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# Conservation Grade Farming Protocol

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## 1. Introduction

This document outlines the basic principles of the Conservation Grade Protocol and its habitat requirements. Further information and a more detailed Training Manual are provided to farmers at training days (which are only available to members).

Conservation Grade Producers Ltd intends that the Conservation Grade Protocol becomes the leading farming and environment standard, and is based on the best practically achievable outcomes. The Conservation Grade Protocol is designed to consistently evolve over time and to embrace an increasing range of crop and livestock enterprises.

The maintenance and development of higher standards of wildlife enhancement than other farming and environment protocols defines its leading position and provides consumers with outstanding quality food together with positive wildlife benefits.

The Guild of Conservation Grade Producers was formed in 1989 to promote the production and processing of food to high standards of purity, under conditions that are benign to the environment. The Guild of Conservation Grade Producers became Conservation Grade Producers Ltd in 1993. Membership comprises of farmers and processors committed to producing food to the standards laid down in The Conservation Grade Protocol and Training Manual.

Originally the Conservation Grade Protocol stipulated the specific fertilisers, pesticides, animal medicines and other inputs that could be used by growers to meet the standards. Subsequently, the Standards and Technical Committee of The Guild (and more recently the Technical Advisory Panel) have changed the emphasis to using inputs that combine the best of modern technology with concern for wildlife and biodiversity.

In order to maintain the integrity of food products to Conservation Grade standards, certain pesticide inputs are still proscribed where they have been judged as being potentially harmful to wildlife.

All matters relating to the Conservation Grade Protocol and Training Manual are reviewed annually by the Technical Advisory Panel, the CG Agronomist and the CG Technical Advisor.

## 1.1 Definitions

**Conservation Grade Farming:** the farming standards carried out on a Conservation Grade farm which ensures that crops are grown in compliance with the requirements of the Conservation Grade Protocol.

**Conservation Grade Protocol (the Protocol):** the document which defines the standards which a farmer must implement to become an approved Conservation Grade grower and to produce Conservation Grade cereals. For farmers, all references to the Protocol also include the Training Manual. The Protocol is the document against which the Conservation Grade verification audit and the Environmental Assessment are carried out.

**Conservation Grade Cereals:** those cereals grown in compliance with the Protocol on a Conservation Grade farm.

**Conservation Grade Producers Ltd (the Company):** an independent company which owns and manages the Conservation Grade farming system.

**Conservation Grade Management:** the management team of the Company who manage the on-going activities of Conservation Grade.

**The Guild of Conservation Grade Producers (The Guild):** The Guild is the body comprised of Conservation Grade accredited farmers and is administered by the Company.

**Conservation Grade Verification Audit:** the annual independent audit for Conservation Grade accredited farmers which verifies that farmers are complying with the requirements of the Protocol

**Conservation Grade Habitat Assessment:** 20% of farmer members will be visited annually by independent trained assessors who will assess habitat area compliance and individual habitat quality.

**Farmed Area:** total farm area minus land that cannot be cropped (roads, tracks, streams, ponds, ditches, woodland, hedgerows, permanent pasture).

**Habitat Area:** the total area of wildlife habitats on the farm. All existing habitats on the farm plus those the farmer intends to create can count towards the 10% requirement as detailed in the Protocol. The farmer may use habitats that are already in other schemes as part of the habitat area required by the Protocol.

**CG Farm Environment Plan:** a record of various environmental statements, farm policies and procedures, specific to the farm.

## **2. Conservation Grade Standards**

**The Conservation Grade Protocol is designed to deliver the highest levels of on-farm wildlife and biodiversity through habitat creation and management, and is the only scheme backed by scientific proof.**

**To meet the requirements of the Conservation Grade Protocol, farmers need to satisfy the following essential criteria:**

1. Committing at least 10% of the farmed area to a range of managed wildlife habitats
2. Full membership of an approved Assured Food Standards farm assurance scheme
3. Drawing up a Farm Environment Plan
4. Participating in the training programmes provided for farmers
5. Complying with the production standards
6. Passing an annual verification of the Protocol by a Company approved verifier
7. Membership of the Guild of Conservation Grade Producers

These requirements are set out in more detail within this document and the Training Manual.

