We will now be publishing the newsletter on a monthly basis rather than every other month. Please contact us with any feedback or suggestions on topics you would like to see in future editions.

If you do not already receive the Farming Advice Service (FAS) newsletter straight to your inbox, but would like to, please email bookings@farmingadviseservice.org.uk with ‘Register for newsletter’ in the subject line. Your details will not be shared with any third parties.

Contact us

FAS technical advice line: 03000 200 301
advice@farmingadviseservice.org.uk
www.gov.uk/government/groups/farming-advice-service

Key dates
How can FAS help you?
Coronavirus: information for farmers, landowners and rural businesses
What is meant by catch crops and cover crops?
Don’t forget, restrictions on tree and hedge-cutting rules are in place until September
Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) – reminders
Protecting soils post-harvest
Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) simplification from 2021
Animal welfare reminders – welfare of calves
Bovine TB
Agriculture Bill 2020 reaches report stage
Water abstraction reminders
Sign up to FAS services

July 2020 – Issue 53
Key dates

Below are details of forthcoming key dates that you should be aware of.

1 August

If you have been granted a derogation by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), you may be able to cut or trim hedges throughout August for the purposes of sowing oilseed rape or temporary grassland during the same August. (GAEC* 7a)

1 August

For any land located in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ), this is the start of the closed period for applying organic manure with a high, readily available nitrogen content (for example, slurry, poultry manures or liquid digested sewage sludge) to tillage land on shallow or sandy soils except where crops will be sown on or before 15 September. (SMR** 1)

20 August

Ecological Focus Area (EFA) catch crops must be established by this date (and retained until 14 October). (BPS*** 2020)

---

* GAEC = Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition
** SMR = Statutory Management Requirement
***BPS = Basic Payment Scheme

---

FAS has produced a handy, printable, one-page poster of all the cross compliance and greening dates for 2020, which you can access and download from here.

---

For more details about the information provided in the key dates table, please visit the Guide to cross compliance in England 2020 and Basic Payment Scheme: rules for 2020 pages of GOV.UK.
How can FAS help you?

Free and confidential advice
England’s domestic farming legislation and EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) regulations require an advisory system that covers cross compliance, greening, water protection and aspects of pesticide use. In England, this is provided by the Farming Advice Service (FAS). Under these regulations, the advice given to individual farmers must be confidential – that is, FAS must not disclose any personal or individual information, or data it obtains during its advisory activities.

FAS updates the farming sector on relevant EU policies, and policies for England from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). It explains the requirements and objectives of domestic national legislation and policy, CAP, and EU directives, and the actions that can be taken to help meet compliance. FAS provides free, confidential advice on cross compliance and the greening requirements, some aspects of the Water Framework Directive (such as silage, slurry and agricultural fuel oil (SSAFO), and waste exemptions) and the Sustainable Use (of pesticides) Directive.

The cross compliance rules apply to you if you are a Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Countryside Stewardship or Environmental Stewardship claimant.

Getting in contact with the advice line
Farmers requiring telephone advice from FAS can contact the Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301 Monday to Friday between 08:30 and 17:00. In light of the current situation, please be assured that our helpline will be operating as normal and we will continue to support farmers.

The Rural Services Helpline provides a single number for all FAS, Rural Payments Agency, Animal and Plant Health Agency, Natural England and forestry enquiries. By providing a single point of contact, the Government aims to make it simpler for farmers to access technical guidance on a range of topics, including cross compliance, greening, CAP payments and animal health inspections.

You can also email enquiries to advice@farmingadviceservice.org.uk
Coronavirus: information for farmers, landowners and rural businesses

The Government has issued updated guidance for working safely outdoors during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which is available on GOV.UK. It is important that 2 metres social distancing is maintained wherever possible or 1-metre-plus precautions are observed – including when arriving at and departing from work, while in work and when travelling between sites. Where social distancing cannot be maintained, it is important to consider whether the activity is business critical and, if so, to take mitigating actions to reduce the risk of transmission between staff.

