

April 2014 – e-news issue 14

Welcome to the Farming Advice Service newsletter

If you would like to sign-up to receive the Farming Advice Service (FAS) newsletter straight to your inbox, please email bookings@farmingadvice.org.uk with 'Register for newsletter' in the subject line. Your details will not be shared with any third parties.

We hope you find the information in this issue helpful. If you have any comments or ideas for topics you'd like us to cover, please let us know.

FAS technical advice line:

Telephone: 0345 345 1302

Email: advice@farmingadvice.org.uk

Website: www.defra.gov.uk/farming-advice



**Farming
Advice Service**

In this issue

SPS 2014 application forms are now available

PLANET update

Updated guidance for Single Payment Scheme claimants affected by adverse weather

Nitrate Vulnerable Zone reminders

Frequently asked questions during March

Reporting sheep and goat movements electronically from April 2014

CAP update

Soil Protection Review – choosing the correct environmental option

Funding

Forthcoming FAS events

Water abstraction returns – reminder

The FAS helpline number has changed*

From April the telephone number for contacting the Farming Advice Service (FAS) will be **0345 345 1302**.

Updated guidance for Single Payment Scheme claimants affected by adverse weather

The RPA has published some further guidance to Single Payment Scheme (SPS) claimants who are unable to meet cross compliance standards as a result of the adverse weather this winter. For more information please go to the [RPA website](#).

Single Payment Scheme (SPS) application forms for 2014 are now available

Application forms and guidance for the 2014 SPS are now available on The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) [website](#). Your application form should be submitted to the RPA by midnight on **15 May 2014**. If your application is late there is a risk of receiving a late application penalty or your application could be rejected.

Registered digital customers (those that used SPS online for the 2013 application) should have received two emails; the first was to announce the 2014 SPS claim window had opened, and a separate email with a link to the documents. Non-digital customers (those who applied by paper form in 2013) were sent a pre-populated claim form, the 2014 SPS update and a CAP update. All mailings were posted in mid-March and emails have been sent out so if you are yet to receive your form, please check unopened post and your email SPAM folder. If you have not received communication from the RPA or require assistance with completing your form, please contact their Customer Service Centre on 0845 603 7777 or email csc@rpa.gsi.gov.uk

Please note that this year the RPA **is not** offering a 'drop-in centre' service at their buildings for checking/receiving paper claim forms this year.

The SPS 2014 supplement contains important reminders about things to check for. It also tells you about some new things that will affect SPS 2014 payments. The supplement isn't a full handbook and isn't a replacement for the 'Single Payment Scheme Handbook for England 2013'. You should read the supplement and the 2013 handbook (including the 'Extra guidance on dual use of land') before you apply for SPS 2014.

Applications can be made online using the [RPA online website](#) as well as by post.

This is the final year of SPS and a new direct payments scheme for farmers will start in 2015. It will be called the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS). There's more information in the leaflet called '[CAP reform: What you need to know now](#)'.

Reporting sheep and goat movements electronically from April 2014

Don't forget that from April 2014, sheep and goat keepers in England will be able to use a new [Animal Reporting and Movements System \(aRAMs\)](#) to report their animal movements electronically.

You will be able to

- report moves electronically with a click of a button;
- set up moves and print your own movement documents; and

- save yourself from having to write out repetitive information for each move.

More information is available at www.aRAMs.co.uk. New guidance on sheep and goat identification, and recording and reporting movements will be sent to all registered sheep and goat keepers in spring 2014.

The 'Guidance on the rules for sheep keepers in England' has been updated for 2014. You can download the document from the [GOV.UK](#) website.

PLANET update

The PLANET software can be used to help farmers with field level nutrient management decisions and to assess compliance with the NVZ regulations. PLANET is currently being updated to take account of the NVZ rule changes and a new version is expected in May 2014. All registered PLANET users will receive an email update when the new version of PLANET is available. If you would like to register for PLANET you can do so on the [PLANET website](#).

* Whilst 0345 345 1302 will become the primary number the 0845 345 1302 number will continue to be operational.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) reminders

Record keeping requirements

By **30 April** you are required to have:

- A record of the number of livestock kept on your farm in the previous calendar year and the amount of nitrogen (N) they produced. This is to ensure that the amount of livestock manure that is spread or directly deposited by grazing animals does not exceed 170kg N per hectare or 250kg N per hectare from grazing livestock for farms with a grassland derogation. This is the 'loading limit' and is averaged over the area of the farm. Further guidance, including a step-by-step guide to the producing the calculations, can be found in **Chapter 6** of the document '[Guidance on complying with the rules for Nitrate Vulnerable Zones in England for 2013 to 2016](#)'.
- A record of the number and type of livestock kept on the farm during the previous storage period, details of imports or exports of manure during the storage period and the dates and location of any sites used for storing solid manure. This is to ensure that there was adequate manure storage available on farm for the previous

closed period. **Chapter 10** of the guidance document provides detailed guidance on compiling these records.

