



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

farmingadvice.org.uk

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

February 2024 – Issue 96

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Key dates to be aware of...

- 1 March** The main bird breeding and nesting season begins on 1 March and runs until 31 August. Nesting wild birds are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence to damage any nest while it is being built or in use. It is also not permitted to destroy or remove eggs from nests. Hedgerows are regularly used by our wild birds for nesting and as a result careful management is required. Further information on the management of hedgerows can be found on GOV.UK at [Countryside hedgerows: protection and management](#).
- As you may be aware, last year Defra consulted on future protections for hedgerows. They recently announced that they will be seeking to improve regulatory protections when Parliamentary time allows. The consultation response and next steps will be published by Defra shortly.

In case you missed them...

- 1 February** For any land located in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ), you can, from this date, **apply organic manure** with a high, readily available nitrogen content (for example, slurry, poultry manures or liquid digested sewage sludge) **to grassland and tillage land on all soil types** if conditions are suitable and you adhere to the quantity restrictions for applying these manures. This is also subject to complying with the [Farming Rules for Water](#) and there being agronomic justification for applying manure. ([NVZ Guidance](#))
- 28 February** For any land located in an NVZ, this date is the end for **quantity restrictions for applying organic manures** with a high, readily available nitrogen content. This is subject to compliance with the [Farming Rules for Water](#) and there is agronomic justification. ([NVZ Guidance](#))

For more details about the information provided in the key dates table, visit the [Rules for Farmers and Land Managers](#) and the relevant pages of GOV.UK.

Upcoming grant deadlines

- 13 March** [Farming Innovation Programme: Large R&D partnerships Round 3](#). The deadline for applications is 11am on 13 March 2024.
- 21 March** [Farming Investment Fund – Improving Farm Productivity grant](#). The online eligibility checker for this grant closes at 11:59pm on 21 March 2024.

In case you missed them...

From 3 January the following grants opened for application

- [Capital Grants 2024](#)
- [Higher Tier Capital Grants 2024](#)
- [Protection and Infrastructure Grant](#)
- [Woodland Management Plan \(WMP\) Grants](#)
- [Woodland Tree Health \(WTH\) Grants](#)
- [Implementation Plan Grant \(PA1\) or Feasibility Study Grant \(PA2\)](#)

Farming
Advice Service

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 and land managers in England understand and meet the legal requirements in English law around certain farming activities to protect people, livestock and the environment. 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 Farming Regulation, 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.

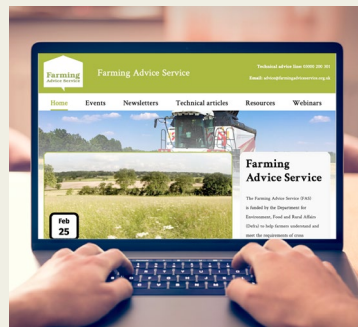
Contacting the advice line

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, RPA, Animal and Plant Health Agency, Natural England** and **forestry** enquiries.

You can also email enquiries to 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.

You can also now speak to our Helpline team through the new online chat function on the [farmingadvice.org.uk](https://www.farmingadvice.org.uk) website.



Watch our webinar recordings and listen to our podcasts

If you missed any of our previous webinar sessions, including the **FAS Webinar from 26 January** ('The farming offer in 2024' with Defra Farming and Countryside Director Janet Hughes) or the session from **21 February** ('Discussing the farming offer in 2024', with Amelia Rome and Fraser Hugill), you can watch the recordings on the [FAS website](#).



Our latest podcast 'The Big Farmland Bird Count with GWCT' is also now available on our [website](#) and major streaming services.

Previous FAS podcasts, where expert speakers discuss topics such as the Farming Resilience Fund and Nutrient Management, are also available on the [FAS website](#) and Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

Technical articles available on the FAS website

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

- [Reducing agricultural emissions of ammonia](#)
- [Supporting farmers to become resilient](#)

A reminder for those interested in nutrient management on farm is that the FAS has a series of webinars on this topic, as well as a handy technical article. The webinars and technical article have been provided by Mel Holloway, expert farm consultant and FACTS qualified advisor, and include guidance on how best to plan nutrient management on farm as well as what to be aware of when staying compliant with the Farming Rules for Water. Please find links to these resources below:

- [Nutrient Management with Mel Holloway \(Webinar\)](#)
- [Practical Nutrient Management Planning \(Webinar\)](#)
- [Nutrient Management Planning – technical article](#)

FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

Funding farmers for a more sustainable business



**Farming for the Future:
Sector Specific Countryside Stewardship
and Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)
Webinar Series in March**

Please join Ricardo, in partnership with The Andersons Centre and on behalf of Defra, who will be presenting a **free** webinar series focusing on Countryside Stewardship and Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) agreements in 2024.