Mitigating actions include:
• increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning;
• keeping the activity time as short as possible;
• using screens or barriers to separate people;
• using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible;
• reducing the number of people each person comes into contact with by using fixed teams or partnering.

To help with briefing new workers who come to England to pick fruit and vegetables on farms, the guidance on border arrangements for seasonal agricultural workers is available on GOV.UK in several languages.

The NHS Test and Trace service was launched in England in June. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and given clear information explaining what they must do. Please visit GOV.UK for more information.

Recent updates for farmers, landowners and rural businesses

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has a dedicated page for COVID-19 on GOV.UK where updates are posted for farmers, landowners and rural businesses. It is important to check this page regularly.

Below is a summary of some of the recent updates:
• The Dairy Response Fund 2020 is now open. The new funding will help support dairy farmers who have seen decreased demand for their products as bars, restaurants and cafes have had to close. Please visit GOV.UK to access the handbook and application form.
• Farm visits and inspections. Inspection visits to farms and food processing plants have now resumed. Inspectors will follow current Government advice, adhering to social distancing rules at all times. They will contact customers before a visit to explain arrangements and find out if there are any issues, such as vulnerability, they should be aware of. Please visit GOV.UK for more information.

Please read the June FAS newsletter for more information on updates as a result of COVID-19.

Please sign up here to receive email alerts when information changes on the RPA pages.
If you have more than 15ha of arable land, it is likely that you are required to have an Ecological Focus Area (EFA). EFAs are areas and features that are beneficial for the climate and the environment. If your farm needs an EFA, the areas and features used must be equivalent to at least 5% of the total arable land (even if you are not declaring it on your Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application). Page 42 of the Basic Payment Scheme: rules for 2020 guidance provides a list of the areas and features that can count as an EFA.

One of the options is to establish catch crops and/or cover crops. These are designed to protect the soil and use available nutrients between harvest and sowing:
- catch crops are quick-growing crops that are planted between two regular crops grown in consecutive seasons or between two rows of regular crops in the same season;
- cover crops are planted between main crops to prevent leaching or soil erosion, or to provide green manure.

Under EFA rules, catch crops or cover crops must consist of a mix of at least two different cover types that establish quickly, achieve ground cover and will use available nutrients. Farmers can use any percentage of a sown mix, as long as there is a visible mix of at least two different crops from the list below (minimum of one cereal and one non-cereal):
- cereal: rye, barley and oats;
- non-cereal: vetch, phacelia, mustard, lucerne and oilseed radish.

To count as an EFA in 2020, catch crops must be established by 20 August 2020 and be retained until at least 14 October 2020.

To count as an EFA in 2020, cover crops must be established by 1 October 2020 and be retained until at least 15 January 2021.

For more information on catch crops and cover crops, please refer to the Basic Payment Scheme: rules for 2020. If you have any questions or require further support, please contact the FAS helpline by telephone 03000 200 301 or email advice@farmingadviceservice.org.uk.
The closed period that places a ban on cutting and trimming hedges and trees between 1 March and 31 August (inclusive) is a cross compliance requirement under Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) 7a: Boundaries and GAEC 7c: Trees. If you are a Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) applicant, have a Countryside Stewardship or Environmental Stewardship agreement (starting 1 January 2007 or later), or claim the Woodland Management Grant and/or Farm Woodland Premium elements of English Woodland Grant Scheme, then you must adhere to these requirements across your whole holding, which may include woodland, or you could receive a reduction in your payments.

You can apply to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) in writing for a derogation to cut or trim a hedgerow or a tree in a hedgerow during the month of August for the purposes of sowing oil seed rape or temporary grassland during the same August. If you are applying for this derogation you are encouraged to submit this as early as possible.

You should wait for written permission from the RPA before carrying out any work. The RPA can be contacted by email (ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk). Please ensure the subject line includes your Single Business Identifier (SBI) and states ‘Cross compliance 2020 derogation’ to ensure it is directed to the correct team. Please be aware that a derogation to cut a tree within a hedgerow would need to be considered under:

- **GAEC 7c: Trees** – with respect to the tree itself;
- **GAEC 7a: Boundaries** – with respect to the hedgerow that the tree is a part of.

