

Rural Insight

April 2026



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English Update

Farming Equipment and Technology Fund (FETF) 2026

Applications for the FETF 2026 opened on the **17th of March** with grants of up to £25,000 available. Themes are the same as last year, Productivity, Animal Health and Welfare and Slurry Management. You can only submit one application per theme. The uplift scoring that was in place last year has been removed. The deadline for applications is **midday on 28th April**.

Countryside Stewardship (CS) and Environmental Stewardship (ES)

You can now submit your 2026 revenue claim for Countryside Stewardship (CS) or Environmental Stewardship (ES). Claims must be submitted by 11:59pm on Friday 15th May. Any claims submitted after this date will be subject to reductions.

Capital grants

A new round of capital grants will be opened in **July**. £225 million is available under the Capital Grants offer to help cover the cost of one-off investments on farms. Funding limits will continue as per previous rounds with a maximum of £25,000 for the water quality, air quality, and natural flood management and £35,000 for the boundaries, trees and orchards.

Making Tax Digital

Making Tax Digital (MTD) for Income Tax goes live on 6 April 2026 for sole traders and landlords with a turnover of over £50K.

Payments to reduce fertiliser use

The Soil Association Exchange Market is a funding scheme for arable farmers, paying for practical changes that reduce emissions - most commonly through fertiliser use, where both costs and emissions are highest.

What's on offer?

- £60 per tonne of CO₂e reduced
- Typically, £1,500–£8,500 per 100ha (2026)
- 50% paid upfront to support cashflow
- Simple 12-month agreement
- No carbon credit selling

How it works

You decide what changes to make on your farm. For many, that starts with reducing or optimising nitrogen use, but it could also include other approaches you've been considering. It will also pay for fuel usage reductions. Payments are based on the emissions you reduce, with support from the Exchange advisory team to help build a plan that fits your rotation and system. Go to www.soilassociationexchange.com/funding-for-farmers and complete the 5-minute eligibility checker.

Bonus opportunity (Oilseed Rape growers)

If you grow OSR, you may also be eligible for a fully funded whole-farm environmental assessment, including soil sampling and biodiversity surveys. Places are limited.



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For more information:

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Stewardship option guidance

AB1 / AHL1 / CAHL1 - Pollen & Nectar flower mix

Plots should now be grazed / cut. It may be worth rolling them to encourage growth.

AB5 / CAB5 - Nesting plots for lapwing and stone curler

Plots should now be cultivated. If natural regeneration covers more than 70% of the plot, then you can spray off before the end of April to restore bare ground.

AB8 / IPM2 / CIPM2 – Flower-rich grass margins, blocks or in-field strips

Areas should now be cut and may benefit from rolling to encourage growth.

AB9 / AHL2 / CAHL2 – Winter Bird Food

Winter bird food plots can be returned to the rotation / destroyed. This is a tough month for farmland birds so the longer they are left, the more environment benefit they are delivering.

AB10 / AHW9 / CAHW9 – Unharvested cereal headland

Unharvested cereal headlands need to be established between February and April.

AB11 / AHW11 / CAHW11 – Cultivated areas for arable plants

For spring germination, cultivations must be completed by the end of April. Areas need to be up to 6m wide to allow natural regeneration of arable plants.

AB12 / AHW2 / CAHW2 Supplementary winter bird food

Supplementary feeding needs to continue throughout February, until 30th of April. Remember to keep your invoices and a diary of when, where and how much you feed.

AB14 / AHW10 / CAHW10 – Low input harvested cereal crop

Low input cereal crops need to be established by the end of April.

AB15 / NUM3 / CNUM3 – Legume Fallow

Cutting between March and mid-June can help to control annual grassweeds such as Blackgrass. Rolling may encourage growth.

Compliance

Hedges – No cutting from 1st March

You must not cut or trim a hedgerow on or next to land used for agriculture until the 31st of August. As a reminder you should also have a 2-meter buffer strip from the centre of the hedge that is not cultivated or any fertiliser or pesticides applied on it.

NVZ Compliance

If your farm / land is located within a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ), by the 30th of April each year you must make a record of:

- Area of your holding in hectares
- Numbers of livestock kept on your holding from previous year
- Type of animal and number of days each animal spent on your holding, including if kept in a building or on hard standing.
- Calculation of the amount of nitrogen produced by livestock.
- Dates (start and end) and locations of any field sites you use for storing solid manure.

These records need to be kept for 5 years.

If you need any help with environmental scheme management or compliance, please get in touch with your local rural consultant.

Scottish Update

BPS Payments

Mairi Gougeon, Scottish Rural Affairs Secretary, has confirmed BPS and Greening payments will be made to Scottish farmers from early September this year. The announcement that 2026 payments will be made as early as possible comes as the application window for the Single Application Form (SAF) opens for farmers and crofters in Scotland. It will close on the usual **15th of May**. Scottish farmers have experienced the least change in support payments in the UK and payment rates are expected to be similar to those received in 2025.