### ***2.1 Establishing Wildlife Habitats***

Wildlife conservation is core to the philosophy of Conservation Grade farming, and each farm must dedicate an area equivalent to 10% of the farmed area for the creation of a range of specific wildlife habitats. Creating a scientifically determined range of dedicated wildlife habitats on the farm will play a major part in redressing the well documented declines in farmland wildlife in the recent past.

Some of the required habitats may already exist on the farm or may be part of agri-environment schemes and, providing they meet certain standards, can count towards the 10% requirement, while others may have to be established. All habitats will require specific management in order to maintain the high quality standards necessary to comply with the Protocol.

Information about the types of habitats and how they should be managed or established can be found in Section 3. In all cases the required habitats have been designed to fit in with Environmental Stewardship Schemes (Countryside Stewardship, Entry Level and Higher Level Schemes), Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions and Statutory Management requirements. Habitats can also be created on land outside of these schemes, providing the Protocol requirements are met. Habitats that already exist on the farm can qualify if they meet the Protocol requirements.

There are also some additional requirements and options for wildlife and the wider environment, for example provision of nesting and roosting boxes.

## 2.2 Farm Assurance

Assured Food Standards (AFS) schemes afford the consumer a substantial degree of comfort on food safety and animal welfare. Full membership of an appropriate AFS scheme is a prerequisite to membership and an on-going requirement to maintain membership.

- Red Tractor Farm Assurance Combinable Crops & Sugarbeet scheme <http://assurance.redtractor.org.uk> (Formerly ACCS)
- RTA Fresh Produce Scheme <http://assurance.redtractor.org.uk> (Formerly APS)
- Genesis [www.genesisqa.com](http://www.genesisqa.com)
- Scottish Quality Crops [www.sqcrops.co.uk](http://www.sqcrops.co.uk) (Formerly Scottish Quality Cereals)
- Farm Assured British Beef & Lamb [www.its-your-choice.co.uk](http://www.its-your-choice.co.uk)
- Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance Scheme [www.nifcc.co.uk/publications](http://www.nifcc.co.uk/publications)
- GLOBAL G.A.P. [www.globalgap.org](http://www.globalgap.org)

## 2.3 The Conservation Grade Farm Environment Plan

All farms participating in Conservation Grade production are required to draw up environmental records and plans containing various environmental statements, farm policies and procedures. These records must be drawn up according to Conservation Grade guidelines as outlined below. Full details are covered during the induction training programme.

The Farm Environment Plan is a key part of the annual compliance audit carried out by NSF Certification UK Ltd (see Section 2.6).

The key elements are:

- The farm details and summary
- A farm habitat summary highlighting the total farm area, the farmed area (as defined in the Introduction) and a list of the required habitats and areas (sizes) for the farm
- A map ideally to scale 1:10,000 or larger annotating key environmental, ecological and heritage features of the farm, and the habitat locations
- The farm's animal husbandry policy (where appropriate)
- The farm's crop husbandry policy
- The farm's pollution, waste and energy management policies
- The farm's Soil Management Plan, Nutrient Management Plan, Manure Management Plan and Crop Protection Management Plan
- The farm's Mycotoxin risk assessment (where appropriate)
- Details of the food products being produced to Conservation Grade standards
- A short statement of the farmer's vision for realising the full ecological potential of the farm

These records and plans will help Conservation Grade accredited farmers enhance the efficiency of their businesses and ensure that impacts on the wider environment are minimised. In doing so, it will also demonstrate farmers' commitment to the principles of Integrated Farm Management (IFM).

## **2.4 Training and Probationary period**

In order to help farmers appreciate and adhere to the Protocol, and to develop an understanding of the wider value of this system of food production in terms of marketing, public perception and wildlife conservation, attendance at an induction training course is required as part of the approval process for new prospective Conservation Grade farmers.

