

# Sustainable Sector Growth Groups Pilot Scheme

## Membership Agreement

**1 March 2026 until 31 March 2030.**

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## Definitions

<b>The Department</b>	The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
<b>CAFRE</b>	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.
<b>Delivery Agent</b>	A professional services provider working to CAFRE specifications.
<b>Applicant</b>	An eligible farm business which has applied to a scheme
<b>SSGG</b>	Sustainable Sector Growth Group Pilot Scheme.
<b>SSGG participant</b>	A farm business which has applied for the scheme and meets the eligibility criteria
<b>Lead Applicant</b>	The SSGG participant who has been appointed as lead person for a SSGG application by the other group applicants and applied on behalf of the group.
<b>SSGG Pilot Scheme Manager</b>	The person appointed by CAFRE to manage the SSGG Pilot Scheme.
<b>HPS</b>	Horticulture Pilot Scheme
<b>Membership Agreement</b>	A document which sets out the offer for financial support including the terms and conditions. Once accepted it becomes a legally binding contract.
<b>Hosting payment</b>	A payment to an eligible farm business for the provision of facilities and support to facilitate learning. This will be paid to the Category 1 or 2 farm business as recorded on the SSGG Pilot Scheme application
<b>Business Plan</b>	A business plan is a specific plan for individual farm businesses and the SSGG which sets out future plans and a strategy for achieving them. It will detail the Key Performance Indicators which SSGG participants and SSGG have identified as areas for improvement.

## Foreword

The Horticulture Pilot Scheme (HPS) is part of DAERA's Sustainable Agriculture Programme. The HPS aims to provide support to growers to develop their businesses and ensure that they have the knowledge and skills required to successfully navigate and comply with current and future challenges.

The SSGG Pilot Scheme is one of the three DAERA's interventions under the HPS. This support will help SSGG participants to be able to meet the four key outcomes of the Sustainable Agriculture Programme:

- i. Improved environmental sustainability.
- ii. Enhanced productivity
- iii. Stronger resilience
- iv. Effective participation in a functioning supply chain

## 1. Introduction

**1.1** This membership agreement sets out the requirements necessary to participate in the SSGG pilot scheme. **By clicking submit on the enrolment form you are confirming you accept the terms and conditions of the membership agreement.**

The offer is subject to strict adherence to all conditions detailed in this membership agreement. Failure to adhere to the membership agreement may result in the SSGG participants being removed from the SSGG Pilot Scheme. Applicants must read this membership agreement before submitting the enrolment form.

## 2. Purpose of Membership Agreement

**2.1** The membership agreement is between CAFRE and the applicant. This documents states:

- the conditions which must be met by the applicant to participate in the SSGG pilot scheme, avail of the professional support, and access any financial assistance provided by the pilot scheme;
- the amount of financial assistance available; and
- the duration of the membership agreement.

**2.2** By accepting the membership agreement you are accepting the conditions set out in this document. Failure to adhere to the membership agreement may result in the farm business being removed from the SSGG Pilot Scheme.

### 3. Conditions of the SSGG Pilot Scheme

- 3.1** This membership agreement has been issued to SSGG Pilot Scheme applicants who have been offered a place in the pilot scheme.
- 3.2** This membership agreement is valid from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2026 until the end of the pilot scheme on the 31 March 2030 and includes an evaluation period of up to two years post-delivery (until March 2032).
- 3.3** SSGG Pilot Scheme participants can withdraw from the Pilot Scheme at any time. If a SSGG participant wishes to withdraw from the pilot scheme, they must notify CAFRE in writing (email: [kt.admin@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:kt.admin@daera-ni.gov.uk)).
- 3.4** The SSGG participant must attend workshops/training events linked to their SSGG only. They are not permitted to bring any non-SSGG participants to workshops/training events. This is to protect the confidentiality of information being shared by other SSGG participants.
- 3.5** All SSGG Pilot Scheme participants will be required to work towards being able to complete a business plan for their business at the end of the first year of membership of their SSGG and be willing to share key farm performance information with their group participants at workshops in agreement with the facilitator, programme manager, and other participants.

