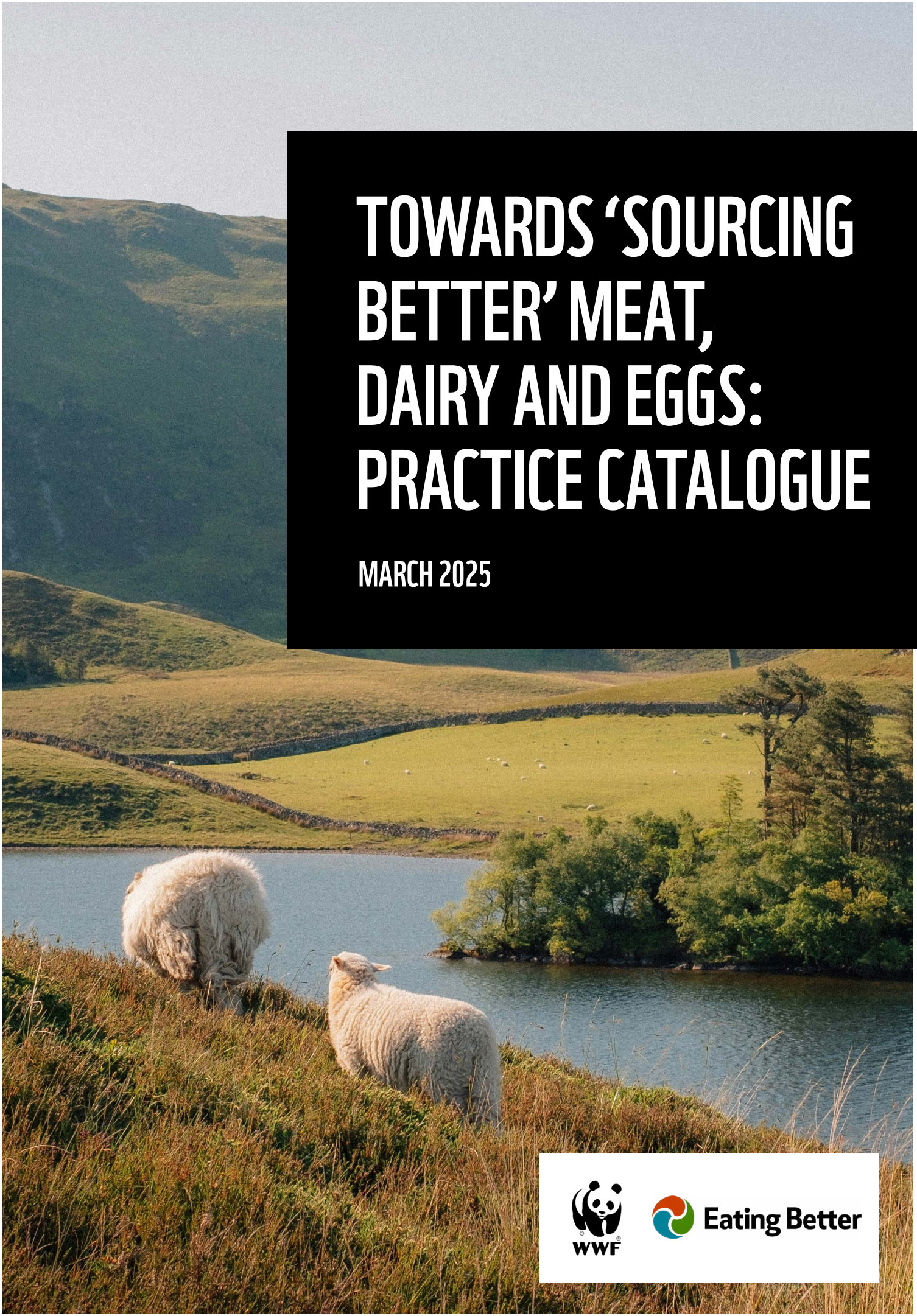

TOWARDS 'SOURCING BETTER' MEAT, DAIRY AND EGGS: PRACTICE CATALOGUE

MARCH 2025

WWF

Eating Better

WHY A SOURCING BETTER PRACTICE CATALOGUE IS NEEDED

Through the Retailers' Commitment for Nature, seven major UK food retailers – Co-op, M&S, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Aldi, and Lidl – representing more than 70% of the UK food retail market, have pledged to halve the environmental impact of UK shopping baskets by 2030. To track progress against this shared goal, WWF developed a series of Outcomes and Measures focusing on key areas such as climate, deforestation and habitat conversion, agriculture, marine, diets, food waste and packaging. One of the key measures for agriculture is to assess progress against sourcing 100% of meat, dairy and eggs to "better" standards by 2030.