As well as helping become compliant with Protocol, the training will provide information on wider issues such as agri-environment schemes and agri-politics.

The course comprises:

- An introduction to the Conservation Grade concept - the value of marketing wildlife to consumers and farming for wildlife
- A review of current and expected changes in agriculture and environmental policy
- A review of the science underpinning the Protocol
- An introduction to DEFRA's Environmental Stewardship Schemes
- The location, creation and management of wildlife habitats
- Combining policy and practice on the farm
- Compiling the Farm Environment Plan

The course carries continuing professional development (CPD) points.

The initial training will be followed up with bi-annual regional events for Conservation Grade accredited farmers to meet with Conservation Grade management and discuss relevant issues. Attendance at one regional event per year is a minimum requirement of continued membership of The Guild.

### **Probationary Period**

New farmer members have two years (i.e. 2 crop harvests) to deliver satisfactory habitats as described in the CG Protocol. This is to give the farmer time to meet the standards required. However all the crop production requirements must be followed from day one and contracts will be revoked at any time for non-compliance.

## **2.5 Production Requirements**

All approved Conservation Grade accredited farmers must also adhere to the following Production Requirements for all Conservation Grade crops:

- Only non-genetically modified products can be used in the production of any crop or livestock product on a Conservation Grade accredited farm.
- All agrochemical applications on the farm, whether by contractor or farmer, must comply with the provisions of the Voluntary Initiative ([www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk](http://www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk)).
- All operators must be NRoSO certificated (<http://nroso.nptc.org.uk/>) and all machinery must have passed an annual NSTS check ([www.nsts.org.uk](http://www.nsts.org.uk)).
- It is the responsibility of the farmer to ensure any contractors understand and comply with the Conservation Grade protocol.
- All plant protection or plant nutrition treatments must be based on a recommendation of a member of the BASIS and FACTS professional registers [www.basis-reg.com](http://www.basis-reg.com) and be legally approved for use.

Furthermore, in order to provide land for quality wildlife habitats on the farm efficient and effective production practices must be available for use on the cropped area. However, these practices must not interfere with the wildlife habitats, have a substantial detrimental effect on wildlife within the crop or pose a risk to humans.

The Protocol prohibits the use of certain agrochemicals. Although these products have statutory approval for use in conventional agriculture, the Company believes that they do not fit well with its philosophy of safety and wildlife enhancement.

## Prohibited Pesticides

The following pesticides are prohibited from use on any Conservation Grade accredited farm:

Prohibited chemical	Details	Some potential alternatives (Not an exhaustive list)
<b>Methiocarb slug pellets</b>	Methiocarb is known to have effects on non-target organisms including earthworms and predatory carabid beetles.	1. Ferric Phosphate 2. Metaldehyde. (in accordance with the Metaldehyde Best Practice Advice given by the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group. Further details available on: <a href="http://www.pelletsarepesticides.co.uk">www.pelletsarepesticides.co.uk</a> , <a href="http://www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk">www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk</a>
<b>Organo-phosphate insecticides – for crop production</b> (i.e. not including for livestock treatment)	Organophosphates are broad spectrum and have effects on non-target beneficial insect species. (Winter treatment for certain larval pests, e.g. Wheat Bulb Fly, can be permitted under derogation, *see note 1)	Thiacloprid (e.g. Biscaya) or CG approved pyrethroids (see below) can be used for cereal pest control (e.g. Wheat blossom midge).
<b>Organo-phosphate insecticides – for grain store treatment</b>	Organophosphates are not permitted for in-store grain treatment, *see note 2. (NB.Treatment of grain-stores prior to filling is permitted. * See notes 3)	K-Obiol (Deltamethrin) or Diatomaceous earth products are permitted as an in-store grain treatment.
<b>Synthetic pyrethroid insecticides</b>	Synthetic pyrethroids, with the exception of tau-fluvalinate, cannot be applied to (i) any cereal crop between 31st March and the harvest of the crop concerned, or (ii) any CG habitat (e.g. Winter Bird Food).	Taufluvalinate (e.g. Mavrik).

