

Rural Insight

September 2026



Grazing and foraging derogations

Defra has introduced temporary adjustments to some SFI, CS and HLS options due to the prolonged hot and dry weather. If you undertake any of the temporary adjustments, you must complete a Temporary Adjustments form and keep it for your records. You do not need to return the completed form to the RPA but need to supply it if they ask for it.

A list of some of the adjustments include:

- You can cut or graze the following options for your own use or shared with the wider community — **not cut for profit:**
 - Grass buffer strips
 - Field corners/blocks
 - Buffer areas around in-field ponds
 - Protected in-field tree areas
 - Flower-rich grass areas
 - Pollen and nectar mixes
 - Unharvested cereal headlands
 - Some grassland corners
 - Winter bird-food areas
 - Legume fallow
 - Organic multi-species leys
- For the bumble bee, pollen and nectar, flower rich grass plots, winter bird food, flower-rich grass, legume fallow and over winter cover crops you can sow the mix up until and including the 30th September 2026.
- You can graze the AB13 fodder crop from 15th August.
- You can sow up to 5 ha per 10 ha (50%) of forage crops and graze it until 14th Feb 2027 on basic overwinter stubble.
- You can supplementary feed on very low input grassland.

English Update

Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026

On the 22nd September, window 2 is expected to open for all eligible farm businesses. The budget allocation for window 2 has increased by £50 million to £230 million and notification of budget allocation will be at 25%, 50% and 75%. If you have an SFI agreement ending before the 28th February 2027 or Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier agreement ending in 2026 you can apply in this window before your agreement has expired.

Capital grants 2026

Capital grants opened on the 30th July and has now closed. Approximately 17,000 applications were submitted, and the RPA are now starting to process them. Due to the high volume of applications received, it's likely that agreement offers will continue to be issued throughout the remainder of the year.

DEFRA Drought Package

Announced 14 August 2026, the package makes £65 million of additional support available to English farmers, funded by reprioritising Defra's farming budget. It includes:

- £50m extra to the for SFI 2026 budget.
- Temporary flexibility in environmental schemes - specifically to allow drought affected farmers to use certain habitat areas for grazing or cutting for forage while retaining their environmental payments.
- Measures to make on-farm reservoirs easier to build, including planning changes.
- Changes to make it easier to share/transfer water between holdings during shortages.

Delinked Payments 2026

Delinked payments capped at £600 per business have started to be paid to eligible customers.

Stewardship option guidance

AB1 / AHL1 / CAHL1 Nectar Flower Mix

Can be grazed from the 1st September and the entire area should be cut between 15th September and 30th March, removing or shredding cuttings.

AB5 Nesting plots for lapwing and stone curlew

From the 1st August these plots can be sprayed off, cultivated and sown with mustard/turnips to provide extra partridge holding cover.

AB6 / AHW7 / CAHW7 Enhanced overwinter stubble

From the 1st August these areas can be sprayed off and returned to the crop rotation from the 15th August.

AB8 / IPM2 / CIPM2 Flower rich margins and plots

Cut (and remove if dense) or graze 90% of the area between 15th August and 31st October to leave a plant height of between 10cm and 20cm. Leave 10% of the area uncut or ungrazed. If you are establishing a flower rich mix for the first time, we strongly suggest sowing before the middle of September.

AB11 / AHW11 / CAHW11 Cultivated areas for arable plants

Can be cultivated from 1st September.

AB15 / NUM3 / CNUM3

Establish legume fallow mixes as soon as possible, ideally by the end of August.

AB16 / AHW1 / CAHW1 Bumble bird mix

Establish mixes as soon as possible, ideally by the end of August but need to be sown by 15th September.

IGL2 / CIGL2 Winter bird food on improved grassland

Do not graze or cut the grass from September until March so that the grass is left to go to seed.

SOH3 – Multi-species summer sown cover crop

A multi-species cover crop with at least 4 species, 2 from 2 or more different plant families must be established by the end of August. These need to stay in place until the next cash crop is drilled.

SAM2 / CSAM2 / SW6 Overwinter Cover crops

Cover crops under SW6 should be established by 15th September. Cover crop mixes need to be at least 2 species. If you need any seed, please get in touch.

IPM3 / CIPM3 Companion Crop

In preparation for Autumn drilling approaching, you should start planning companion crop species, seed rates and pesticide compatibility. If you need any seed, please get in touch with your agronomist.

WD3 / AHW12 / CAHW12 Woodland edges on arable land

Can be cut to maintain scrub and grass mosaic and to control injurious weeds. No more than one-third cut in any one year.

