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### **Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme update**

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#### **Progress to date**

The Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme has been open since 17 December 2003. Funding of £2 million is available to finance the scheme. At the end of June 45 applications had been received and approvals have been issued relating to approximately £1 million of funding to applicants. Farmers from a wide range of enterprises and farm size have availed of the scheme so far.

#### **Timescale**

If you are planning to make an application for funding you need to act quickly. Approved work must be completed in sufficient time to allow prior payment inspection, claim and payment processing by 31 March 2005, the final funding date.

#### **Making an Application**

The scheme can support the conversion, construction and replacement of livestock buildings to meet organic housing standards. It can also fund storage for farmyard manure and bedding materials. Professional fees from, for example, architects and engineers can be funded.

Explanatory booklets and application forms are available from DARD Environmental Policy Branch, Room 651, Dundonald House, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, BT4 3SB.

You may wish to discuss your plans with an organic adviser. It is best to draw up specifications for the work to be done prior to seeking quotations. Quotations for the work need to be obtained, ensuring that all of the providers are quoting for the same work – hence the need to provide them with specifications. The number of quotations will depend on the cost of the project. The application form should be completed accurately and sent to DARD along with all the necessary documentation.

#### **What happens next?**

The proposed works will be assessed to make sure they meet the Scheme requirements. An on-farm inspection may be carried out. When any outstanding queries have been resolved a letter of approval will be issued. Work must not commence prior to receipt of the letter of approval.

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## Greenmount Organic Unit Open Day

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The Greenmount Organic Unit in Antrim will be open to visitors on the afternoon and evening of Thursday 29th July. Tours will commence between 1-4pm and 6-7:30 pm

The 36 ha Unit consists of a mixed farm incorporating red and white clover swards, Angus x Limousin suckler beef herd, Lleyn sheep flock, along with arable and legume crops. The purpose built organic beef house will be on view, and a number of trade and advisory exhibits will also be on site.

We hope you will plan to attend and bring others with you.

For further information ring Adrian Saunders on 028 9442 6765

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## Botulism warning

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### Cause of botulism

Contamination of **broiler** litter (not litter from egg laying hens) with whole and fragmented carcasses of chickens can render litter dangerous for cattle. Cattle of all ages are susceptible to botulism, characterised by a progressive muscle weakness or paralysis. Affected animals may be weak, stagger about, or go down. In most cases the disease is fatal.

### Control of Botulism in Cattle

Careful disposal of all animal or bird carcasses and poultry litter is essential to minimise the risk of botulism to cattle. Poultry carcasses should be promptly removed from chicken houses and disposed of by incineration, or rendering as required by EU Regulation No. 1774/2002.

Following removal of the broiler crop, all poultry house doors should be kept closed until the litter is removed. The litter should be loaded directly onto spreading equipment, covered vehicles or immediately stacked and covered. Washings from poultry houses and yards should be collected in tanks.

Poultry litter should not be spread on agricultural land that is to be grazed, or from which silage or hay is to be harvested, in the same year. Litter should be deep-ploughed into arable ground. If this is not an option and litter must be disposed off by spreading on pasture, cattle should not have access to the treated fields for at least several months. Any carcasses, or portions of carcasses, on pasture should be promptly removed. However, there is no guarantee that the treated fields would then be safe for cattle.

### Vaccination

No vaccine is available under general licence in the UK for the protection of cattle against botulism.

### Public Health

The risk to humans from cases of botulism in cattle appears remote. Further information and advice may be obtained from DARD Veterinary Laboratories at Stormont (tel: 028 9052 5701) or Omagh (tel: 028 8224 3337).

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## Organic Farming Scheme reminder

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The DARD Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) is very much alive and well, and open for applications.

New organic farmers who have recently entered their farms into conversion should remember that applications for the OFS **must** be received by DARD within **six** months of receipt of their first organic certificate.

Existing organic producers should also remember that they are also eligible to apply for the OFS for any new land they start into organic conversion. All of your organically farmed land, both existing and more recently converted, must remain in organic production for at least 5 years from the date the last land enters an OFS agreement.