\*Note 1. Wheat Bulb Fly treatment in cereal crops can be permitted under derogation following a specific CG Risk Assessment.

Note 2. In certain circumstances the use of in-store treatment of grain by organo-phosphate fumigants can be permitted under a CG derogation.

Note 3. Approval for Chlorpyrifos-methyl (Reldan 22) – MAPP No.12404 expires on December 2013

## Specific Contract Restrictions relating to certain products/processors

Pesticides may be prohibited either by The Protocol or by the processor contracted to buy the Conservation Grade accredited raw material.

Conservation Grade management assesses the management practices and agrochemical products used in the production of Conservation Grade accredited crops. Any special conditions required will be fully discussed and agreed with the Company and its suppliers before production starts.

## **2.6 Annual Verification of Compliance**

Farms are assessed for compliance with the Conservation Grade standards and Protocol in two separate parts:

### **Audit for Protocol Compliance**

The cost of the audit is £130 + VAT/annum for ACCS members (£180 + VAT/annum for non-ACCS members). NSF Certification UK Ltd currently undertakes the audit and will contact growers directly to arrange the audits. NSF Certification UK Ltd will issue members a single invoice to include both the audit fee and the Guild membership fee (£65 + VAT) for payment direct to NSF.

### **Habitat Assessment**

#### **(20% of farms visited each year)**

Independent, trained assessors undertake the habitat assessments each year. Members will be required to return a pre-habitat assessment form to Conservation Grade management prior to the visit.

### **a) Audit of Protocol Compliance**

Every farm will be assessed annually for compliance with the Protocol. The assessment will largely be a farm office-based exercise and should take place at the same time as the annual verification for the relevant farm assurance scheme applicable to the individual farm.

There are two core areas that are assessed in the Conservation Grade standards:

**Farm Environment Plan** (see section 2.3). This will involve the inspection of the records & plans for the farm and the associated maps.

**Production Requirements** (see section 2.5). This will involve checking agrochemical and spraying records and related issues, for example ensuring that recommendations for agrochemicals come from a BASIS registered advisor.

An audit checklist is maintained as a separate document (called The Conservation Grade Standards) and is provided to all new members at their Induction Training course. The checklist details the audit questions and the actions required by each member, including provision of appropriate documentation and evidence to satisfy the auditor that compliance has been achieved.

### **Breaches:**

Each question in the Audit is assigned either a 'recommended', 'minor', or a 'Critical Failure Point' (CFP). Failure to meet the requirements for a given question will result in a breach. The status of the breach is determined by the status of the question.

Minor breaches should be rectified within 28 days. (Excessive numbers of these, or repeats of the same breach, may result in suspension).

A Critical Failure Point (CFP) breach will result in immediate suspension of the farm.

There are two noteworthy areas that can result in immediate CFP breaches:

1. Failure to hold current full membership of an appropriate assurance scheme

2. The application of any banned pesticides to crops contracted to the relevant CG Licensees (see Section 2.5 Production Requirements).

**Farmers who are suspended will not be able to fulfil existing contract obligations and will not be eligible for at least two years. And then only after satisfying the auditing authority that the critical breaches have been remedied.**

Farmers will be given feedback relating to their performance by the auditor on the day and will be left with a list of any non-conformity identified.

Farmers with one or two major breaches will be contacted by Conservation Grade management within 7 working days to discuss ways in which the breaches can be resolved.

Farmers with Critical Failure Point breaches, and who are recommended for suspension, will be contacted by Conservation Grade management within 3 working days.

Any farmers concerned about any aspects of the audit should contact a member of Conservation Grade management or of the NSF Certification UK Ltd audit team (see Appendix 2 for contact details).

### **b) Habitat Assessment**

Regular Habitat Assessments will be carried out on every Conservation Grade accredited farm. This assessment will look at the quality of the wildlife habitats established and the impact on wildlife from these habitats. The habitat assessments will be carried out by independent assessors.