The latest UN report (IPCC WG3, April 2022) highlighted that reducing meat consumption and transitioning to "less and better" meat, alongside increased consumption of plant-based foods, is crucial for mitigating climate change and achieving a sustainable food system. But what does "better" meat mean, and how can progress be effectively tracked? The food sector faces a host of demands to improve animal welfare and reduce its environmental impact, while providing us with healthy and nutritious food. Different ways of defining and measuring success can create confusion and hinder progress.

This resource provides a clear roadmap towards sourcing better for food service and retail. It builds on the Sourcing Better Framework, drawing on the collective civil society expertise of Eating Better, an alliance of over 60 civil society organisations representing public health, sustainable farming, food waste, social justice, animal welfare, environment and conservation. It aims to guide retailers on which on-farm practices to incentivise. Reporting against this framework will provide a more granular view of where the sector is progressing well and where more work is needed. Additionally, the data can serve as a valuable evidence base to highlight to Government where additional public funding or policy is needed to accelerate progress.

So far, the simplest and most comprehensive way of identifying "better" animal products has been whether they meet a credible certification such as Organic or RSPCA Assured. While this remains the case, production under suitable certifications covers only a small fraction of the products we consume. Reporting only against certification schemes has therefore masked what progress (or in some cases lack thereof) retailers have made in the various Sourcing Better impact areas.

This document defines “better” practices for major livestock species within four impact areas: animal welfare, local pollution, soil health, and biodiversity.[1] By supporting suppliers in adopting these practices, retailers can help raise UK livestock production standards – helping to restore nature, provide everyone with nutritious food, and combat climate change.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The practice catalogue is a joint publication by WWF-UK and Eating Better. It seeks to provide retailers with a clear path to sourcing better meat, dairy, and eggs. It outlines clear benchmarks for “better” practices, complementing the Sourcing Better Framework. Alongside each “better” practice the catalogue maps which existing certification schemes can be used to prove adherence to the practice. The green numbers refer to the table at the end of the document. Some schemes’ requirements go beyond the better practices (e.g. organic) and should be understood as a means of verification rather than a requirement for “better”. Retailers may also adhere to better practices outside of certification schemes. A definition of best practices is to follow in the forthcoming update to the Sourcing Better Framework.

1 Further impact areas defined in the Sourcing Better Framework, namely GHG emissions, land use change, and water scarcity, are covered in separate metrics within the WWF Basket and have therefore been deprioritised in this practice catalogue. Better practices for antibiotics use are clearly defined in the Sourcing Better Framework. The updated Sourcing Better Framework will contain a full practice catalogue for all impact areas.

ANIMAL WELFARE

KEY CHARACTERISTIC

Livestock are provided with conditions that exceeds minimum legal guidelines, supporting their health and well-being, including opportunities for the expression of some natural behaviours

Recommended supply chain practices to ensure 'better' animal welfare include:

- Set procurement policies that encourage investment in extensive or pasture-based systems
- Incentivise or require environmental enrichment or outdoor access
- Allow variance in carcass and product quality
- Incentivise genetic diversity
- Reward livestock longevity
- Discourage routine mutilations

ON-FARM PRACTICES FOR BETTER ANIMAL WELFARE[2]

LAYING HENS[3]

No cages, including no combination or limited access systems.

Certifications: 1, 2, 3, 4.

Maximum stocking density of 16.5 birds/m2 indoors.

Certifications: 1, 2, 3, 4.

At least two types of enrichment per 1,000 birds (e.g., pecking blocks, straw bales)

Nest boxes

Minimum 15 cm of perch space per bird.

At least 33% of the floor must be covered with litter for foraging and dustbathing.

Certifications: 1, 2, 3, 4.