The business plan submitted must be of sufficient quality to produce a meaningful analysis of business financial performance. This is to meet the criteria for full participation in the SSGG Pilot Scheme.

- 3.6** Each SSGG participant, in conjunction with their Facilitator and Business Development Advisor, will develop a business plan both for their business and for the SSGG, which must be updated on an annual basis. Within the business plan, key performance indicators (KPI's) will be identified as areas of the business which the SSGG participant aims to improve.
- 3.7** SSGG Pilot Scheme participants must be willing to host a farm visit, share enterprise performance information, discuss technical performance and progress towards meeting productivity and sustainability targets.
- 3.8** Farm performance information shared at group workshops/training events must be treated as strictly confidential by all SSGG participants. Data relating to other SSGG participants businesses must not be shared outside the SSGG workshops/training events, without the prior consent of the relevant SSGG participant(s).

- 3.9** Participation in the SSGG Pilot Scheme is free of charge, however SSGG participants must cover their own costs to attend workshops and other costs not covered by the scheme's funding.
- 3.10** The success of the SSGG Pilot Scheme will depend on the group participants demonstrating a willingness and commitment to their specific group. SSGG participants must arrive punctually, remain at the event until it has concluded and participate fully at each workshop/training event.
- 3.11** Each SSGG Pilot Scheme participant will be encouraged to contribute to the discussion during the workshops/training events. Group participants are expected to respect each other's contribution, the Facilitator and the other professionals delivering the pilot scheme.
- 3.12** CAFRE will continuously evaluate the SSGG group structure, membership and the SSGG Professional Services Providers engaged in the delivery of the pilot scheme.
- 3.13** The membership agreement may be revised by CAFRE in the event of changes to DAERA requirements. CAFRE will inform participants of the proposed changes with reasonable advance notice.
- 3.14** SSGG Pilot Scheme participants must inform the SSGG Pilot Scheme Manager if they have a conflict of interest in relation to CAFRE, any employees, servants, agents, or sub-contractors of CAFRE in connection with the SSGG Pilot Scheme.
- 3.15** SSGG Pilot Scheme participants must adhere with UK competition law.
- 3.16** DAERA may withhold or recover a payment where an application for payment has been approved by the Department, and it becomes aware that the applicant—
- (a) is not eligible to receive the payment; or
  - (b) has failed to meet the requirements/condition for the hosting payment; or
  - (c) have received directly or indirectly any DAERA or UK Government funding for any measures claimed for or supported within this scheme.

## 4. Schedule of the SSGG Activities

- 4.1** Each SSGG will have a minimum of two group workshops/training events during the period of 1 April to 31 March in each year, with each session normally lasting a minimum of two hours. The SSGG participant will be invited to attend the workshops/training events relating to their SSGG. Each group will, with the support of their group facilitator and SSGG Pilot Scheme Manager, agree the subjects to be covered at workshops/training events during the year.
- 4.2** SSGG workshops/training events will be held primarily on the host farms of the group participants. Each SSGG will be allocated a Facilitator who will organise and facilitate the group workshops/training events and support SSGG participants working towards the implementation of their individual business plans as well as the group business plan.
- 4.3** SSGG participants must attend at least two group workshops/training events per year to remain in the pilot scheme. Where participants attend less than two of the workshops/training events offered and/or have not worked towards completing financial data for their business to the standard required by CAFRE, participants may be withdrawn from the pilot scheme subject to the scheme's rules.
- 4.4** Where a SSGG participant has hosted a workshop/training event, a hosting payment of £786 is payable to the farm business, subject to meeting the hosting criteria as outlined in 6.1. The participant is expected to have fully participated in the activities organised for the pilot scheme for the previous calendar year prior to the hosting event taking place.
- 4.5** CAFRE retains the right to change the number of workshops/training events without prior notice.

## 5. Scheme grants

- 5.1** Subject to "The Horticulture Pilot Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025", the Department shall pay to the farm business participating in the SSGG Pilot Scheme, a hosting payment of **£786** if the conditions as outlined

in 6.1 of this document are met. This will be paid to the Category 1 or 2 farm business as recorded on the SSGG Pilot Scheme application.