The assessors will visit the farms with prior notification and will randomly assess the habitats.

They will also provide any on farm environmental assistance that may be needed. A copy of the assessment report will be sent to the farmer and a copy also filed by Conservation Grade management. The documentation for habitat assessments is maintained separately and sent to farmers in advance of their assessment.

Feedback on the findings will be given to the farmer before the auditor leaves, and any significant issues will be taken up by Conservation Grade management. The habitat assessment forms are maintained and issued separately from the Protocol.

## **2.7 Membership of the Guild of Conservation Grade Producers**

All participating farmers must be members of the Guild of Conservation Grade Producers. There is an annual membership fee for farmers (£65+VAT), whilst processors pay a licence fee and/or royalty on any product carrying the Conservation Grade logo.

# 3 Habitats

## 3.1 Introduction

Many wildlife species associated with farmland have declined in recent years. The Protocol is designed to ensure that every Conservation Grade accredited farmer addresses this issue by creating a wide range of high quality wildlife habitats on their farm. The designated habitats have been carefully selected based on a broad range of research and practical experience and can deliver significant increases in a range of farmland wildlife species.

Every Conservation Grade accredited farmer has to designate a minimum of 10% of their farmed area to a range of managed wildlife habitats. Farmed Area is defined as total farm area minus land that cannot be cropped (roads, tracks, streams, ponds, ditches, woodland, hedgerows, permanent pasture).

Any of the required habitats that are already in existence on the farm (for example under Environmental Stewardship) and which reach the required quality can count towards the habitat requirements, which are listed here for arable farms:

<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>% Farmed Area</b>
Pollen & nectar mixes	4.0
Wild bird food crops	2.0 ( <i>or 1.5 if ACNR adopted</i> )
Tussock & fine grass mixtures	2.0
Annually cultivated natural regeneration (ACNR)	0.5 ( <i>or 0 if not appropriate</i> )
Other habitats	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.0</b>

Note 1: 'Other habitats' can include habitats already in existence on the farm such as woodland, hedgerows, water courses, ponds.

Note 2: Where annually cultivated natural regeneration is not appropriate (e.g. grassland only farms or farms where noxious weeds would dominate) there is no requirement for 'annually cultivated natural regeneration', in which case the 'wild bird food crops' requirement raises to 2.0%

The provision of these habitats is the key aspect of the Protocol. However, in addition to these habitats there are some additional management actions covering wildlife, existing farm features and wider environmental issues that are required in order to comply with the Protocol:

- Hedgerow management
- Protection of water and waterside habitats
- Wildlife nesting and roosting habitats

**In certain circumstances where farmers have specific nationally important habitats (for example in Sites of Special Scientific Interest) which do not qualify under the habitat Protocol, or have nationally important species (Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species) which require specific management actions, they should contact Conservation Grade management to discuss the opportunity to amend the Protocol for their farm to include these areas.**

Detailed guidance on the management of the Protocol requirements can be found in the **Conservation Grade Training Manual**.

### **3.2 Linkage with Environmental Stewardship and Other Schemes**

The Protocol has been designed to fit in with other Environmental Stewardship options, e.g. CSS, Entry Level & Higher Level Schemes (ELS/HLS). When entering CG habitats under an ES scheme, habitat management should follow the ES scheme's requirements wherever possible.

The Protocol is aimed at providing the best habitats and is not automatically compliant with any particular scheme; for example, selective graminicides may be used on certain habitats under the Protocol but not routinely under the ELS options. It is important to remember that the **quality** of the habitats is assessed under the Protocol (which is not the case under ELS) and the grower must determine whether management requirements under some ELS options are limiting or not, in establishing the habitat quality required under the Protocol on each site.

Important differences between ELS options and the Protocol are noted in the Training Manual. However it is the responsibility of farmer to check the rules of the various schemes to ensure compliance. Where there are differences between meeting the habitat requirements under the Protocol and scheme requirements, farmers are strongly advised to speak to their RDS officer and seek derogation, if necessary.