BE3 / HRW2 / CHRW2 Hedgerow Management

You can now cut your hedges until 28th February. You can either cut:

- If on a three-year cutting regime – cut a third of the length in this option.
- If you have gone for the two-year cutting regime then you cannot cut until 1st January.
- Or if under the SFI, cut the hedges incrementally on an annual basis.

Please refer to any recent derogations for these options. If you need any help with environmental scheme compliance, please get in touch with your local rural consultant.

Scottish Update

Farming Advice Service Funding

Funding for specialist advice through the Farming Advice Service has been closed.

Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme

The 2026 Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme (SUSSS) is now open for applications. This scheme provides additional support, on top of the Basic Payment Scheme, to sheep producers who farm in Scotland's rough grazing areas. The application window will close at midnight Monday 30 November 2026.

Future Farming Investment Scheme (FFIS)

The next round of the Future Farming Investment Scheme (FFIS) will have funding of £14.25m. This scheme provides capital grants for Scottish farmers to invest in improving soil quality, creating hedgerows, upgrading livestock management infrastructure etc. The scheme is due to open towards the end of this year – the date is still to be confirmed. There have been some rule changes since the first round, in response to feedback. The standard grant rate will be 50% instead of the 100% under Round 1. This is to spread the funds more widely – around half of the applicants to Round 1 did not receive funding. In addition, a list of items that will be eligible will be published prior to applications opening. There should also be clearer guidance on the scoring criteria for applications. Items delivering an environmental benefit may still be funded at 100%. There will also be higher grant rates for New Entrants (80%) and those in the Highlands and Islands (60%).

Preparing for Sustainable Farming (PSF) scheme

Since the PSF scheme finished at the end of 2025, there is no indication that there is going to be any further funding for soil sampling at the moment. By the **15th May 2028** farms will need to have all their Region 1 fields sampled within the previous 5 years. As harvest approaches and we start to look ahead at cropping for 2027, it is also a great time to see which fields still need to be soil sampled. Get in touch with your agronomist, precision specialist or rural consultant to discuss options available to you.

Grain sampling for Phosphorus

There are areas across Scotland that are seeing increasing levels of Phosphates within their soils. Harvest is a great time of year to check whether these high phosphates are available to growing crops. Taking a grain sample from each field that is high in Phosphates and having it analysed will show whether the grain and therefore the plant is able to extract this Phosphate from the soil. Talk with your Agronomist now to discuss options before the combines start rolling.

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

Welsh Update

Welsh Drought Measure

The Welsh Government has announced a relaxation of the rules under the Growing for the Environment Scheme due to drought conditions. The sowing deadline for 'mixed ley', 'red clover' and 'lucerne' options has been extended to the 15th September from the 31st August. Farmers who still cannot plant by the 15th September should contact RPW to request a case-by-case extension.

SFS Grant Scheme

The Welsh Government has provided opening dates for some of the Optional categories under the SFS.

- Small Woodland Creation Grants Scheme – opened from 20th July to 23rd October.
- Capital: Production and Efficiency – applications can be made from 28th July. Grants of between £500 to £15,000 at a 40% grant rate will be available to fund items in areas such as livestock handling, EID, precision application, biosecurity, soil management, grain processing, water management, computers & IT.
- Organic Conversion – open for applications from 29th July to 9th September for conversion to organic. This is a 5-year agreement, but payments are only made for the first two years (it is possible to apply for the organic farming support payments from the third year). The scheme will be similar to the previous organic support.

Other grants are due to open later in the year.

- Small Infrastructure – September 2026
- Infrastructure and Equipment – October 2026
- Designated Sites (only those in Universal Layer) – November 2026
- Temporary Habitat Creation – November 2026
- Capital: Environment – November 2026.

Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)

A three-year funding commitment has been given to the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). It is designed to provide more certainty for Welsh farmers. There will be £340m for the SFS for each of the years 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30. Funding will be split so that £238m per year goes to the Universal layer and £102 million to the Optional and Collaborative Layers.

If you have applied for the Universal Layer of the SFS, you need to make sure you are progressing all the Universal Actions (UAs) which are applicable to you by the end of the year. You will need to confirm on the SFS Universal Dashboard by 15th January 2027 that you have met the requirements for the Universal Actions.

As a reminder, we can help with the following universal actions:

- UA1 Soil health
- UA2 – Integrated Pest Management
- UA10 – Tree and Hedgerow planting opportunity plan
- UA11 – Historic Environment

If you need any help with SFS compliance then please contact your agronomist, precision specialist or Phil Edenborough.