



## Welcome to the Farming Advice Service (FAS) newsletter

*Thank you for continuing to subscribe to our monthly newsletter.*

*We hope you find the content useful and we welcome any feedback or suggestions on topics you would like to see covered in future editions.*

### Contact us

**FAS technical advice line:** 03000 200 301

[advice@farmingadvice.org.uk](mailto:advice@farmingadvice.org.uk)

[farmingadvice.org.uk](http://farmingadvice.org.uk)

You can view a text-only version of the July Newsletter [by clicking this link.](#)

Please [click here](#) to complete a short survey about FAS services.

## July 2023 – Issue 89

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## Key dates to be aware of...

- 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](#))
- 18 August** This is the closing date for Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier and Wildlife Offer applications. Application guidance can be found on the [GOV.UK](#) webpages
- 31 August** This is the deadline for making certain changes to a Countryside Stewardship (CS) revenue claim declaration that was submitted before midnight on 15 May (without reduction). If you missed the deadline for CS revenue claim declarations or Environmental Stewardship (ES) revenue claims without reduction on **15 May, 31 August at 11:59pm** is also the deadline for late CS revenue claim declarations and ES revenue claims (with reduction). ([GOV.UK](#))

## In case you missed them...

- 1 May** You must not carry out hedge or tree coppicing or hedge laying from this date. ([GAEC\\*\\*7a](#) and [GAEC\\*\\*7c](#))

\* SMR = Statutory Management Requirements

\*\*GAEC = Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions

For more details about the information provided in the key dates table, visit the [Guide to cross compliance in England 2023](#) and the [Rural Payments Agency key dates 2023](#) pages of [GOV.UK](#).

# How can we help you?

## Free and confidential advice

The FAS is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). We provide **free, confidential advice** to help farmers in England understand and meet the cross compliance requirements. These requirements apply to you if you are a Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), CS or ES claimant.

We update the farming sector on relevant government farming policy that is applicable in England and on the actions that can be taken to help farmers comply with the relevant regulations. Our newsletter also provides articles on topics that are complementary to cross compliance, such as practices that benefit the wider environment, and wellbeing support.

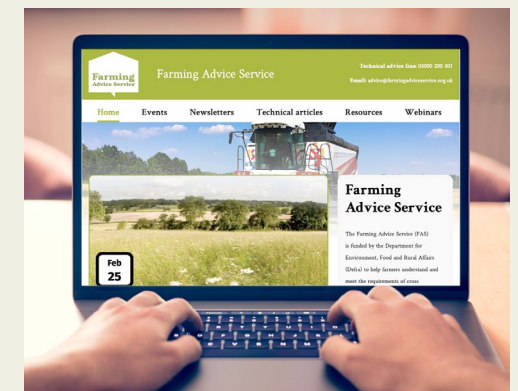
[Our website](#) hosts our previous newsletters, as well as technical articles and webinars that cover various topics in more detail.

## Contacting the advice line

Farmers requiring telephone advice can contact the **FAS technical advice line** on **03000 200 301**, Monday to Friday, between **08:30** and **17:00**. The Rural Services Helpline provides a single number for all **FAS, Rural Payments Agency (RPA), Animal and Plant Health Agency, Natural England** and **forestry** enquiries.

You can also email enquiries to [advice@farmingadvice.org.uk](mailto:advice@farmingadvice.org.uk). Our helpline team aims to respond to all telephone and email enquiries within one working day.

The advice given to individual farmers is **confidential** – we do not disclose any personal or individual information or data obtained during advisory activities.



## Watch our webinar recordings and listen to our podcasts

If you missed any of our previous webinar sessions you can watch the recordings on the [FAS website](#).

You can also listen to **podcasts** with expert speakers on the [FAS website](#), as well as through Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

## Technical articles available on the FAS website

The FAS and partners have produced a number of technical articles covering a range of topics, from farming practices to cross compliance. To access these articles, please click on the links below:

- [Nutrient management and farming rules for water](#)
- [Reducing agricultural emissions of ammonia](#)
- [Environment Agency updated prospects for irrigation – forecast for 2023](#)

## FAS Services Survey: please share your views

*Each year we ask for your views on FAS services, to allow us to improve our offer to you and to demonstrate the value of FAS to Defra and our stakeholders.*

If you could spare 5 minutes to complete the FAS 2023 survey it would be very much appreciated. This will help us to continue to provide free support and guidance to the farming community.

Even if you responded last year we'd like to get your views again, to see if anything has changed or if there's anything we could do better.