Minimum period of 8 hours of consecutive artificial light and uninterrupted period of darkness lasting for one third of the day.

Certifications: 1, 4.

Mutilations such as toe clipping, dubbing/comb trimming, and de-spurring are prohibited..

Certifications: 1, 2, 4.

Beak trimming must only be carried out on chicks no older than 24 hours using infrared equipment and when necessary to prevent injurious feather pecking and cannibalism.

Certifications: 1, 2, 4.

BROILERS[4]

No cages or multi-tier systems.

Certifications: 2, 5, 11a.

Maximum stocking density of 30kg/m2 or less.

Certifications: 1, 2, 5, 11a.

At least 50 lux of light, including natural light.

At least two metres of usable perch space, and two pecking substrates, per 1,000 birds.

On air quality, the maximum requirements of Annex 2.3 of the EU broiler directive, regardless of stocking density.

Certifications: 2, 5, 11b.

Adopt controlled atmospheric stunning using inert gas or multi-phase systems, or effective electrical stunning without live inversion.

Certifications: 5.

All mutilations are prohibited.

Certifications: 1, 2, 11a.

Slower growing breeds are used (defined as <40g/d averaged over the growth cycle according to the breeding company specification).

Certifications: 1, 5.

2 Better practises for animal welfare are based on RSPCA guidance, the Better Chicken Commitment (for broilers), British Lion Barn Eggs (for Laying Hens), and have undergone consultation with Eating Better's animal welfare organisations

3 Suggested better animal welfare practices for laying hens follow the Code of Practice for Lion eggs: https://beicdev.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/LCoPV7.pdf

4 Better animal welfare practices for broilers follow largely the Better Chicken Commitment: https://betterchickencommitment.com/uk/policy/

ON-FARM PRACTICES FOR BETTER ANIMAL WELFARE

PIGS[5]

Minimum space allowances must follow (at a minimum) RSPCA requirements E5.2, E5.2.1, and E5.2.2 for pigs.

Certifications: 1, 2.

No routine crating of farrowing of lactating sows

Certifications: 1, 2.

No confinement (sow stalls/gestation crates) during the dry period (including the observation period).

Certifications: 1, 2.

Floors with bedding .

Certifications: 1, 2.

Manipulable material (edible, chewable, destructible and investigable fibrous material).

Certifications: 1, 2.

No routine mutilations like tail docking, teeth clipping and grinding, unless deemed necessary for animal welfare by a veterinary .

Certifications: 1, 2.

DAIRY COWS[6]

The floor space allowances in straw yard accommodation must follow (at a minimum) RSPCA requirement E4.2 for dairy cows

Cubicle housing space requirements must follow (at a minimum) RSPCA requirements E5.1, E5.8, E5.9, E5.9.1, E5.10, E5.11, E5.12 for dairy cows

Certifications: 1, 2.

No single penning of calves for more than 48 hours.

Certifications: 1, 2.

Cattle kept in straw yard accommodation must be kept on, or have access at all times to, a lying area which is:

a) well-drained or well-maintained with dry bedding

b) of sufficient size to accommodate all cattle lying down together in normal resting posture.

Certifications: 1, 2.

Cattle must have access to pasture for at least:

a) 4 hours per day, and ideally 6 hours

b) the minimum number of days per year calculated using the following farm-specific equation[7].

Certifications: 1, 2, 6.

Animals should be turned out into a pasture with a grass height and density capable of providing a contribution to nutritional requirements.

Certifications: 1, 2, 6.

Pain relief must be provided when any procedure performed on the animal is likely to cause pain during and/or after the procedure, for example therapeutic foot trimming.

Certifications: 1, 2.

5 Better animal welfare practices for pigs follow RSPCA Assured guidance: https://science.rspca.org.uk/documents/1494935/9042554/RSPCA%20welfare%20standards%20for%20pigs%20%28PDF%205.72MB%29.pdf/8b2d5794-9a10-cd1f-f27d-e3642c0c1945?t=1557668440116

6 Better animal welfare practices for dairy cows follow RSPCA Assured guidance: https://business.rspcaassured.org.uk/media/lljpeymt/dairy-standards-june-2021.pdf

7 Number of days in the year – Predicted number of days whereby access to pasture may not be reasonable due to inclement weather – Average transition/freshly calved period (in days) = expected minimum number of days available for each cow to have access to pasture per year.

