.

2. Is the Horticulture Pilot Scheme open to all horticulture businesses?

- The Horticulture Pilot Scheme is open to the following sectors of commercial production horticulture: soft fruit, top fruit, edible crops, mushrooms, protected crops, ornamental crops and cut flowers/foliage. Applications will be open to both new and existing growers.

3. How long will the Horticulture Pilot Scheme last?

- The Horticulture Pilot Scheme will last for four years.

4. What schemes can growers apply to under the Horticulture Pilot Scheme?

- There are three sub schemes in the Horticulture Pilot Scheme offering support to horticulture businesses:
    - Sustainable Sector Growth Groups Pilot Scheme (4 years)
    - Innovation Drivers & Support Pilot Scheme (4 years)
    - Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme (3 years)

5. What will be available through the Sustainable Sector Growth Groups Pilot Scheme?

- Sustainable Sector Growth Groups aim to increase productivity by providing specialist agronomy, supply chain and business development advice to participants, encouraging them to share information and explore market opportunities collectively.

- Joining a Group will help growers to develop and implement growth plans over a four-year period.

6. Can a horticulture business be a member of two different Sustainable Sector Growth Groups?

- No, a business cannot be a member of two different Sustainable Sector Growth Groups.

7. Will all applications receive approval to participate in the Horticulture Pilot Scheme if they meet the eligibility criteria?

- No, there will be a competitive application process for all three schemes. This is a pilot scheme with a target of 6 Sustainable Sector Growth Groups selected, 20 members enrolled on the Growers' training and support scheme and 30 applicants selected for the Innovation & Driver Support Pilot Scheme (The final number of applications to the Innovation & Driver support will depend on financial expenditure of the projects).

8. How do I join a Sustainable Sector Growth Group?

- Growers who have agreed aims and objectives for the growth of their businesses will come together and appoint a group lead to submit the group's application.

9. What will be available through the Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme?

- The Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme will offer funding to individual commercial horticulture businesses to invest in new / innovative crops, technologies, and systems. This support will de-risk the adoption of new crops, technologies and systems by the commercial horticulture industry in NI.

- There will be no prescriptive list of eligible items and growers will present their plan as part of the competitive application process.

- Growers can apply for grant support up to a maximum of £250,000 or 40% of the total eligible cost of their proposed project. Therefore, the maximum purchase value eligible for funding would be £625,000. The minimum purchase eligible for funding will be £10,000. They will also receive specialist agronomy, supply chain and business development advice.

10. Can more than one applicant receive funding for the same innovation item/project?

- No, the Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme is a competitive programme and only one proposal will be financed per each innovation. Only one of each innovation item/project proposed will be selected following an assessment by an independent panel, therefore funding of multiple identical projects will not occur. As part of the competitive application process, the onus will be on the applicants to propose and illustrate how their project will support the growing of a crop and/or the implementation of a technology or system which can be deemed as new to the Horticulture Industry in NI.

11. What is available through the Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme?

- The Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme provides the opportunity for professional development training and participation in activities and events. Joining this scheme will allow growers to develop the knowledge and skills required to start a horticulture enterprise or increase their business profitability

and sustainability. They will also receive specialist agronomy, supply chain and business development advice.

12. What are the eligibility requirements to make an application to the Horticulture Pilot Schemes?

- An applicant for **the Sustainable Sector Growth Group Pilot Scheme** must:

  a) hold a DAERA category 1 or 2 farm business ID number or be able to provide to the Department such an ID number with the written consent of the farm business holding that ID number.

  b) be a member of not more than one new group of businesses making one application to become a sustainable sector growth group.

  c) operate or be employed by a commercial horticulture business; and

  d) be at least 18 years of age.

- An applicant for an **Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme** must:

  a) hold a DAERA category 1 or 2 farm business ID number; and

  b) operate a commercial horticulture business.

  c) be at least 18 years of age.

- An applicant for the **Growers Training and Support Pilot Scheme** must:

  a) hold a DAERA category 1 or 2 farm business ID number or provide that farm business ID number to the Department with the prior written consent of the person who is registered with that farm business ID.

  b) have a Level 2 Practical Horticulture Skills Award qualification or a qualification of an equivalent or higher standard as listed in the guidance notes for applicants; and

  c) be at least 18 years of age.

13. How do I register for a DAERA Business Identity Number?

- Information on how to register your business with DAERA is available on the following link: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/registering-your-business.

14. When will the Horticulture Pilot Schemes open for applications?

Both the Sustainable Sector Growth Groups Pilot Scheme and the Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme are open for applications from 31st October to 1st December 2025.

- It is anticipated that the Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme will open in Autumn 2026.