▶ [Share your views](#)

# Trees on farms – the latest updates

## Coronation Living Heritage Fund

*Defra will be launching the new Coronation Living Heritage Fund in early August.*

This fund offers the opportunity to work with your local authority to commemorate the King's Coronation, while also increasing biodiversity on your farm. Each local authority can apply for up to £100k in funding to support two projects in their area.

The fund has five options, and this includes an opportunity for local authorities to support planting by farmers and landowners. Funding can be provided to support projects on farmland such as:

- Planting in-field trees
- Creating hedgerows
- Developing orchards
- Agroforestry
- Innovative approaches such as planting trees in field corners

Any funded projects must be completed by March 2024 and planted through Autumn/Winter 23/24, which is this year's tree planting season. While the scheme is not open directly to landowners or farmers, local authorities are eligible to apply for this funding and may be seeking interested parties who wish to be involved. Please do make enquiries with your appropriate local authority team (county or unitary).

To find out which local authority you are in please search [here](#).

More information about the fund will be published on GOV.UK when the scheme is launched in early August.



# Sustainable Farming Incentive 2023

*On 21 June, Minister Spencer confirmed details of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) 2023 offer at the Lincolnshire Show. In August 2023, applications will open in a controlled rollout.*

## What is the SFI?

The SFI pays farmers for actions that support food production and that can help improve farm productivity and resilience, while also protecting and improving the environment. Farmers across the country provided their input to help develop the actions under the SFI 2023 offer, with the aim of ensuring there are actions for all farming types.

## Farmers will be able to:

- Apply for the scheme online themselves, with the straightforward online service telling them which actions will work on which land parcels – unlike the initial offer, where actions were grouped together into standards and farmers had to carry out all actions in a group
- Choose what area of eligible land to do actions on – there's no minimum or maximum land area
- Combine more SFI actions with CS options; as long as the land is eligible for both, they are compatible and Defra is not paying twice for the same activity
- Choose how to complete the actions, as long as they are carried out in a way that achieves their aim – so farmers can make the actions work for their farm, without lots of prescriptive rules
- Be confident that they will be treated fairly and supported if things go wrong – if they have to repay money already paid to them, additional financial 'penalties' will not be applied

## What actions and payments are available?

As a farmer, you can apply for a three-year SFI agreement to implement actions to help promote the sustainable management of your land. You will receive payments every three months.

The actions cover:

- Soil health and moorland assessment
- Hedgerows
- Integrated pest management (IPM)
- Nutrient management
- Farmland wildlife on arable and horticultural land, and improved grassland
- Buffer strips
- Low-input grassland

### Example

You can get £129 per hectare for your winter multi-species cover crop. If you assess IPM options and produce a plan, you can get £989 a year. You can also get paid for a range of other actions, including actions related to field margins, corners and blocks, companion crops, legumes in grassland and managing hedgerows.

The 2023 [SFI Handbook](#) provides more information on all the actions, annual payments and rules.

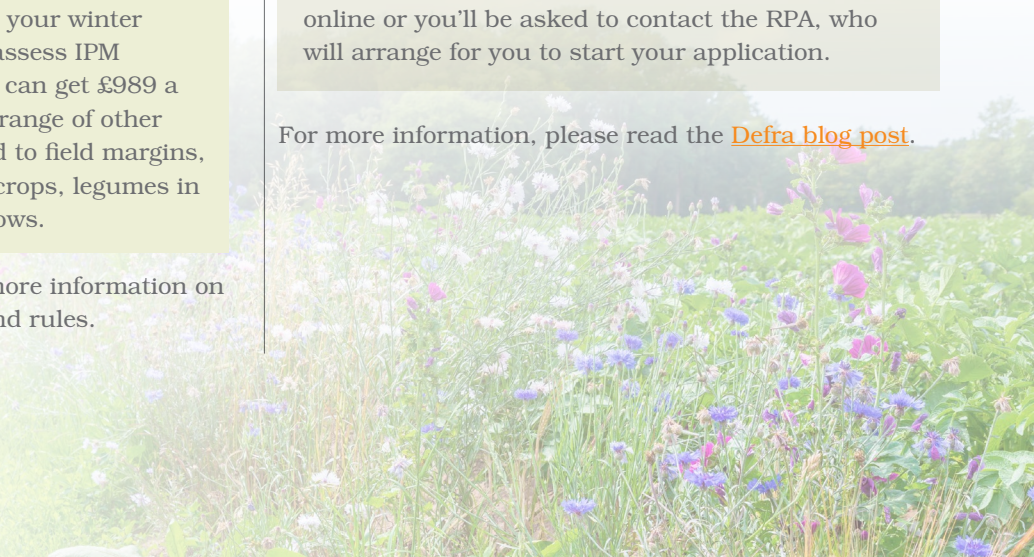
## What else can you get paid for?