If you would like free and confidential advice on hedge and tree cutting and trimming rules from an independent adviser, please contact the FAS helpline by telephone (03000 200 301) or email (advice@farmingadviceservice.org.uk).

Don’t forget, restrictions on tree and hedge-cutting rules are in place until September.
NVZ: Back to basics

FAS has produced a technical article called 'NVZ: Back to basics'. This provides a simple guide to the NVZ requirements, including the rules for applying organic and manufactured fertiliser, the forthcoming closed periods and storage of organic manure. The article can be downloaded for free from the FAS website. If you are claiming Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) payments and any of your land is in an NVZ, you must comply with the requirements or your payments could be reduced. You can also find detailed guidance on GOV.UK.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ) – reminders

If you have any questions or require further support, please contact the FAS helpline by telephone (03000 200 301) or email (advice@farmingadviseservice.org.uk).
Protecting soils post-harvest

The cross compliance Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) requirements for soils focus on the condition of the land and this is what the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) will consider during an inspection.

One method of reducing compaction and soil erosion, as detailed in GAEC 5: Minimising soil erosion, is to select the correct post-harvest options. This is to ensure that land is left in a state where erosion is unlikely.

Choosing the correct post-harvest management technique involves taking into consideration the weather, soil type and topography; the crop that has been harvested; and the next crop to be sown. Hot, dry conditions can cause soils to cap during harvest and when being cultivated. This can exacerbate runoff, especially if rainfall is heavy. To minimise the risk of significant runoff, care must be taken when deciding what and where to sow.

Before cultivating and drilling, make sure that any topsoil and subsoil compaction is removed. Firstly, dig several soil pits across a field to determine the depth of compaction. Then, set up the appropriate machinery (such as a subsoiler) to just below the pan to remove the layer of compaction. Please ensure that soil is sufficiently dry to enable effective subsoiling. By identifying the correct depth of compaction, savings can be made on fuel use, machinery parts, labour costs and time by not cultivating deeper than necessary.

Planting a winter crop or cover crop by early autumn will help to:
• enhance soil organic matter levels;
• comply with GAEC 4: Providing minimum soil cover and the farming rules for water;
• improve workability;
• retain moisture and nutrient levels for further crop development needs;
• provide valuable soil protection from winter rains;
• prevent soil loss if sown by early October.

For more information on the cross-compliance soil management requirements, please refer to the Guide to cross compliance in England 2020.

If you have any questions or require further support, please contact the FAS helpline by telephone (03000 200 301) or email (advice@farmingadviceservice.org.uk).

Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) simplification from 2021

Farmers in England are set to benefit from a reduced administrative burden next year because the Government plans to end the need for farmers to comply with the EU-delivered greening requirements. This simplification will take effect from the 2021 BPS scheme year. For more information, please go to GOV.UK.
In addition to the requirements under SMR 13, some of the requirements for keeping and caring for calves (bovines up to 6 months old) are listed below. The full list can be found on GOV.UK.

- Inspect all housed calves at least twice a day and those kept outside at least once a day to check their wellbeing. Any calf that appears to be ill or injured must be cared for appropriately without delay. Veterinary advice must be obtained as soon as possible for any calf that is not responding to the stockkeeper’s care. Where necessary, sick or injured calves must be isolated in adequate accommodation with dry, comfortable bedding.
- Ensure that the accommodation for calves is constructed in such a way that they can stand up, turn around, lie down, rest and groom themselves without difficulty. Accommodation should be appropriately insulated, heated and ventilated. If calves are kept in groups, ensure each one has its own minimum allowance of free floor space.
- Ensure that feeding and watering equipment is designed, constructed, placed and maintained so that contamination of the calves’ feed and water is minimised. Weaned calves must be fed at least twice a day and each calf over 2 weeks old must be provided with the minimum daily ration of fibrous food.
- Where calves are being kept in individual stalls or pens these must: - meet the minimum width requirements (at least equal to the height of the calf at the withers when measured in the standing position); - meet the minimum length requirements (at least equal to the body length of the calf, measured from the tip of the nose to the rear of the pin bone (tuber ischii) multiplied by 1.1); - have perforated walls that allow the calves to see and have physical contact with one another (this does not apply to sick animals being isolated).
- Keep all housed calves on or give them access at all times to a clean, comfortable, adequately drained lying area. Ensure all calves less than 2 weeks old have suitable bedding.
- Make sure that each calf gets bovine colostrum as soon as possible after it’s born and in any case within the first 6 hours of life.