ON-FARM PRACTICES FOR BETTER ANIMAL WELFARE

BEEF CATTLE[8]

The floor space allowances in straw yard accommodation must follow (at a minimum) RSPCA requirement E4.2 for beef cattle.

Certifications: 1, 2.

Cattle kept in straw yard accommodation must be kept on, or have access at all times to, a lying area which is:

a) well-drained or well-maintained with dry bedding

b) of sufficient size to accommodate all cattle lying down together in normal resting posture

Certifications: 1, 2.

All cattle, except unweaned calves being fed by artificial means and calves being reared for veal, must have access to pasture:

a) during the grass-growing season, and

b) for at least four hours per day.

Pasture must provide grass of a sufficient height and density to enable cattle to express grazing behaviour..

Certifications: 1, 2, 6.

Pain relief must be provided:

a) when any procedure performed on the animal is likely to cause pain during and/or after the procedure, for example therapeutic foot trimming, and

b) when an animal is suffering from a condition which is likely to be painful, e.g. lameness.

Certifications: 1, 2.

SHEEP[9]

The minimum space allowances for housed sheep must follow (at a minimum) RSPCA requirement E5.5 for sheep.

Certifications: 1, 2.

Housed sheep, including lambs, must be kept on, or at all times have access to, a lying area that is:

a) bedded to a sufficient extent to avoid discomfort, and

b) well drained and/or maintained so that it is kept dry.

When sheep are kept outdoors, to ensure comfort and limit the build-up of mud or dung on the fleece, there must be an area to which they have ready access that is:

a) grassed or straw covered

b) well drained and dry, and

c) of sufficient size to accommodate all sheep lying down together at the same time in normal resting postures.

Certifications: 1, 2.

During the grass growing season, climatic conditions allowing, all sheep must derive as much of their nutritional requirements as possible from grazing at pasture. The routine feeding of diets high in concentrates is not permitted (0.4kg of concentrate feed per day).

Certifications: 1, 2.

Pain relief must be provided when any procedure performed on an animal is likely to cause pain during and/or after the procedure, for example a traumatic lambing, or if an animal is suffering from a condition which is likely to be painful, for example severe lameness.

Certifications: 1, 2.

8 Better animal welfare practices for beef cattle follow RSPCA Assured guidance: https://business.rspcaassured.org.uk/media/asnjl40q/beef_welfare_standards_2023.pdf

9 Better animal welfare practices for sheep follow RSPCA Assured guidance: https://business.rspcaassured.org.uk/media/atiluphr/sheep_welfare_standards_2023.pdf

SOIL HEALTH

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Livestock are used to maintain or potentially improve soil health and fertility
- Soil health and fertility is measured and accounted for in the planning of farm operations

Recommended supply chain practices to ensure 'better' soil health include:

- Incentivize suppliers to adopt regenerative practices like reduced tillage, organic amendments, or agroforestry.
- Collaboration with on-farm monitoring like LandApp, Soil Association Exchange to monitor regenerative practices
- Soil health targets for feed crop production
- Retailers/ food service providers have commitments and action to rebalancing the basket towards less industrial meat, more plant protein sources to reduce risks to soil health

ON-FARM PRACTICES FOR BETTER SOIL HEALTH[10]

LIVESTOCK ARE USED TO MAINTAIN OR POTENTIALLY IMPROVE SOIL HEALTH AND FERTILITY

Dairy

Beef

Sheep

Ruminants are reared in grazing systems rather than fully housed ones. The requirements for outdoor access are the same as for animal welfare.

Certifications: 1, 2, 6.

A plan is in place to ensure that grazing, foraging or cultivation is managed to protect and enhance biodiversity. This means the risk of soil degradation must be assessed prior to operations being carried out to ensure the timing, field conditions, equipment and soil management techniques are appropriate.

Certifications: 1a, 2, 3, 6, 7.

Animals are managed in a way which avoids damage to soil. This may include:

- adjusting stocking rates
- adjusting animal movements and/or using rotation
- consideration of permanent tracks
- positioning of gateways and fencing
- positioning of supplementary feeders and drinkers

Certifications: 2, 3, 7, 8.