The Farming Advisers from The Anderson Centre will present the coming changes to Countryside Stewardship & SFI in 2024 for each business sector and there will also be an opportunity for the advisers to answer questions from the audience.

Please find the dates and times for the upcoming webinars below – including links to the registration pages.

- [Tuesday 12 March: 2pm to 3.30pm – Uplands Countryside Stewardship & SFI Online Advice Session](#)
- [Tuesday 12 March: 6pm to 7.30pm – Livestock & Grassland Countryside Stewardship & SFI Online Advice Session](#)
- [Thursday 14 March: 2pm to 3.30pm – Organics Countryside Stewardship & SFI Online Advice Session](#)
- [Thursday 14 March: 6pm to 7.30pm – Arable & Horticulture Countryside Stewardship & SFI Online Advice Session](#)
- [Tuesday 19 March: 2pm to 3.30pm – Livestock & Grassland Countryside Stewardship & SFI Online Advice Session](#)
- [Tuesday 19 March: 6pm to 7.30pm – Uplands Countryside Stewardship & SFI Online Advice Session](#)
- [Thursday 21 March: 2pm to 3.30pm – Arable & Horticulture Countryside Stewardship & SFI Online Advice Session](#)
- [Thursday 21 March: 6pm to 7.30pm – Organics Countryside Stewardship & SFI Online Advice Session](#)

If you require help with registration or have any questions, please contact the Ricardo ETAFF Project Team (01235 753575), or email ETAFF@ricardo.com.

Capital Grants and Farming Investment Fund in 2024

Applicants' guide to capital grants in 2024

What are capital grants?

Capital grants, which are part of Environmental Land Management (ELM), are three-year agreements offering capital items to achieve certain environmental benefits. These environmental benefits fall within four groups:

- Boundaries, trees and orchards (including the former hedgerows and boundaries grant items)
- Water quality
- Air quality
- Natural flood management

Capital grants are standalone and complement Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), existing Countryside Stewardship (CS) Mid Tier, Higher Tier and Wildlife Offers, and Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Stewardship.

What's changed?

The name 'Countryside Stewardship' has been removed from all capital grant offers to make it clear that these grants are available to a wide range of farmers and land managers, particularly those who have (or who are considering applying for) an SFI agreement.

Applications

- Capital grants opened for applications on 3 January 2024 and are open all year round.
- There is no limit on either the maximum amount for any application or the amount you can apply for in each group.
- You can also submit an application for each Single Business Identifier (SBI) that you may manage.

- New agreements cannot contain parcels that already have capital works which are incomplete or have not received their final payment.
- If your application is successful and you agree with the capital grant offered to you, you will enter into an agreement with the RPA.

For more detailed information on Capital Grants 2024, including eligibility, land receiving other funding, and more details on how to apply, please see the full [Applicant's guide: Capital Grants 2024](#).

There are 70 capital items available. The [Grant finder](#) gives a description and essential requirements for each capital item.

Farming Investment Fund grants in 2024

During the Prime Minister's speech at the NFU conference in February, it was announced that Defra will be launching the largest ever round of grants in 2024, which is expected to total £427 million. This will include:

- £116m – grants for infrastructure and equipment to support slurry management.
- £91m – Animal Health and Welfare Pathway grants to support with the costs of equipment, technology and infrastructure designed to improve the health and welfare of livestock.

Productivity schemes

- £70m – Farming Equipment and Technology Fund to support farmers with the costs of eligible items to build the resilience of the sector and boost our food security.
- £70m – Farming Innovation Programme to invest in innovation, research and development that benefits farmers, growers and foresters in England.
- £50m – Improving Farming Productivity Fund for robotics and automation, and rooftop solar to build on-farm energy security.