- Annual management to cover the cost of signing up and taking part, which is £20 per hectare, for up to 50 hectares of land entered into the scheme, up to a total payment of £1,000
- An annual vet visit to review livestock health and welfare – farmers can register their interest now and don't need to wait until the controlled rollout of the environmental land management actions
- Environmental land management actions under [Countrywide Stewardship \(CS\) \(for more specific actions related to specific areas of land\)](#)

## What next?

Defra expects to begin accepting applications in a controlled rollout from **August 2023**. During this initial phase, when you sign into the Rural Payments service, you'll either be able to apply online or you'll be asked to contact the RPA, who will arrange for you to start your application.

For more information, please read the [Defra blog post](#).



## New Animal Health and Welfare grants to fund improved calf housing

Farmers will be able to access grants of between £15,000 and £500,000 to co-fund large infrastructure projects that will help improve the health and welfare of their animals.

Initially, the grant will be available for cattle keepers to co-fund new and upgraded calf housing that improves social contact and the ambient environment. In time, Defra will be extending the offer to include grants for cattle housing, as well as introducing new offers for keepers of pigs and poultry.

This expands the range of grants already on offer through the Farming Transformation Fund, which currently includes support for improvements to slurry, water management and productivity.

In March this year, Defra launched the first round of the Animal Health and Welfare Equipment and Technology Grant, which will help farmers to purchase items that are proven to improve the health and welfare of their livestock. Defra will be awarding almost £20 million through this grant, which will benefit over 3000 farms.

### Why consider applying for the Infrastructure grant?

Upgrading or building new calf housing with an ambient environment can provide the following benefits:

- provides a comfortable temperature, improved humidity levels, and protection from draughts
- increases social contact between animals
- produces healthy calves that are likely to be more resilient and productive in later life

As well as providing farmers with an opportunity to see a benefit through increased productivity, this grant also offers an ability to adapt calf housing and ensure it's ready to meet the demands of extreme weather conditions and a changing climate.

Through this grant, farmers will be able to access funding for roof-top solar panels, which are a source of thermal insulation and low-cost energy for calf housing.

Read Defra's new farming [blog post](#) to find out more about the new Infrastructure grant and who can apply.

## Protecting your soil post-harvest

*It is important to consider the correct post-harvest management technique to protect your soils. This will benefit the next crop and your business, and will also reduce compaction and soil erosion. The methods are detailed further in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) 5: [Minimising soil erosion](#).*

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.

Ecological Focus Area (EFA) catch and cover crops are no longer a requirement if you are claiming under the BPS. However, you may want to consider planting a winter crop or a cover crop by early autumn, as this 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.

The [GAEC 5](#) page has more information on how to limit soil erosion from (for example) cropping practices, livestock and machinery.

For more information on the cross compliance soil management requirements, please refer to the [Guide to cross compliance in England 2023](#).

As well as being cross compliance requirements, the preservation and improvement of soil health forms a core part of longer-term planning for a sustainable and resilient farming business. Funding is available to support this: farmers can receive payments under the SFI 'actions for soils' and existing CS schemes; further details can be found on the [GOV.UK](#) webpages.

**If you have any questions or require further support, please contact the FAS helpline by telephone (03000 200 301) or email ([advice@farmingadvice.service.gov.uk](mailto:advice@farmingadvice.service.gov.uk)).**

# Ditch maintenance

*With the recent heavy rainfall events and thunderstorms hitting England with force, land drainage systems and good drainage maintenance is playing an important role on farms.*



## Why are ditches important?

Efficient drainage systems are important for productive farming as they direct flow off farmed land and into watercourses. Good drainage maintenance prevents flooding and supports good soil structure and yield.

## Relevance to cross compliance

Under GAEC 1: 'Establishment of buffer strips along watercourses', the term 'watercourse' includes field ditches, and for farmers and landowners who claim Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), there are certain rules which need to be followed. These rules include the following:

- Taking steps to maintain a green cover on land within 2 metres of the centre of a watercourse or field ditch, or to land from the edge of the watercourse or field ditch to 1 metre on the landward side of the top of the bank.
- Avoid cultivating or applying fertiliser or pesticides within 2 metres of the centre of a watercourse or field ditch, or to land from the edge of the watercourse or field ditch to 1 metre on the landward side of the top of the bank of a watercourse or field ditch.