- 5.2** CAFRE may cover costs where this has received prior agreement from CAFRE's pilot scheme programme manager. DAERA's policies on service requisition procedures will be adhered to in all instances where these costs are agreed.

## 6. Payment of Scheme grants

### **6.1 Hosting payments.**

Where a SSGG participant hosts a training event, the following criteria must be met for the farm business to be eligible to receive a hosting payment:

- (a) Prepare the farm for visitors ensuring sufficient farm business public liability insurance (minimum £5 million) and biosecurity measures are in place, and health and safety requirements are met (see sections 9 and 10 below); or
- (b) If a situation arises where a participant is unable to host an event on the farm (e.g. where a biosecurity issue has arisen), subject to agreement with the group facilitator, the training event may be held in an alternative local venue. The venue must hold sufficient public liability insurance and meet required biosecurity and health and safety requirements. Evidence of adequate public liability insurance (minimum £5 million) for the venue must be provided to the Facilitator/Professional services provider prior to the event. The SSGG participant will be required to pay for hire of the venue. On occasions, it may be possible to host a workshop/training event via an on-line platform. This will require prior agreement with the group Facilitator/Professional Services Provider.
- (c) Collate and present relevant farm performance information to group participants as agreed with the Facilitator/Professional Services Provider.
- (d) Eligible hosting payments will be paid after the hosting event has taken place.

- 6.2** Payments shall be made to the bank account held by DAERA Grants & Subsidies Branch linked to DAERA Business ID Number linked to the SSGG participant.

## 7. General

- 7.1** All payments made by CAFRE will be paid electronically by the Bankers Automated Clearing System (BACS).
- 7.2** CAFRE does not accept any liability in respect of any loss attributable to any delay in payment of claims or to any suspension, reduction, or cancellation of financial assistance.
- 7.3** The Department may conduct on the spot check on any element of the SSGG Pilot Scheme, which could include training events.

## 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

- 8.1** Each SSGG participant must provide CAFRE with any information (e.g. gross profit margin, external sales), it may require for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the pilot scheme's objectives and targets.

## 9. Insurance & Indemnity

- 9.1** Neither CAFRE nor the Department accepts any responsibility, financial or otherwise, for expenditure or liabilities arising out of the work or activities of SSGG participants acting as individuals or as a business group.
- 9.2** The SSGG participant, in preparation for hosting a SSGG workshop/training event shall indemnify CAFRE, and any employees, servants, agents or sub-contractors of CAFRE in connection with the SSGG Pilot Scheme against all claims, proceedings, actions, damages, legal costs, expenses and any other liabilities in respect of death, personal injury, disease transmission, loss of or damage to property arising out of or in any way connected with the performance or non-performance by the host farm, its servants or agents of all or any activities associated with the host farm and/or the host farm facility, including the provision of advice to third parties by the host farmer, and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing the use, misuse, malfunction or failure of any plant, machinery or equipment involved in the delivery of the SSGG workshop/training event.
- 9.3** Nothing in this membership agreement shall restrict any party's liability for death or personal injury caused by its negligence.

- 9.4** When hosting a visit, the SSGG participant must ensure that they have public liability insurance (minimum £5 million) for their business. All documents in relation to the above should be available for appropriate inspection by CAFRE. It is the responsibility of the participant to ensure that they are adequately insured against claims for damages which may arise throughout the duration of this membership agreement. It is the responsibility of the participant to ensure that insurance is in place prior to hosting the training event and that the original insurance certificate (or written confirmation of insurance from the broker) is forwarded to the SSGG facilitator for verification, copying and copy filing on request.
- 9.5** The SSGG participant shall adequately instruct and supervise visitors to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all persons who may be affected by the services provided under the SSGG Pilot Scheme. Risk Assessment forms will be completed by the Facilitator in conjunction with the SSGG participant and agreed by CAFRE before each training event.
- 9.6** The professional responsible for organising the event shall advise the group participants at the outset of a farm visit of any potential risks and dangers presented by the undertaking as required by health and safety legislation.