- Submitted your Fertilisation Accounts to the Environment Agency if your farm was granted a grassland derogation in 2013. You can submit your records electronically by email to regaware@environment-agency.gov.uk or by post – Regulation Awareness Team, National Customer Contact Centre, The Environment Agency, Quadrant 2, Parkway Business Park, Sheffield, S9 4WF. The [FAS February newsletter](#) also provided further information regarding submitting records for the grassland derogation.

New rules for manure heaps

From **16 May 2014**, you are not permitted to build or maintain a field heap within 30m of surface water (including ditches) if the land slopes steeply (12 degrees (1 in 5, or 20%) or greater). There will also be a requirement that the field heap occupies as small a surface area as is practically required to support the mass of the heap and prevent it from collapsing. Further information on the

new rules for storing solid manure can be found in **Chapter 10** of the NVZ guidance.

Provision of slurry storage for farms newly in NVZs in 2013

If your land was designated in an NVZ for the first time in 2013, you will need to provide adequate storage for any slurry you produce from the closed period in autumn 2015. Although the closed period is about 15 months away, advance planning will ensure you are ready for this requirement. See **Chapter 8, part 3** onwards of the guidance for further advice.

Spring Nitrogen Advice now available

The Spring Nitrogen Advice document (March update), which can be used for NVZ planning, is now available to download from the [FAS website](#). You can use the excess winter rainfall (EWR) maps to identify your rainfall class within RB209, which in turn determines your Soil Nitrogen Supply (SNS) category & nitrogen recommendations.

Soil Protection Review – choosing the correct environmental option

If you are a Single Payment Scheme (SPS) claimant or are in receipt of support through certain schemes under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), such as Entry Level Stewardship (ELS), you are required to complete a Soil Protection Review (SPR). The SPR is a requirement under the Cross Compliance Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) rules and it should be retained on the farm. It is a useful tool to raise awareness of potential risks associated with the soil-type and the different crops you are growing on your holding. FAS have produced an article that contains a case-study to demonstrate how the SPR has helped West Hall Farm to pinpoint damage to the soil and identify an appropriate remediation strategy. To view the article, please go to the [FAS website](#).

CAP update

New payment schemes and a new Rural Development Programme (RDP) will start from 2015. A factsheet called '[CAP Reform Countdown – An introduction to the new Common Agricultural Policy schemes in England](#)' has been produced to give you an overview of what it will mean for you.

'CAP factsheets' – like the one linked above – will be published throughout 2014. Future factsheets will focus on particular areas of the new policy in more detail. In the first factsheet, Defra are starting off with an overview of the new schemes.

You can find more information at www.gov.uk/cap-reform

Water abstraction returns – reminder

Reporting water abstraction

Farmers who hold abstraction licences are required to record the amount of water they abstract and submit the information to the Environment Agency (EA).

Records of abstraction are generally referred to as 'returns'. Your return can be, for example, water meter readings or actual volumes abstracted. Depending on their licence conditions and the quantity of water that they are allowed to abstract, most farmers will need to keep weekly or monthly records of the actual amount of water they take and submit annual returns as shown in Table 1.

Ways of submitting a return

Paper form – the EA sends out a paper form to abstractors. When completed with the details of water abstracted, the form is sent back to the EA.

Generic Operator Returns (GOR) online reporting system – water abstraction returns can be submitted online by completing the web screens or using the water resource GOR spreadsheet application. If you are interested in using the online service

please e mail WR_Systems_Team@environment-agency.gov.uk quoting your abstraction licence number.

Paper forms and online returns are pre-populated with information about your return, making it quicker for you to complete your submission. If you are a winter/all-year abstractor, you should have received a paper form for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, unless you have requested to use the online service. Even if you haven't abstracted any water it is important that you submit a 'nil' return to the EA.

How returns are used

Once submitted, the information is used for:

- charging;
- checking compliance with licence conditions; and
- water resource management

Charging (two-part tariff)

Returns are used for two-part tariff billing. If you abstract water for irrigation, you may be able to get a reduction in your annual bill

by applying for a two-part tariff agreement. If your application is successful you will, for example, get 50% reduction in your bill per year if you do not abstract any water and submit a 'nil' return.

Compliance

Water abstraction licence conditions are set to manage the balance between human use and environmental needs. The EA assesses compliance with the conditions and prefers to work with licence holders to resolve compliance issues. However, if licence conditions are breached, further action can be taken to protect the environment and other water users. Abstractions for spray irrigation fall under Cross Compliance Good Agricultural Environmental Condition (GAEC) 18 – Water Abstraction. The EA can use the returns you submit to report compliance issues to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

Water resource management

Information on abstracted volumes is used to assess the impact that abstraction has on river flows or wetland sites, helping to manage water resources in England. Returns also help the EA and partners to assess present and likely future demand for water.

If you have any enquiries regarding your water abstraction licence or returns, please contact the EA on 03708 506 506 (Mon-Fri, 8am – 6pm) or email enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Table 1: Water abstraction return dates

When can you abstract water?	This means you are referred to as a...	When does the EA ask you for your return?	When do you need to submit returns by?
Wholly between 1 April and 31 October	Summer abstractor	End of October each year	30 November each year
Not wholly between 1 April and 31 October	Winter/all-year abstractor	End of March each year	30 April each year

Farm Recovery Fund

Defra has announced details of the Farming Recovery Fund, providing grants of between £500 and £5000 to any farm holding directly affected by the recent flood events (since December 1, 2013). Applications should be submitted by **9 May 2014**.