When keeping and caring for calves you must not:
- tether your calves or cause them to be tethered;
- muzzle your calves;
- keep a calf in an individual stall or pen after the age of 8 weeks (unless a veterinary surgeon has certified its health or behaviour requires it to be isolated to receive treatment).

You will not break the rule on tethering calves if the tethers are put onto group-housed calves, for up to 1 hour, when you are feeding them milk or milk substitute.

For more information on the welfare of calves, please visit the SMR 11 or the Caring for beef cattle and dairy cows pages on GOV.UK.
If you are registered in the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), or Environmental Stewardship or Countryside Stewardship schemes, you have a requirement to adhere to the bovine tuberculosis (bTB) testing requirements. If you are late with your bTB testing, you may receive an automatic reduction in your BPS payment. Visit GOV.UK for more information on bTB requirements. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, some temporary changes to bTB rules have been introduced – details of these changes can be found at the bTB information hub.

In October 2017, the TB Advisory Service was launched. Through this service, cattle farmers in high-risk and edge areas of England can benefit from free expert and bespoke advice on practical, cost-effective biosecurity measures to reduce their TB (and other animal health) risks. If you would like to register to take up this offer, which could include an on-farm visit or telephone advice, please e-mail info@tbas.org.uk or call 01306 779410.

More information is available at www.tbas.org.uk.
The Agriculture Bill provides the legislative framework for replacing agricultural support schemes. It provides Government with a range of legislative powers to implement new approaches to farm payments and land management. In England, farmers will be paid to produce ‘public goods’ such as environmental or animal welfare improvements. The Agriculture Bill also includes wider measures, such as improving fairness in the agricultural supply chain and the operation of agricultural markets.

On 29 July, the Agriculture Bill entered the report stage in the House of Lords, taking another step towards reaching royal assent later this year.

**Trade and Agriculture Commission**

Throughout the passage of the Agriculture Bill, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has affirmed that all EU food safety, animal welfare and environmental standards will be retained at the end of the transition period and will form part of our domestic law.

Recently, the Government announced that it will establish a Trade and Agriculture Commission.

This will ensure that the UK’s trade policy fully considers our farmers and our commitment to maintain the UK’s high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards.

Please click [here](#) to read a summary of the Agriculture Bill, including a breakdown of what it involves.

Please click [here](#) to sign up for e-alerts from Defra, including updates on the Agriculture Bill and the Trade and Agriculture Commission.
**Water abstraction reminders**

The Environment Agency has updated its guidance on water abstraction during prolonged periods of dry weather, which you can read on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). More information on the current water resources situation can be found at [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

**New Authorisations (previously exempt abstraction activities)**

The deadline for applications for previously exempt activities (including trickle irrigation) closed on 30 June. Any abstraction undertaken after that date, without a valid application already submitted by then, will be unlawful and will require a new application through the normal licensing process before any further abstraction can take place.

For information on water abstraction and coronavirus (COVID-19), please read the [April FAS newsletter](https://www.gov.uk) and [May FAS newsletter](https://www.gov.uk).
Get the latest updates by following FAS on Twitter
Follow us on @DefraFAS for up-to-the-minute updates on publications, events and industry information.

Subscribe to the free FAS Newsletter
If you don’t already receive the FREE monthly FAS newsletter, please email bookings@farmingadVICEService.org.uk with ‘Register for newsletter’ in the subject line.

In line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), FAS has updated its privacy policy to explain how your data is kept safe. To view the policy, please visit www.farmingadVICEService.org.uk/events/privacy/