## 10. Bio-security Management

- 10.1** CAFRE and its services providers will ensure that DAERA biosecurity protocols will be followed during workshops/training events.
- 10.2** The SSGG Pilot Scheme participant shall notify the group Facilitator immediately if there is a suspected or confirmed case of a disease specified in the Diseases of Animals (NI) Order 1981 or if the business has been given a restriction of movement in relation to a plant health issued by DAERA's Forest Service Plant Health Inspection Branch. In these circumstances, the workshop/training event may be suspended until a future date can be set or relocated from that particular host farm. The Facilitator will co-ordinate this with agreement from the group.
- 10.3** The SSGG Pilot Scheme participant will notify the group Facilitator, confirming that any and all restrictions placed on her/his farm business have been lifted. No workshop/training events will be hosted on this particular farm until notification has been received or approval has been received by CAFRE, and

it's Professional Services Provider delivering the pilot scheme, from the local DVO or DAERA's Forest Service Plant Health Inspection Branch.

## 11. Sharing of Information, Data Protection and Freedom of Information

**11.1** The Department takes data protection, freedom of information and environmental information issues seriously. It takes care to ensure that any personal information received from you is dealt with in a way which complies with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. This means that any personal information you supply will be processed principally for the purpose for which it has been provided. However, the Department is under a duty to protect the public funds it administers, and to this end may use the information you have provided for this purpose. It may also share this information with other bodies responsible for the audit or administration of public funds, in order to prevent and detect crime. In addition, the Department may also use it for other legitimate purposes in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation, Data Protection Act 2018, Freedom of Information Act 2000, and Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

These include:

- the full range of departmental policy responsibilities;
- the production and safety of food;
- all financial support schemes;
- management of land and other environmental controls;
- animal health and welfare;
- statutory schemes and obligations in the areas of plant health and crop certification;
- occupational health and welfare;
- regulatory and natural resources policy;
- legislation relating to the Northern Ireland Environmental Agency; DAERA Privacy Statement 3;
- the prevention and detection of fraud or maladministration (e.g. The Comptroller & Auditor General and HM Revenue & Customs);
- compilation of statistics;

- disclosure to other organisations when required by law to do so;
- disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 where such disclosure is in the public interest;
- administration of UK wide schemes on behalf of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in Great Britain;
- business development and knowledge advisory service for farmers, growers, and food processors;
- statistical and research purposes; this may include linking or combining the information with data from Arm's Length Bodies, government departments, or other public bodies;
- delivering education and training programmes;
- corresponding with you in connection with the above activities.

The Department uses artificial intelligence to benefit customers and to support the Departmental strategic priorities in accordance with the DAERA Artificial Intelligence Policy: "Securely Maximising the Benefits of Artificial Intelligence." DAERA will not use artificial intelligence for automated decision-making in relation to your personal data in any way.

Please see DAERA's Privacy Statement for more information:

[DAERA Privacy Statement | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

- 11.3** Other than information that could be requested under the prevailing Data Protection, Freedom of Information legislation or GDPR, all personal information discussed as part of the SSGG Pilot Scheme, will be treated confidentially and will not be shared with anyone outside the Department or CAFRE or agents or sub-contractors of CAFRE.
- 11.4** CAFRE and any employees, servants, agents, or sub-contractors of CAFRE, in connection with the SSGG Pilot Scheme, will be required to manage information and data in a confidential manner.
- 11.5** CAFRE may take photographs and videos at announcements and events to publicise its work. Photographs, interviews, videos, or other recordings may be issued to media organisations for publicity purposes or used in promotional material, including in publications, newspapers, magazines, other print media, on television, radio, and electronic media (including social media and the

internet). Photographs and videos will also be stored on the Department's internal records management system. The Department will keep the photographs and recordings for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which they have been obtained. The Department's Privacy Policy is available on our website.

## 12. Termination or Suspension

**12.1** The farm business may be withdrawn from the SSGG Pilot Scheme by CAFRE if:

- (a) The participant attends less than two workshops/training events in any year where there is no clear/specific justification.
- (b) The participant refuses or neglects to share and/or complete financial details as required to fully participate in the pilot scheme;
- (c) The participant refuses or neglects to share business knowledge and data;
- (d) There is an unwillingness to host a workshop/training event where there is no clear/specific justification;
- (e) Irregularities are found as part of a claim for financial assistance;
- (f) Data is shared outside the SSGG Pilot Scheme;
- (g) There is inappropriate behaviour towards other group participants and/or the professionals delivering the pilot scheme;
- (h) The SSGG participant has been charged with or is convicted of an offence which CAFRE considers sufficiently serious, or CAFRE becomes aware of a serious conviction which was not disclosed during the enrolment process.