- £15m – Adding Value Grant, part of the Farming Investment Fund, for farmers who want to expand their farm operations into processing, packing and retailing.
- £15m – Water Management Grants, part of the Farming Investment Fund, for projects such as on-farm reservoirs and works to improve irrigation.

Defra has recently published a post on their farming blog with more information on the [Farming Equipment and Technology Fund 2024](#).

Bluetongue virus

Guidance for farmers

Bluetongue is a notifiable viral disease of ruminants and camelids which is spread by biting midges. The bluetongue virus (BTV) does not affect people or food safety. Meat and milk from infected animals are safe to eat and drink.



The first case of bluetongue virus serotype 3 (BTV-3) was detected in a cow in Kent in early November 2023. The infected animal was found whilst the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) was undertaking its annual risk-based surveillance testing of farms in high-risk counties along the south and east coast of England. APHA has continued to identify further cases in Kent and, later, in Norfolk and Suffolk and temporary control zones (TCZs) were put in place around premises where infected animals were identified.

How the disease spreads

BTV affects all ruminants (e.g., cattle, sheep, deer and goats) and camelids (e.g., llamas and alpacas), and can be spread long distances across water by wind dispersal of *Culicoides* midges. The most likely cause of the infections in England are from midges infected with BTV-3, which have blown across from continental Europe. Midges become infected with the virus when they bite an infected animal, and the virus spreads when the infected midge then bites an uninfected susceptible animal. However, only a small proportion of midges can transmit the virus. Once a midge has picked up the BTV it will be a carrier for the rest of its life. There is no evidence that the virus is currently circulating in the UK's midge population.

BTV can also be spread through the import or movement of infected animals

and/or their germplasm (semen and ova, or embryos). Pregnant females can also pass the infection to their offspring.

How you can help protect your animals

Sheep are more likely to show obvious clinical signs of BTV than cattle if they become infected, but the impacts on susceptible animals can vary greatly. Some show no clinical signs at all, while for others it can cause productivity issues such as reduced milk yield. In the most severe cases it can be fatal for infected animals.

The main signs in sheep are:

- Ulcers or sores in the mouth and nose
- Discharge from the eyes or nose and drooling from the mouth
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, head and neck and the coronary band (where the skin of the leg meets the horn of the foot)

Other signs include:

- Red skin, and mucous membranes, due to blood collecting beneath the surface
- Fever
- Lameness
- Breathing problems
- Abortion, foetal deformities and stillbirths
- Sudden death

The clinical signs in cattle are similar but are milder. You can read more about the clinical signs [here](#).

Bluetongue virus – Guidance for farmers

In neonatal and young ruminants and camelids

Lambs, calves and other ruminants and camelids can become infected with BTV before birth if the dam is infected while pregnant. Signs of infection include:

- Lambs or calves born small, weak, deformed or blind
- Death of lambs or calves within a few days of birth
- Stillbirths

Livestock keepers and vets should consider BTV as a possible cause and report any suspicions to APHA immediately.



Other ways to help prevent the disease

There is no vaccine for BTV-3, but you can vaccinate against BTV-4 and BTV-8 serotypes.

It is unlikely that it will be practical or cost effective to house animals in midge-proof accommodation although it may be possible to reduce the risk by housing high value animals. To be fully midge proof this would mean screening with mesh with holes less than 0.5mm, impregnated with insecticide and with positive air pressure.

If you also keep camelids such as alpacas and llamas, remember that they too are susceptible to BTV and the movement restrictions in disease control zones also apply to them. Where practical, house animals, especially at dawn and dusk.

Although incidences are rare, BTV can also affect dogs and other carnivores if they eat infected material (such as aborted material and afterbirth). Livestock keepers should therefore prevent farm dogs and pets from accessing these materials.

Report suspected bluetongue

If you suspect bluetongue, you must report it immediately by calling:

03000 200 301 in England

03003 038 268 in Wales

Your local [Field Services Office](#) in Scotland

What APHA has been doing to control the disease

APHA has been undertaking surveillance testing of susceptible species on premises within the TCZs. On a surveillance visit, APHA checks records, inspects and samples the blood of all the ruminants and camelids.

Infected animals have, until recently, been humanely culled to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Where animals are culled for disease control purposes, compensation will be paid.

Vaccination

There is currently no vaccine available for BTV-3, but pharmaceutical companies are investigating whether a vaccine could be produced in the future. Unfortunately, there is no cross-protection from other BTV strain vaccines.