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) 2026

The AECS 2026 opened on the 23rd of February for Agri-environment, irrigation lagoons and organics applications. The application window is open until the **20th of June 2026**. If you are applying for the stand-alone organic application, then you have until the 31st of July 2026.

Scottish Agricultural Wages Order 2026

From 1 April 2026, the new Scottish Agricultural Wages Order (SAWO) comes into force. As a summary:

- The minimum hourly rate sees a 4.1% uplift to £12.71,
- The apprentice rate rises to £8.00,
- The additional sum increases to £1.91,
- Dog allowance jumps by 12% to £11.18,
- From 6 April, Statutory Sick Pay becomes a day one right. However, Agriculture Sick Pay continues to apply only after 52 weeks of employment, and only from day 4 of illness.

Compliance

Muirburn

The 2025 / 2026 Muirburn season finished on the 31st of March 2026. From 2026 onwards, the season will change to 15 September – 31 March.

Reminder of the EFA Key changes

Significant changes to Scotland's greening rules came into effect from 1 of January 2026.

The changes are summarised below:

- Removal of grassland exemptions. Previous exemptions for farms with over 75% grassland or temporary grass have been removed.
- 5% EFA requirement applies to all holdings with more than 15 hectares of arable land and/or temporary grassland. This requirement is set to increase to 7% of arable land by 2027.
- By 2026, fallow land must feature a diverse mixture, including at least three flowering species.
- New rules prohibit cutting or trimming hedges between March 1st and December 1st.
- Allowed gaps in hedges are restricted to 5 meters.
- For Nitrogen-Fixing crops the requirements now include establishing a minimum of two separate nitrogen-fixing crops.
- Application of fertiliser or manure on EFAs is prohibited to help reduce emissions.
- While an EFA map no longer needs to be submitted with the Single Application Form (SAF), an up-to-date map must be available for inspection.
- 4 new options have been introduced including:
 - Low input grassland
 - Herb-rich pastures
 - Unharvested crop
 - Agroforestry

If you need any help or further information, please contact Lewis Butlin or Sara Barrett.

Welsh Update

Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)

The Single Application Form (SAF) window is now open and closes on **15th of May 2026**. Applications to either the BPS or the Universal Layer of the new SFS can be completed via the SAF. As a reminder, BPS is being phased out and will be fully concluded by 2029. In 2026, the SFS begins so the BPS will be reduced by 40%. Once moved to the SFS, farmers cannot revert back to BPS.

SFS Optional and Collaborative themes

The Welsh Government has grouped the Optional actions into different 'Categories'. These often closely cover the same sort of activities as previous grant schemes. Some will only be available to farmers who are participating in the Universal Layer, whilst others will be open to all. An example of optional layers include:

- *capital: production and efficiency* - grants of £500 to £15,000 at a 40% grant rate. Open to all. It will fund items such as livestock handling, precision application, biosecurity, soil and water management.
- *infrastructure and equipment* - grants of between £12,000 and £50,000 at a 40% grant rate. Open to all. Covers items such as slurry storage/ covers, precision manure spreading, chemicals & fuel storage.

Whilst there is less detail released on the collaborative actions, they will operate in three areas in 2026:

- innovation, research and development,
- collaborative market and supply-chain,
- collaborative landscape scale activity.

Ffermio Bro

It has been confirmed that £6.5m will be available in 2026-2028 under the Ffermio Bro scheme. The scheme launched last May (2025) with funding available via Designated Landscape (DL) bodies across National Parks and National Landscapes in Wales, to support nature recovery in these areas. The Welsh Government has confirmed £5.5m will go directly to farmers to carry out on-farm projects.

Welsh Agricultural Loan Scheme

The Welsh Government has given details of an Agricultural Loan scheme being introduced later this year. The Sustainable Agriculture Loan Scheme (SALS) will offer incentivised loans to help small and medium-sized farms invest in energy efficiency, waste management, and productivity improvements. The funding package will include the following:

- 3% fixed interest rate loan
- loans of between £25,000 and £1 million per project
- up to 15-year repayment term
- 6-month upfront repayment holiday
- seasonal payment options are also being considered.

Eligible investments include:

- renewable energy generation for on-farm use
- energy efficiency and storage
- waste and nutrient management
- farm infrastructure and assets – including equipment, processing and storage

The new loan scheme will be launched by the Welsh Government and delivered by the Development Bank of Wales 'later this year'. Up to £5 million will be available during the 2026/27 financial year, with the potential to extend the scheme depending on demand.

Farming Connect launches FARMDATA+

An interactive benchmarking tool that enables farmers to measure farm-specific performance indicators (KPIs) and compare their own financial and technical results with similar farms is being rolled out by Farming Connect and will be available for use on April 1st 2026.

If you need any help or further information, please contact Phil Edenborough or Erin Forsyth.