**12.2** CAFRE may terminate or suspend membership of the SSGG pilot scheme and seek repayment where any other event occurs in relation to the SSGG participant in the opinion of CAFRE and DAERA, might reasonably be expected to materially and adversely affect its liability to comply with its obligations under this membership agreement.

## 13. Appeals Procedure where a participant is withdrawn from the SSGG Pilot Scheme

SSGG participants who have been withdrawn from the pilot scheme have the right to appeal the decision. The appeal must be submitted in writing within ten working days of the decision leading to the appeal to [CAFREappeals@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:CAFREappeals@daera-ni.gov.uk), and must be supported with evidence to confirm at least one of the following:

- There has been a significant procedural irregularity.
- New evidence is available which was unavailable at the time the original decision or penalty was being considered.
- The penalty applied is disproportionate or that the original decision was demonstrably unreasonable.

The appeal will be reviewed by another individual (or a panel of individuals) with the appropriate authority to review the previous decision. CAFRE will aim to review the appeal and inform the appellant of the decision within ten working days of the date when the written appeal was received.

## 14. Withholding and recovery of payment

**14.1** DAERA may withhold or recover a payment where an application for payment has been approved by the Department, and it becomes aware that the applicant—

- (a) is not eligible to receive the payment; or
- (b) has failed to meet the requirements/condition for the hosting payment; or
- (c) have received directly or indirectly any DAERA or UK Government funding for any measures claimed for or supported within this scheme.

**14.2** The Department may—

- (a) revoke the approval of the application for a payment; and
- (b) where payment has not been made, withhold the payment or any part of it; or
- (c) where payment has already been made, recover from the applicant an amount equal to the whole or any part of the payment—
  - (i) as a civil debt; or

- (ii) by way of offsetting against any sum otherwise payable to the applicant by the Department.

**14.3** Before exercising the powers under ‘The Horticulture Pilot Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025’ - the Department must by a withdrawal or recovery notice, as is appropriate —

- (a) give the applicant a written explanation of the reasons for the proposed action;
- (b) afford the applicant the opportunity to make written representations with a reasonable time specified by the Department; and
- (c) consider representations made by or on behalf of the applicant within a reasonable time period.

## 15. Review of decision

**15.1** Where the Department rejects an application under ‘The Horticulture Pilot Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025’, in whole or in part, an applicant may apply to the Department for a review of the decision.

**15.2** An applicant must apply to the Department in writing for a review no later than one month beginning with the date of the notification of the decision to be reviewed and specify—

- (a) the name and address of the applicant;
- (b) the decision of the Department in respect of which the applicant seeks a review and the date of that decision; and
- (c) full particulars of the grounds upon which the review of the decision sought.

**15.3** Where an applicant seeks a review under this regulation the Department must review the decision specified.

**15.4** In reviewing a decision the Department may—

- (a) consider any document or other evidence produced by the applicant (whether or not that document or evidence was available at the time of the decision);
- (b) invite the applicant to provide such further information relevant to the review as it considers appropriate; and
- (c) give the applicant or its representative an opportunity to make representations orally or in writing.

**15.5** Following a review of the decision the Department may—

- (a) confirm the decision; or
- (b) substitute for it a new decision.

**15.6** As soon as reasonably practicable after reviewing the decision, the Department must notify the applicant in writing of its decision and the reasons for it.

**Warning**

**Any person who knowingly or recklessly makes a false statement for the purposes of obtaining grant under this Scheme or assisting another to obtain grant aid may be prosecuted. The information provided on this form may be made available to other Departments/Agencies for the purposes of preventing or detecting crime.**

**DAERA FRAUD HOTLINE – Telephone 0808 1002716**

**Email: [daeracounterfraud@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:daeracounterfraud@daera-ni.gov.uk)**

**Contact details:**

SSGG Pilot Scheme Manager

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