The current situation – February 2024

When temperatures drop, midge activity is much lower, and they will not actively feed. Low temperatures also mean that the virus cannot replicate in the midge, so even if a midge does feed on an infected animal, the risk of transmission to another animal is very low. This is called a seasonally vector low period. As a result of the lower temperatures in January and February, the TCZs were lifted on 19 February 2024. However, positive high-risk animals will remain under restriction as well as premises in the former zones which have not yet been tested.

Infected animals where test results indicate older infection are not being culled. High-risk infected animals (e.g., entire males and pregnant females) will still be restricted at their current locations and other disease mitigation measures taken as appropriate.

To stay up to date with the latest situation visit: www.gov.uk/bluetongue or follow the QR code.



Useful information, including frequently asked questions and details of forthcoming bluetongue virus industry-led webinars, can also be found on the [Ruminant Health and Welfare Group's bluetongue virus hub](#).

Water abstraction – Irrigation prospects and abstraction licences



Irrigation prospects

The Environment Agency (EA) will publish their initial prospects for irrigation forecasts 2024 at the beginning of March. A copy of this document will be available on the [technical articles page](#) of the FAS website, when it is made public. With the generally wet conditions that have prevailed so far this

winter, initial prospects are good, reflecting ongoing refill of farm storage reservoirs and recharging of groundwater.

Abstraction licences

If you hold an abstraction licence that authorises abstraction during the winter and all year period (the authorised period of abstraction does not fall wholly

between 1 April and 31 October), the EA will ask you at the end of March 2024 to report your water abstraction return for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

You will need to submit your return by 28 April 2024.

You can submit your return online by registering with the EA's [online service](#).

If you already have an online account and have applied for and received a new licence, including a renewal of a licence which previously expired, since April 2023 you will need to link the new licence to your account. You can do this by accessing your account and selecting the 'add licence' option.

If a licence expired during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 (inclusive), a return may still be requested. To submit the return you will need to request a paper return form from the EA rather than submitting online.

Trees on Farms – Put Down Roots campaign

Defra's [Put Down Roots](#) campaign was featured in *Farmers Weekly* in February. The [promotional piece](#) presents two different farms and how they have used a grant scheme to generate additional income by planting trees on unproductive land.

Michael Flesher of Ghyll House Farm, near Ilkley in West Yorkshire, joined forces with his neighbour to apply for a regional woodland creation grant. They approached the White Rose Forest, their local community forest, for help. Michael shares his story of how the White Rose Forest team supported him throughout the process, from design right through to ongoing maintenance.

Like Michael, Vincent Hedley-Lewis at Birkholme Manor in Lincolnshire has planted an additional 3ha of trees, funded by the England Woodland Creation Offer. Again, he received advice and support along the way, and you can read how the scheme has helped generate income for his business.

Farmers and landowners like Michael and Vincent put questions to an expert panel in a recent tree planting webinar with *Farmers Weekly*. You can watch the webinar recording [here](#).



Countryside Stewardship 2024

Applications for CS Wildlife Offers, Mid Tier and Higher Tier are now closed and a rolling application window will open later in the year.

Many options previously only available through CS will also be available through the SFI from summer 2024.

Applications for capital grants opened on 3 January. Details are available on the [Capital Grants 2024 pages](#).



Updates from the Farming blog and industry announcements

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

Government underlines commitment to British farmers

Last week, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak addressed the NFU conference and announced further steps to back British farmers. This builds on the announcement made at the Oxford Farming Conference in January this year, where Defra announced the biggest update to farming schemes since the start of the agricultural transition. This included an average 10% increase to payment rates in SFI and CS mid-tier, and up to 50 new actions.

At the conference the PM underlined the government's commitment to deliver on its plan to support profitable farming businesses, improve food security and protect the British agriculture sector for generations to come. The government is:

- **Investing in sustainable, resilient farm businesses:**

- Doubling the Management Payment for the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) so those with existing agreements receive up to an extra £1,000 and extending it to Countryside Stewardship (CS) mid-tier for the first year of agreements starting by March 2025.
- Announcing the largest ever grant offer totalling £427m. This invests £220m in productivity and innovation in farming, £116m in slurry infrastructure, and £91m in improving the health and welfare of our farmed animals. The first of these schemes is an enhanced £70m round of the successful Farming Equipment and Technology Fund. The currently open Improving Farming Productivity Fund will also increase from £30m to £50m, and covers robotics, automation and rooftop solar to build on-farm energy security.