### **3.3 Pollen & Nectar Sources**

Research has shown that modern farmland is deficient in sources of pollen and nectar. Pollen and nectar are vital to support a range of invertebrates, such as butterflies, bumblebees and honey bees which in turn provide a core building block in the wildlife food chain.

Two pollen and nectar habitats should normally be provided: 1) grass and wildflower mixtures and 2) grass and legume mixtures (although research has shown that the addition of grass in the legume mix can be detrimental to legume survival).

Existing pollen and nectar habitats (i.e. naturally occurring or sown) can count towards the total habitat area. The sites should contain a mixture of appropriate native grasses and wildflowers. The minimum flower density for existing habitats is defined in the Training Manual. Pernicious weeds (e.g. creeping and spear thistle, curled and broadleaved dock and ragwort) do not count as flowering plants.

#### **a) Grass and wildflowers**



The target species are butterflies, bumblebees, honey bees, hoverflies, spiders and beetles.

Grass and wildflower habitats must take up a minimum of 1.5% out of the 4% pollen and nectar area. Existing herb-rich grassland (e.g. hay meadows, species rich grassland, water meadows, lowland heath, etc.) are key pollinator habitats and therefore qualify under the Conservation Grade protocol. Otherwise these habitats need to be created, either by floristically



enhancing existing grass (e.g. semi-improved grassland) or sowing specific new areas with an appropriate perennial wildflower mix. These can be in blocks or linear strips. Suitable example mixtures are shown in the Training Manual. When creating these habitats, species chosen should reflect the conditions in the area to be sown.

Only UK native seeds should be used and where possible they should be of local origin. Grass and wildflower habitats should ideally be sown on south sides of hedges and field corners.

Newly established or existing grass and wildflower habitats will require cutting or grazing in the autumn (occasionally cutting or grazing may be required in the spring). Where habitats are cut the cuttings should always be removed.

### **b) Legume mixes**



The target species are butterflies, bumblebees and honey bees.

These habitats should be a maximum of up to 2.5% of farmed area. Areas can be in blocks or linear strips. Suitable example mixtures are shown in the Training Manual. Legume habitats (+/- grass) should ideally be sown on south sides of hedges and field corners.

Newly established or existing grass and wildflower habitats will require cutting or grazing in the autumn (occasionally cutting or grazing may be required in the spring). Where habitats are cut the cuttings should always be removed.

## **3.4 Wild Bird Food**



The decline of farmland birds has been well documented over the past 20 years.

Loss of food sources is a key factor in that decline. Most farmland bird species tend to rely on seeds to feed on in the winter and invertebrates during the summer. Invertebrate food sources will be provided by other habitats in the Protocol. Wild bird food crops aim to provide a source of seeds during the winter months. However, food sources from wild bird feed crops (and winter stubble) tend to run out in the late winter and early spring.

Therefore, it is also important to supplement food sources by spreading additional grains, like tail corn and oilseeds.

### a) Wild bird food crops



The target species are farmland birds such as Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer, Linnet, Grey Partridge and Corn Bunting.

Wild bird food crops must take up 2.0% of the farmed area (or 1.5% if Annually Cultivated Natural Regeneration is adopted as a habitat). Areas should ideally be spread around the farm and be a minimum of 6m wide.

Suitable example mixtures are shown in the Training Manual. At least three seed bearing crops should be used. Seed rate and ratio will depend upon the species selected. Either annual or biennial mixtures can be sown. Wild bird food crops should ideally be sited adjacent to established hedgerows or woodland areas.

### b) Supplementary feeding



The target species are farmland birds such as Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer, Grey Partridge and Corn Bunting. Feed sources could be tail corn, screenings and sweepings, ideally containing wheat, linseed, and oilseed rape.

Feeding should take place at least once a week between November and end April. (Note that current stewardship options EF23 & HF24 do not permit the use of 'Tailings' and only cover the period 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> March).

The build-up of food should be avoided to minimise disease and the build-up of vermin. Feed should ideally be spread on tracks adjacent to woodland or hedgerow cover. Hopper feeding is unsuitable for small songbirds.

