

Case Study 2025/2026



Department of  
**Finance**  
An Roinn  
**Airgeadais**

## **DAERA - CAFRE - HORTICULTURE PILOT SCHEME**

**Human Rights and Modern Slavery**

## **PPN 01/21 – Social Value**

## **PPN 05/21 – Human Rights in Public Procurement**

**Project Title: ID 6020932 DAERA - CAFRE - HORTICULTURE PILOT SCHEME**

### **Project Overview**

The Horticulture Pilot Scheme, which aims to support the long-term development and sustainability of the production horticulture industry in Northern Ireland, is a key component of DAERA's Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP).

Having developed the Scheme, the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), sought to appoint a supplier to administer and deliver the professional support elements.

CAFRE, a Division within DAERA, is Northern Ireland's leading provider of education and knowledge transfer for the agri-food and land-based sectors. Through this contract, CAFRE will manage the delivery of the three strands of the Horticulture Pilot Scheme, which include:

1. Sustainable Sector Growth Groups Pilot Scheme
2. Horticulture Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme
3. Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme

These interlinked schemes are available to production horticulture growers and businesses, supporting cooperation, investment in innovation and skills development.

The appointed supplier is required to provide technical horticulture expertise, alongside business, financial and supply chain support. The contract is for an initial period of approximately four years, subject to ongoing review and annual evaluation.

### **Procurement Approach**

The procurement, with an estimated maximum value of £5,024,000, was undertaken using an above-threshold Open Procedure in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023.

Some months prior to the procurement, a Preliminary Market Engagement (PME) exercise was conducted to:

- Assess market capability
- Inform procurement design
- Support competition and supplier readiness

This ensured a proportionate and robust procurement strategy aligned with the complexity of the requirement.

## Project Significance and Innovation

This project represents a first-of-its-kind intervention for the Northern Ireland horticulture sector and is strategically aligned with DAERA's sustainability and agri-food objectives.

Key innovative aspects include:

- Integration of three pilot schemes within a single contract structure
- Delivery of cross-disciplinary expertise combining technical, commercial, and supply chain support
- Creation of a scalable model for future sectoral interventions
- Embedding of social value and ethical procurement practices, particularly in relation to human rights

Notably, the project demonstrates how public procurement can act as a policy delivery mechanism, extending beyond service delivery to influence sector-wide behaviours and standards.

## Policies and benefits included in the contract awarded 2025/2026

- **Social Value Integration**

Meeting the requirements of [Procurement Policy Note \(PPN\) 01/21](#) Social Value was included as a scored element within the tender evaluation, with a weighting of 10.5%.

This focused on:

- (Indicator 2.4) Support entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship, including helping new and small organisations to grow.

This approach ensures the contract delivers not only technical outcomes but also contributes to broader economic and social development.

- **Modern Slavery mitigation**

A key innovation within this procurement was the proactive integration of modern slavery awareness and human rights considerations, in alignment with [PPN 05/21 – Human Rights in Public Procurement](#).

Beyond standard compliance measures, Supply and Services Division, CAFRE, and Strategic Investment Board Social Value collaboratively developed a bespoke contractual requirement to address modern slavery risks through awareness and education.

### **Contractual Requirement: Modern Slavery Awareness Initiatives**

The contract includes a requirement for the supplier to deliver annual Modern Slavery Training Awareness Initiatives, which:

- Target supplier personnel, programme participants, CAFRE students, and other agreed groups;
- Provide education on recognising, preventing and responding to modern slavery, forced labour and labour exploitation; and,

- May be delivered through in-person or online sessions in partnership with relevant expert organisations.

This approach moves beyond passive compliance to active risk mitigation and capacity building, embedding awareness across the agri-food and education sectors.

## **Alignment with Procurement Policy**

The project directly supports:

- [PPN 05/21 – Human Rights in Public Procurement](#)
- [Public Procurement Policy Statement](#)
- Wider objectives relating to:
  - Ethical supply chains
  - Social responsibility
  - Sustainable economic development

## **Outcome and Benefits**

The contract was awarded in February 2026 to commence on 23 March 2026.

While final expenditure will depend on programme uptake, the contract value will not exceed £5,024,000.

### **Key benefits**

- Establishes a sustainable support framework for the horticulture sector;
- Enhances innovation, skills development, and supply chain resilience;
- Promotes inclusive economic growth through social value measures;
- Embeds modern slavery awareness across a broad stakeholder base; and,
- Demonstrates a replicable model for integrating human rights considerations into public procurement

## **Conclusion**

This project exemplifies how procurement can deliver broader societal impact, particularly in advancing human rights awareness and mitigating modern slavery risks.

By embedding training and awareness as a contractual obligation, the initiative extends its influence beyond service delivery, fostering a culture of ethical responsibility and informed practice across the agri-food and education sector.