Cover crops, mulching, and soil residue cover are used to protect soil over winter, particular in mixed farming systems.

Certifications: 2, 3, 7, 8, 9a, 9b.

Steps are taken to conserve and build up soil organic matter, e.g. including the use of herbal lays or the addition of fibrous manures.

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9c.

SOIL HEALTH AND FERTILITY IS MEASURED AND ACCOUNTED FOR IN THE PLANNING OF FARM OPERATIONS

All species

Arable land used for feed crops

Grassland

The farm must have an implemented Soil Management Plan which, at a minimum, addresses farm specific soil erosion risks.

Certifications: 2, 7, 9d, 10, 11c, 11d.

A Nutrient, Manure, and/or Farm Waste Management Plan is in place, including strategies to manage the nutrient loading of soils. The plan should cover the use of slurry, manure, compost, anaerobic digestate and/or other organic materials.

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 1, 11c, 11d, 12, 14.

Representative sample of soils are tested for nutrient levels at least every 5 years. Characteristics required for testing must include but are not limited to pH, extractable phosphorus (P), potassium (K) and magnesium (Mg).

Certifications: 7, 16.

10 Better soil health practices are derived from the SAI Regenerating Together Framework, an evaluation of the robustness of schemes for biodiversity and soil health WWF commissioned and are vetted by the 68 expert organisations that form the Eating Better Alliance.

BIODIVERSITY

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Livestock are used to maintain or potentially improve farmland biodiversity
- Sensitive or high value habitats are protected
- Pest and disease management minimises harm to biodiversity while maintaining farm resilience.

Recommended supply chain practices to ensure 'better' biodiversity include:

- Requiring minimum 5% on farm habitat protection from suppliers
- Sustainability targets for feed production, not allowing unsustainable chemical use
- Incentivize suppliers to adopt regenerative practices, such as integrated pest management or organic methods
- Retailers/ food service providers have commitments and action to rebalancing the basket towards less industrial meat, more plant protein sources to reduce the biodiversity loss associated with livestock production

ON-FARM PRACTICES FOR BETTER BIODIVERSITY[11]

LIVESTOCK ARE USED TO MAINTAIN OR POTENTIALLY IMPROVE FARMLAND BIODIVERSITY

Dairy
Beef
Sheep

Ruminants are reared in grazing systems rather than fully housed ones. The requirements for outdoor access are the same as for animal welfare and soil health.

Certifications: 1, 2, 6.

A plan must be in place to ensure that grazing, foraging or cultivation is managed to protect and potentially enhance biodiversity. The requirement is the same as for soil health. ***Certifications: 1a, 2, 3, 6, 7.***

All animals are managed in a way which avoids damage to habitats such as grassland, heath, moorland, heather, bog and brushy uplands. This may include:

- adjusting stocking rates
- adjusting animal movements and/or using rotation
- consideration of permanent tracks
- positioning of gateways and fencing
- positioning of supplementary feeders and drinkers

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8.

SENSITIVE OR HIGH VALUE HABITATS ARE PROTECTED

All species
Arable land used for feed crops
Grassland

Key semi-natural habitats must be recorded, including the presence of habitats of high conservation value and local protected areas.

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 15.

Management practices ensure existing key semi-natural habitats are protected. There may be a management plan.

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11c.

Any practices that may damage statutory, non-statutory or local wildlife sites or ecologically significant habitats are prohibited. For example, ploughing species rich or unimproved grasslands

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 15.

PEST AND DISEASE MANAGEMENT MINIMISES HARM TO BIODIVERSITY WHILE MAINTAINING FARM RESILIENCE

All species

Arable land used for feed crops

Grassland

An integrated pest management plan is in place. This may be part of a wider cropping plan. Practices detailed in the plan may include but are not limited to:

a) Creating fertile soils with high biodiversity

b) Choosing appropriate species and varieties resistant to pests and diseases

c) Appropriate crop rotations, particularly the inclusion of a fertility building grass leys

d) Protecting and encouraging natural enemies of pests.

e) Carefully planning planting dates

f) Pre-emergence and post-emergence mechanical weeding

g) Using good husbandry and hygiene practices to limit the spread of any pests or disease.