Farmers can minimise the risk of breaching [GAEC 1](#) by following the guidance available on GOV.UK. If you are unsure of your responsibilities, please contact the [Farming Advice Service](#) for help and guidance.

If your land is within a [Nitrate Vulnerable Zone \(NVZ\)](#), you should keep accurate records of the amounts and dates of applications of manufactured nitrogen

fertilisers, organic manures and other nitrogen-containing materials that are used as nitrogen fertilisers.

Under [SMR 2: Wild birds](#), it is advised that you avoid cleaning out ditches during the period 1 March to 31 August. The reason for this is to protect any nesting birds within the 2 metre margin or 1 metre from the top of a bank around a ditch. If the ditch cleaning must take place during this time period, the area around the ditch should be checked carefully for any signs of nesting birds.

## Your responsibilities:

- Letting water flow naturally (you may have to remove any blockages which are reducing the flow of water or causing flooding)
- Preventing pollution (avoid disposal of garden waste or chemicals and remove litter and animal carcasses)
- Protecting wildlife (avoid disturbing [birds and their nests](#), [protected plant and animal species](#), and [prevent invasive species](#))

## Thinking of carrying out work in or around your ditch?

Find out if you need permissions and licences from your [lead local flood authority](#) through your local council, the Environment Agency or [internal drainage board](#).

For more information, please visit the guidance on [Owning a watercourse](#).

# Hedgerow cutting derogation



*If you wish to cut a hedgerow during August because you will be growing oil seed rape, you must obtain written permission from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) first.*

Please refer to the rules for [GAEC 7a: Boundaries](#): Protect boundary features, such as hedgerows (hedges), stone walls, earth banks and stone banks.

## Cutting and trimming hedges

You must not cut or trim a hedge between 1 March and 31 August (inclusive) unless:

- the hedge overhangs a highway, road or footpath over which there is a public or private right of way and the overhanging hedge obstructs the passage of, or is a danger to, vehicles, pedestrians or horse riders;
- the hedge is dead, diseased, damaged or insecurely rooted and because of its condition, it or part of it, is likely to cause danger by falling on to a highway, road or footpath; or obstructs the view of drivers or the light from a public lamp;

- it is to carry out hedge-laying or coppicing during the period 1 March to 30 April (inclusive);
- it is to trim a newly laid hedge by hand, within six months of it being laid;
- **you have received written permission from the RPA to cut or trim during the month of August for the purposes of sowing oilseed rape or temporary grassland during the same August;**
- you have received written permission from the RPA to do so, to enhance the environment, improve public or agricultural access, or for reasons relating to livestock or crop production.

To apply for a derogation you must write to or email the RPA. You should send all the available evidence (for example, photographs or diagrams) and explain what you want to do. You should also include the land parcel numbers you want the derogation for.

Correspondence should be clearly marked 'Cross compliance derogation'. You must then wait for written permission before carrying out any work.

If the derogation request is successful, you will not have to meet the rule in question for a specific period of time.

### You can contact the RPA by the following methods:

**Email:** [ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk). Remember to include your **SBI number** in the subject box of your email and also the words '**Cross Compliance Derogation request**'.

**Post:** Rural Payments, PO Box 352, Worksop, S80 9FG. Again remember to include your **SBI number** and the words '**Cross Compliance Derogation request**'.

## Consultation on hedgerow protections in England

Hedgerows store carbon, support crop pollinators, create habitats for animals, slow water flow and create shade and fodder for animals. Defra wants to protect the hedges we have, invest in their maintenance and support further planting. Defra also wants to make sure that hedgerow regulations work for wildlife, the environment and farmers.

On 28 June Defra launched a consultation on hedgerow protections in England and Defra would like to have your views. The consultation will be open for 12 weeks and **closes at 23:59 on 20 September 2023**.

For more information, read the [blog post about the consultation](#).



# Water abstraction – management advice

*The Environment Agency's (EA's) queue of abstraction licence applications has reduced significantly over the first six months of 2023. At the start of the year, the EA's work queue was 317 pieces of work; it now stands at less than 100. The waiting time for their permitting officers to start work on applications is down from eight months to four months, and will soon be reduced to three months. The EA aims to have the waiting time down to under 21 days by the end of December and are regularly reviewing and updating the information provided to applicants about wait times.*

If you have applied for a water resources funding grant (e.g. for a reservoir) and you are concerned about the delays to abstraction licence application progressing times, please make sure you clearly mark on the application form ([Form WR328 Section A1.4](#)) or covering letter that the application relates to the grant. The EA will then be in touch to discuss timescales.