- **Ensuring our continued food security with an annual Food Security Index,** publishing the first one at the next UK Farm to Fork Summit this spring, which will become an annual event. The government will make the annual Index a statutory requirement when parliamentary time allows.

- **Improving the service and support being offered to farmers:** cutting planning red tape with permitted development rights to support farm diversification, investing in advice and improving government services.

- **Building fairness in the supply chain:** confirming next steps by laying the regulations for the dairy sector and announcing the next review for poultry.

For further information on the announcement please read the [Press Notice](#).

Updates from the Farming blog and industry announcements

New actions to support seabirds, wildlife and Net Zero

To coincide with the one year anniversary of the publication of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), the Government has announced a [package of measures](#) to continue to support the sustainable production of food and further halt and reverse the decline of nature in England.

On 31 January Defra announced the winners of the new [‘Water for Peat’ grants](#). These grants award more than £7 million to 35 projects to support sustainable farming and improve water management infrastructure on peat soils across England. These grants were established as part of government response to the independent [Lowland Agricultural Peat Task Force](#), published in June 2023.

Following the announcement in November that there will be a new National Park, the Government has now published [ambitious targets for Protected Landscapes](#). These targets will help National Parks and National Landscapes (the new name for AONBs) to deliver on their huge potential for nature, climate, people and place.

These actions will complement other initiatives, such as [Biodiversity Net Gain \(BNG\)](#), which went live on 12 February. This policy will create and improve natural habitats, which in turn will help the Government meet the target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. BNG requires new developments to be ‘nature positive’, by delivering at least a 10% net gain for nature.

Delinked payments transfer window is now open

The RPA is replacing the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) in England with delinked payments this year. The 2023 scheme year was the last year of BPS. Delinked payments will be paid each year from 2024 to 2027. The amount you receive will decrease each year as progressive reductions are applied. In November and December 2023, RPA sent out a ‘Delinked Payments Information Statement’ for you to check. This showed your reference amount, which will be used to calculate delinked payments each year if you’re eligible. This amount is based on the reference data held for you at that time.

Transferring reference data

On 15 February, transfers of delinked payments reference data opened. You can transfer some or all of your reference amount to another business in a 12-week transfer period, **until 11.59pm on 10 May 2024**. For example, you might want to do this if your business has merged, split or been given a new Single Business Identifier since BPS 2021. Read the [Delinked payments: replacing the Basic Payment Scheme](#) guidance for more information about transfers. Transfer requests can be made in the Rural Payments Service in most cases. See the RPA’s [‘how to’ guide](#) for how to do this.

Quicker results for farmers with expanded use of PCR testing for bTB

The Animal and Plant Agency (APHA) have now expanded the use of rapid PCR testing of post-mortem tissue samples from animals with suspected bovine TB infection, following the success of its initial rollout in bovine TB slaughterhouse cases and all samples from non-bovine animals. The new method reduces the time taken for APHA laboratories to report results to livestock keepers from up to 22 weeks to approximately three weeks.

For farmers, this new tool will reduce time spent waiting for results to be delivered and provide earlier certainty about the presence of bovine TB in their herd. Timely and reliable testing is essential in halting the spread of this disease in animals, and it is a significant step forward that the initial rollout of the M. bovis PCR test has delivered a marked reduction in the laboratory turnaround time.

APHA have expanded the routine use of the PCR test in England, Wales and Scotland to all post-mortem tissue samples taken from cattle, farmed buffalo and bison that are removed as tuberculin skin test reactors, TB blood test positives, direct contacts or inconclusive reactors. Most PCR test-positive samples will then undergo culture for strain typing of the bacterium, but this will not delay the reporting of PCR test results.

For a small proportion of samples the PCR test may not produce a definitive result. When this occurs, livestock keepers will be informed that additional testing could take up to nine weeks.

This development will boost APHA in delivering its role, working with vets and farmers to detect diseases on farms. Read more about the new PCR test [here](#).

Stay up to date with us



Get the latest updates by following us on X (formerly 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 and enter your email address into the newsletter sign-up box.

Alternatively, please email 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/.