## 3.5 Tussocky and/or Fine Grass Mixtures



There are two different grass habitats:

- 1) Tussocky Grass Habitat – A mixture of grass species dominated by those that form tussocks. This is suitable for some ground nesting birds, small mammals and over-wintering invertebrates.
- 2) Fine Grass Habitat – A mixture of fine leaved grasses that do not form tussocks. This is suitable for flower recolonisation, small mammals and invertebrates.

These Perennial grass margins also provide a corridor for connecting up wildlife habitats around the farm. They can also provide an effective barrier to annual weeds moving from field boundaries into the field, and can protect sensitive habitats such as streams and

hedgerows from agricultural inputs or management practices. Many farms are likely to have these habitats existing already.

The target species are over-wintering invertebrates, nesting birds (such as Yellowhammer and Grey Partridge) and small mammals, spiders and beetles. Tussock and/or fine grass habitats must take up 2.0% of the farmed area. At least 0.5% of the 2% must be of tussock grass mixtures. The habitats can be in linear strips/margins (from 2m wide by 100m in length), tree islands and beetle banks.



Suitable example mixtures are shown in the Training Manual. Newly established or existing established tussock grass habitats require cutting every 4-5 years to prevent scrub encroachment. Newly established or existing fine grass areas can be cut and/or grazed from autumn through to spring. Where cutting, removal of the cuttings is preferred.

### **3.6 Natural Regeneration**

***(Not applicable to grassland only farms or farms where noxious weeds would dominate, or where no rare arable annual plants exist)***

The provision of natural regeneration is aimed at the maintenance of populations of rare annual arable flora. Such species are amongst the rarest plants in the UK. Areas of natural regeneration are also important habitats for many invertebrates and birds.



The target species are annual flowering plants, bumblebees and ground beetles.

Annual plants of national and local rarity should be a priority such as Corn Marigold, Prickly Poppy, Corn Buttercup and Shepherd's Needle.

Natural regeneration habitats should take up a minimum of 0.5% of the farmed area. Areas should be a minimum of 6m wide.

The best areas for natural regeneration habitats are likely to be where soils are light and low in fertility. Field edges and corners are ideally suited for this habitat.

Cultivation timing should vary between autumn and spring to provide the Maximum opportunity for the widest range of plant species. Cultivations should take place outside the bird nesting season (1 March - 31 July). Crop plants may be drilled into areas for natural regeneration but they must not be fertilised or sprayed.

Where deemed appropriate some wild annual seeds may be added to the natural regeneration areas

### 3.7 Other Habitats

The more habitats there are on a farm, the greater the wildlife diversity and numbers. This part of the Protocol is aimed at creating a wider range of habitats including wetlands and ponds, hedgerows and broadleaf (or mixed) woodland. Growers who do not already have any of these features on their holding should select at least two of the habitats.



These habitats provide an opportunity for a wide range of species. They must take up an area equivalent to at least 2.0% of the farmed area. Siting of these habitats will vary according to types chosen. Habitat management should follow guidelines in the relevant Environmental Stewardship Scheme. If undertaken outside a scheme, please consult Conservation Grade for advice.

### 3.8 Additional Habitat Management Requirements for Wildlife and the Wider Environment

#### a) Hedgerows

The management of hedgerows and other field boundaries is an essential part of Conservation Grade production. Hedges provide food, shelter and nesting opportunities for a range of birds and insects. Trees grow on year one wood, fruit on year two whereas older, gnarled wood provides opportunities for many insects.

#### b) All ditches, water courses and water bodies, and protection of water



The need to protect water bodies from agricultural inputs is a high priority. The protection of water bodies refers to anything designed to hold water (streams, ditches, lakes and rivers). "Dry" ditches also need protection.

A buffer strip no less than 5m wide between the top of the ditch bank and the crop, or the water's edge and the crop in the case of lakes, must be created.