More details about the funding, including guidance and the application form can be found on the [GOV.UK website](http://GOV.UK). You can also email frf@defra.gsi.gov.uk or call 0300 060 2700.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) to the FAS helpline during March

Q Who is responsible for Cross Compliance?

A Pages 11-12 of the [Guide to Cross Compliance in England](#) provide a detailed explanation of who is liable for compliance with the rules, and also gives some examples.

Q Can a statutory body undertake emergency work on my land? What action should be taken if this prevents me from meeting the cross compliance rules?

A You may be exempt from a cross compliance standard in relation to, or in connection with, any power or authorisation conferred by, or under, any enactment provided that following the completion of the action the agricultural land will be in GAEC. This would include where, for example, the laying, construction or maintenance of a pipeline, cable or pylon, or the carrying out of railway or highway works, under statutory authority conflicts with meeting a standard. If you think this applies to you, ideally you should request an exemption from RPA in advance of the work being carried out. This should safeguard your position. Again, however, in emergency situations, where it may not be possible for you to make an advance request, the RPA would not expect you to do so. If, however, you find the work conflicts with a standard, we would advise you to write to RPA as soon as possible to safeguard your position. The RPA would not expect statutory bodies to have to carry out the process of using their statutory powers to get the permission needed for access, or to carry out work, where voluntary consent exists and where statutory consent would be given if needed.

Q Is there a derogation to allow cutting/trimming of hedges during the closed period due to the adverse weather?

A There is no blanket derogation to allow all farmers to cut/trim hedges during the closed period (1 March – 31 July), however, if you feel that you would require a derogation to carry out any work, please contact the RPA who will assess your individual circumstances.

Q Can I increase the productivity of my uncultivated land?

A You will first need to check whether the land falls under the Environmental Impact Assessment Agriculture Regulations. Land which has not been cultivated for 15 years and which is a semi-natural area are covered. Details can be found page 21-22 of the [Guide to Cross Compliance in England](#). Please contact the Natural England's EIA unit on 0800 028 2140 for further advice. Please be aware that the regulations also apply to those not claiming SPS.

Please note, even if your land does not require an EIA, it is not recommended to increase the productivity of permanent pasture land. The RPA are required under European legislation to maintain the level of permanent pasture in England and the European Commission has proposed that this requirement continues beyond the next CAP Reform.

If permanent pasture reduces beyond a certain level in England, the RPA may have to introduce new cross compliance rules to control the level of pasture. This could mean that in the future they

may be obliged to require all farmers who ploughed up permanent pasture in the prior 24 months (from the latest SPS application) to revert land back to permanent pasture. It is important that all of your land parcels that meet the definition of permanent pasture are declared on your SPS application using the appropriate permanent pasture land use code. This is because the RPA use this information to show the European Commission how much pasture there is in England and this determines whether the RPA are required to introduce the rules referred to above to stop or reverse any decline in pasture levels.

Permanent pasture is land that:

- is used to grow grasses or other herbaceous forage, either self-seeded or sown and has not been included in the crop rotation for 5 years or longer;
- has not been set-aside during this 5 year period under the SPS options; and
- has not been taken out of production under certain environmental schemes.

Forthcoming FAS events

FAS will be running an events programme during 2014, which will cover most regions. The events will be advertised on the FAS website, so please keep an eye on the [events page](#).

Sign up to FAS services



Register for free text message updates

We use text messages to get relevant information to farmers quickly. We send reminders of approaching key dates for cross compliance. To register for FREE text message updates, please call 0345 345 1302 or email bookings@farmingadvice.service.org.uk with 'Register for text updates' in the subject line. Don't forget to include your name and mobile phone number in the message. Your details will not be shared with any third parties.



Get the latest updates by following FAS on Twitter

FAS has joined Twitter. Follow us on [@DefraFAS](https://twitter.com/DefraFAS) for up-to-the-minute updates on publications, events and industry information.



Subscribe to the free FAS Newsletter

To receive further copies of the FREE bi-monthly FAS newsletter, please call 0845 345 1302 or email bookings@farmingadvice.service.org.uk with 'Register for newsletter' in the subject line.

Key dates

16 April	You must not burn heather, rough grass, bracken, gorse or vaccinium in upland areas from this date. (GAEC 10)
30 April	You must have recorded the number of 'specified' livestock kept on your farm during the previous calendar year and calculated the amount of nitrogen they produced. You must also record the number and type of livestock in a building or hardstanding during the previous storage period. (SMR 4)
1 May	You must not carry out hedge-laying or coppicing of hedgerows from this date. (GAEC 15)
1 August	You can cut or plough vegetation on agricultural land which is not in agricultural production from this date. (GAEC 12)
1 August	You can cut hedgerows from this date. (GAEC 15)
1 August	Start of 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 4)