Until now, the National Permitting Service has prioritised formal applications over pre-application, because of statutory timeframes and to ensure that

applicants were not waiting longer than necessary for licences. Understandably, applicants often decided to forego pre-application advice due to time constraints. Now that the queue has reduced significantly, the EA is encouraging applicants to use the pre-application service again. [Get advice before you apply for a water abstraction or impounding licence – GOV.UK](#). This is important because pre-application can improve the quality of formal applications and reduces unexpected delays.

The enhanced application process also has significant additional benefits for applicants, providing critical information about their proposal before they submit the full application charge. This includes:

- The likelihood of success and the quantity of water available for abstraction;
- A quick response providing initial feedback with no extension to overall application timescales;
- Detailed monitoring or data requirements;
- Identification of any issues that need to be addressed (e.g. competing demands) before an application can be determined.

## Water situation reports

The EA would like to remind farmers that the [water situation reports](#) are available as a resource for information on rainfall, soil moisture deficit, river flows, groundwater levels and reservoir levels.

Despite this July being a generally wet month, the EA continues to prepare for all weather eventualities for the rest of summer and autumn. This includes closely monitoring the water environment and ensuring they understand the risks if dry weather returns. The EA is continuing to work with partners to manage any impacts locally.

Further information can be found in last month's [Water Abstraction – Dry weather update article](#) in the FAS newsletter.





## Updates from the Future Farming blog and industry announcements

Defra regularly updates the [Future Farming blog](#). Please [subscribe to the blog](#) to ensure you receive all the latest news.

### New regulations to promote fairness and transparency for the dairy sector

Defra has recently outlined more detail on regulations set to come into force later this year. This will ensure supply contracts in the dairy sector are fair and transparent, with farmers being paid a fair price for their produce.

Further details can be found on the [Defra News webpages](#).

The upcoming dairy regulations are part of a series of supply chain interventions confirmed by the government at the [Farm to Fork Summit](#). New reviews will also begin this Autumn to help establish fairer supply chains in the egg and horticulture sectors, and Defra announced in April that they will also be developing regulations to improve relationships in the UK pig supply chain.

### Reminder to record pig movements

Defra and the Welsh Government have been working with industry and the veterinary sector to raise the importance of pig traceability and biosecurity among the pig-keeping community.

[New posters](#) highlight the actions both commercial and pet pig keepers are legally required to take, and reminding keepers of important biosecurity precautions to safeguard against diseases, such as African Swine Fever.

Farmers keeping pigs are also reminded to contact and register their location with their relevant Rural Payments body, and to provide updates on any changes in circumstances. This includes reporting when keepers stop keeping pigs, or start/stop keeping other livestock at the same location as their pigs, to the Animal and Plant Health Agency via Defra's Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am-5pm) or email [customer.registration@apha.gov.uk](mailto:customer.registration@apha.gov.uk).

For more information on registering and recording pig movements, please visit [Pig keepers: register your holding and animals](#).

### Good biosecurity on farms is essential as bird flu Prevention Zone is lifted

The Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) for poultry and captive birds that was introduced to help stop the spread of avian influenza ('bird flu'), has been lifted.

The risk of avian influenza has now reduced to low for all poultry. As a result, the mandatory requirements were lifted from **4 July**. All bird keepers must keep a close watch on them for signs of disease and maintain good biosecurity at all times.

All poultry gatherings, including at fairs, shows and markets, remain banned, due to the large number of flocks mixing together and the risk posed by any infections spreading across the country.

Find more information and guidance on good biosecurity, visit [GOV.UK](#).

### New rules for bovine TB post-movement testing in England

From **1 August 2023**, cattle (which includes farmed bison and Asiatic water buffalo) moved to herds in annual surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area may require compulsory post-movement testing if they originate from:

- Six-monthly surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area of England
- High Risk Area (HRA) of England
- Wales

More information about these changes can be found on the [TB Hub](#).

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## Stay up to date with us



### Get the latest updates by following us on Twitter

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



### Subscribe to our free monthly newsletter

If you don't already receive our monthly FAS newsletter, please visit [farmingadvice.service.org.uk](https://farmingadvice.service.org.uk) and enter your email address into the newsletter sign-up box.

Alternatively, please email [bookings@farmingadvice.service.org.uk](mailto:bookings@farmingadvice.service.org.uk) with "Register for newsletter" in the subject line.

In line with data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018, FAS has updated its privacy policy to explain how your data is kept safe.

To view the policy, please visit [www.farmingadvice.service.org.uk/events/privacy/](https://www.farmingadvice.service.org.uk/events/privacy/).