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8.

11 Better practices are derived from the SAI Regenerating Together Framework, an evaluation of the robustness of schemes for biodiversity and soil health WWF commissioned, and vetted by the 68 expert organisations that form the Eating Better Alliance.

LOCAL POLLUTION

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Nutrient management practices are in place to understand risks and prevent soil and water contamination
- Inputs such as nitrogen fertilisers and chemicals are restricted in high-value habitats
- Appropriate infrastructure is in place to prevent the escape of pollutants into the environment
- Pesticide use is minimised through responsible management practices that prioritise non-chemical alternatives

Positive practices retailers might follow to ensure less local pollution in their supply chains include:

- Having adequate waste management requirements in sourcing policies, not allowing suppliers to operate without sustainable manure disposal systems.
- Commitments/action toward supporting suppliers in adopting nutrient management plans or recycling systems.
- Retailers/food service providers have commitments and action to rebalancing the basket towards less industrial meat, more plant protein sources to reduce the pollution associated with livestock production.


M868 JKV
Ferrag

ON-FARM PRACTICES FOR LESS LOCAL POLLUTION[12]

NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ARE IN PLACE TO UNDERSTAND RISKS AND PREVENT SOIL AND WATER CONTAMINATION

All species

Arable land used for feed crops

Grassland

A Nutrient Management Plan and/or Farm Waste Management Plan is in place, including strategies to manage the nutrient loading of soils. The plan should cover the use of slurry, manure, compost, anaerobic digestate and/or other organic materials. The requirement is the same as for soil health.

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11c, 11d, 12, 14.

Representative sample of soils are tested for nutrient levels at least every 5 years. Characteristics required for testing must include but are not limited to pH, extractable phosphorus (P), potassium (K) and magnesium (Mg).

Certifications: 7, 16.

INPUTS SUCH AS NITROGEN FERTILISERS AND CHEMICALS ARE RESTRICTED IN HIGH-VALUE HABITATS

All species

Arable land used for feed crops

Grassland

Limit the use of nitrogen and chemical inputs onto species-rich, permanent grasslands.

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7.

APPROPRIATE INFRASTRUCTURE IS IN PLACE TO PREVENT THE ESCAPE OF POLLUTANTS INTO THE ENVIRONMENT

All species

Arable land used for feed crops

Grassland

Organic material, digestate, compost, silage, silage effluent, slurry and solid organic matter are stored according to best practice. This may include but is not limited to:

- Manure and slurry storage must be located in a safe situation and precautions taken to avoid the spread of disease both to livestock and humans.
- Muck Heaps in fields must be fenced off to prevent direct access by grazing livestock

Certifications: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.

PESTICIDE USE IS MINIMISED THROUGH RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES THAT PRIORITISE NON-CHEMICAL ALTERNATIVES

All species

Arable land used for feed crops

Grassland

An integrated pest management plan is in place. The requirement is the same as for biodiversity.

Certifications: 2, 3, 6, 7, 8.

12 Better practices are derived from the SAI Regenerating Together Framework and an evaluation of the robustness of schemes for biodiversity and soil health WWF commissioned and are vetted by the 68 expert organisations that form the Eating Better Alliance.

CERTIFICATION

Certification scheme/commitment/SFI that can be used for proving adherence to practices with the reference number in this catalogue.

1 RSPCA Assured
1a RSPCA Assured (Beef)
2 Organic
3 Soil Association Organic
4 British Lion Barn Eggs
5 Better Chicken Commitment
6 Pasture For Life
7 LEAF Marque Standard V16.1
8 A Greener World Regenerative Standards
9 SFI Agreement
9a SCAM2
9b SOH4
9c Soil Health Actions
9d CSAM1
10 Farm Assured Welsh Livestock Scheme
11 Red Tractor (All)
11a Red Tractor Indoor Enhanced Welfare (broiler chickens, V1)
11b Red Tractor Standard Chicken
11c Red Tractor- Fresh Produce
11d Red Tractor- Crops and Sugar Beet
12 Quality Meat Scotland (Beef & Lamb)
13 N.I. Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme
14 Scottish Organic Producers
15 Fair To Nature
16 Legal Requirement