

Rural Insight

February 2026



English Update

Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026

DEFRA have announced the new Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) offer will launch this year. There will be 2 application windows with budgets set for both:

- June
 - Small farms.
 - Those without existing environmental land management agreements.
- September
 - All farmers.

More information will be released before the first application window opens in June.

Countryside Stewardship, Environmental Stewardship and Higher-Level Stewardship Payments

The payment window opened on the 1st of December 2025 and is open until June. 85% of the payments have already made. The RPA will be making partial payments to some customers who are waiting for their CS 2025 claim payment. If you're eligible for a partial payment, they'll email you and pay 75% of your total claim value. The remaining 25% will be paid by June, once your claim is fully processed.

Farm Profitability Review by Minette Batters

In response to Baroness Batters' Farming Profitability Review a new Farming and Food Partnership Board will be established with farmers at its core to enable partnership development of policy that will be stable at least to the end of this Government.

Compliance

Farming Rules for Water

There are no closed periods for FYM spreading but remember manures should not be spread if the land is flooded, waterlogged, snow covered or frozen for more than 12 hours in the previous 24 hours.

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.



Created by Abbie Allen-Webb

For more information:

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Stewardship option guidance



AB1 / AHL1 / CAHL1 - Pollen & Nectar flower mix

You have until 15th of March to graze or 30th of March to cut your nectar flower plots. If you don't have the equipment to cut and remove, wait until a dry, frosty day and cut very steadily with a flail mower.

CAB2 / AB2 / AHW6 / CAHW6 – Basic overwintered stubbles

Areas in overwintered stubbles can be returned to the farm rotation from the 15th of February.

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

February and March are good months to flail your flower-rich grass margins.

AB9 / AHL2 / CAHL2 – Winter Bird Food

Winter bird food plots need to be in place until at least mid-February. This is the toughest month for farmland birds so please avoid destroying these plots until mid-March where possible.

AB10 / AHW9 / CAHW9 – Unharvested cereal headland

Unharvested cereal headlands can be destroyed from the 15th of February. New plots need to be established between February and April.

AB11 / AHW11 / CAHW11 – Cultivated areas for arable plants

For spring germination, cultivate between February and mid-April areas 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.

HS1 / HS8 / HEF1 / HEF2 Weatherproof buildings

It is a good time to clear out gutters and check roofs, and traditional farm buildings are weatherproof.

BE3 / HRW2 / CHRW2 Hedgerow Management

You can now cut your hedges until 28th of February.

- If you are on a one in two years cutting regime, you can now cut half of your hedgerows.

Hedges and Tree planting

If you are planning on planting any new hedges or gapping up existing hedgerows or planting new woodlands this is a good time to start this work. The Woodland Trust currently has the MOREhedges grant available subsidising up to 75% of the cost if you plant more than 100 meters of new hedging.

To help protect and ensure the best establishment of new trees and hedgerows, Agrovista Amenity offers sustainable alternative tree guards the Tree Hugger or the Whiptec Bio. Both are 100% biodegradable and protect against grazing animals.

SW6 / SAM2 / CSAM2 – Multi-species winter cover crop

Over winter cover crops should be in place until late winter (end of February). If you haven't started, now would be a good time to start planning destruction. You can destroy your cover crop 6 weeks prior to spring drilling. On heavy soils in particular, plants residue can sit and lay wet, taking a longer time to break down and potentially cause issues when it comes to drilling your spring crop.

Compliance

It is a good time of year to take photos of options in each field as evidence such as winter bird food plots, winter bird food on improved grassland, over winter stubbles, cover crops and companion crops.

Scottish Update

Farm Advisory Service Applications Suspended

Due to exceptionally high interest, FAS has temporarily closed the applications for one-to-one advice services for the Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP), Specialist Advice and Mentoring support. Applications which have been submitted and accepted will continue, and they hope to reopen again in April 2026.

Preparing for Sustainable Farming (PSF) claims.

All claims for PSF options including Carbon Audits, Soil Sampling and Analysis, and Animal Health and Welfare Interventions completed in 2025, need to be submitted by the 28th of February 2026. Any late claims will not be eligible for payment. You need to submit all supporting documentation with the claim.

For carbon audits:

- Completion date.
- Name of company or adviser who completed it.
- Farm Business Adviser Accreditation Scheme for Scotland registration number.
- Carbon emissions result in kg of CO₂e or T of CO₂e.

For soil sampling and analysis:

- Date of your last Carbon Audit.
- Analysis for every field sampled and any fertiliser recommendations.
- Date of testing and Company details of analysis supplier.
- Proof of payment (bank statement) and invoice(s).

For Animal Health and Welfare Interventions:

- Date of intervention.
- Written proof of investigation plus action, provided on the standard supporting document signed by an Expert Adviser.

Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) 2026

The AECS 2026 will be opening from 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.

Budget update

The latest budget is set to provide over £660 million for farming, crofting, and land management. The Scottish Government claim the budget reflects a focus on a “transition” towards a new support framework, aiming to balance food production with environmental goals.

Highlights from the budget:

- £540 million maintained for direct support to provide stability for farmers and crofters.
- £170.5 million allocated to Agri-Environment and Climate Change Scheme (AECS) and the Agricultural Reform Programme, focusing on reducing emissions.
- An additional £26 million is provided for the Agricultural Modernisation Fund, with £1.3 million targeted at skills development for regenerative farming.
- £4.4 million is allocated for Crofting Agricultural Grant schemes.
- £28 million for peatland restoration (10,000 hectares).
- £37 million for woodland creation.

Scottish Update cont...

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

Transition from Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) to Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)

The 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%.

Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)

The SFS scheme launched on the 1st of January replacing the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) as the primary support for farmers. It is designed for sustainability and food production, it includes mandatory 10% habitat management and 10% tree canopy, along with universal actions on soil, health, and welfare.

The SFS scheme has 3 levels available:

- Universal – actions all farmers must do. Farmers must complete 12 actions to receive the baseline payment.
- Optional – extra payments for additional actions.
- Collaborative – group projects.

All farmers are eligible to apply via the Single Application Form (SAF) on the Rural Payments Wales online portal. Applications are open from 2nd of March until the 15th of May 2026.

Closing date for Small Grants

- 19th of February – Environment
- 20th of February - Woodland Restoration Scheme
- 27th of February – Efficiency

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