#### c) Skylark plots (arable and mixed farms only)



These are open patches created in winter cereal crops to provide nesting habitats for skylark.

Up to 5 plots/100 ha are desirable per farm. They should be located in open fields bigger than 5 ha away from field boundaries and tramlines.

The plots are managed as per the rest of the field

### 3.9 Desirable Optional extras

The following nesting and roosting features are good for other types of wildlife and should be considered where appropriate.

#### a) Artificial nesting and roosting sites

For many farmland species the provision of artificial nesting and roosting sites is an important factor in population recovery. The section below provides an outline of the requirements and options.

##### Bird boxes



10 bird boxes are desirable. Boxes can be made on the farm; however local councils and wildlife organisations (FWAG, RSPB, bird watching groups) may be able to provide boxes especially if rarer species, such as tree sparrow, are involved. For designs and materials see RSPB leaflet – Nest boxes for small garden birds.

Boxes should be located on mature trees and buildings facing between north and east at between 2m and 5m high depending on the type of box. They should be in easily accessible places as they will need some annual maintenance.

##### Bee Hives

Natural bumble bee populations will be encouraged to feed and nest through the creation of the Pollen & Nectar and Tussocky grass habitats within the protocol. Honey bee populations will also benefit, but hives will need to be sited on the farm. These can be newly created or brought to farms by local bee-keepers.



Sites should be sheltered from the wind and the hottest sun but open to air movements. Thick hedges or shrubs give good wind shelter and also encourage bees to quickly fly upward and over the heads of passers-by. Hives should not be put in places that flood, or fill with snow or are frost pockets. The beekeeper needs to have relatively easy access to the apiary site

##### Barn Owl Boxes



Where barn owls are known to exist, barn owl boxes can count towards the overall bird box requirement. Boxes can be located in undisturbed areas on poles, trees and barns. For further information on designs, materials and locating barn owl boxes contact Conservation Grade management.

It is illegal to disturb a barn owl nesting site without a licence.

## Bat Roosting Boxes



Where there are few other roosting sites on a farm bat boxes can be useful. Boxes can be made on the farm; however local councils, local bat groups and wildlife organisations may be able to provide boxes. For designs and materials see RSPB leaflet – Make a bat box.

Boxes should ideally be located on mature trees (but buildings are also suitable) at woodland edges, in woodland glades or near ponds, rivers and sheltered hedgerows.

There should be three boxes per tree facing north, south-east and south-west. Make sure there are no branches near in order to create an easy flight path into the box. They should be placed as high as practicable.

The boxes need no management. (Note: It is illegal to disturb a bat roost.)

## Conservation Grade Protocol – Acknowledgements

The current Protocol is the result of work carried out by many committed and knowledgeable people. It is an aggregation of expertise and best practice from agronomy, farming policy and economics, biodiversity, environmental sustainability, wildlife and wild flowers, and many more.

Originally the Conservation Grade Protocol stipulated the specific fertilisers, pesticides, animal medicines and other inputs that could be used on Conservation Grade farms. Subsequently, the Conservation Grade Standards and Technical Committee changed the emphasis to using inputs that combine the best of modern technology with concern for the environment and biodiversity. Consequently, there is now no set list of permitted inputs but in order to maintain the integrity of Conservation Grade accredited foods, certain inputs are still proscribed. All matters relating to the Protocol are reviewed regularly.

In response to a series of food, health and environmental issues, numerous assurance schemes have been introduced in recent years, notably the Assured Food Standard (i.e. the Red Tractor scheme). However, many of these schemes have failed to address the very real concerns consumers have about the wellbeing of wildlife and the wider environment.

Although addressing such issues has always been the particular focus of Conservation Grade, in late 2003 a comprehensive review of the Protocol was carried out together with an assessment of their position in the market - a market place that has changed radically since 1989. As a consequence the Protocol has been revised to concentrate further on answering consumers' growing concerns on the environmental provenance of the home-grown food they are eating and hence the development of the concept of *Nature Friendly Farming*.

## **Appendix 1 - Key Contacts**

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