



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 January Newsletter [by clicking this link.](#)

Registration now open for our next webinar: **Discussing the farming offer in 2024, with Amelia Rome and Fraser Hugill**
Wednesday 21 February 6-7:30pm

January 2024 – Issue 95

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Key dates to be aware of...

- 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](#))

In case you missed them...

- 16 January** For any land located in a NVZ, this is the date from which you can apply **manufactured nitrogen fertilisers** to **grassland and tillage land** if conditions are suitable. This is subject to compliance with the [Farming Rules for Water](#) and there is agronomic justification. ([NVZ Guidance](#))
- 31 December (midnight)** Cross compliance, which farmers and land managers must follow if they claim certain rural payments, ends in England on 31 December 2023; however, farming and land management regulations still apply. The rules farmers and land managers must follow can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

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

Upcoming grant deadlines

- 14 February** [Farming Innovation Programme – Research Starter](#) competition deadline for applications is midday (12pm) on 14 February 2024.
- 16 February** [Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund](#) grant deadline for applications is midday (12pm) on 16 February 2024.
- 13 March** [Farming Innovation Programme: Large R&D partnerships Round 3](#) 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

- [Countryside Stewardship Capital Grant 2024](#)
- [Countryside Stewardship 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 \(PA2\)](#)



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.

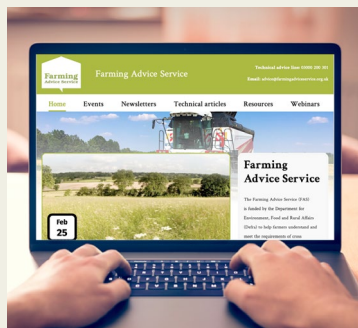
Contacting the advice line

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 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](#), 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 Farming Resilience Fund and Nutrient Management, are also available on the [FAS website](#) and Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

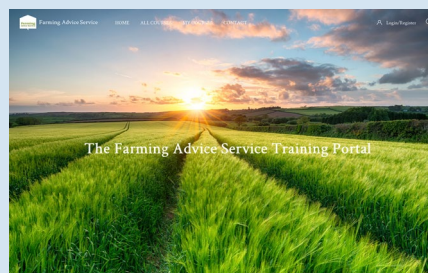
Technical articles available on the FAS website

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

- [Nutrient management and the Farming Rules for Water](#)
- [Reducing agricultural emissions of ammonia](#)
- [Supporting farmers to become resilient](#)



FAS online training portal



The FAS online training portal is available to anyone who wishes to [register](#), with modules on the following topics:

- Net Zero emissions in agriculture
- Farming Rules for Water
- Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs)

Registrants qualify for two BASIS CPD points for completing each end-of-module quiz.

Agricultural Transition – January update

On 4 January 2024, the Secretary of State, announced an update to Defra's [Agricultural Transition Plan](#). The update detailed the following actions that Defra will be taking in 2024:

- To ensure there is something for every farm regardless of where they are and whether they own or rent their land, Defra will be adding approximately 50 new actions across the Environmental Land Management Scheme from summer 2024. A full list of actions can be found in the [technical annex](#) of the Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024
- Increasing payments, on average by 10%, across the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship (CS). Any uplifts to existing agreements will automatically be applied where applicable
- Paying more consistently for both creation and maintenance actions to ensure that those who have already made changes are not disadvantaged
- Continuing to make schemes more flexible so all types, sizes and locations of farmers can make them work in their businesses
- Making targeted improvements (e.g. for more upland, tenant and smaller farmers)
- Improving their services (e.g., the SFI and CS Mid-Tier application will be streamlined into a single application to make it easier for the schemes to slot seamlessly into your farming business)
- Continuing to make regulatory services clearer, fairer and more effective by prioritising an 'advise and prevent' approach across schemes and regulations
- Introducing premium payment actions with the biggest environmental impact. These payment rates will be introduced this year for the 21 high priority actions listed in [Annex 4](#)
- Equalising lowland and upland payment rates. These actions can be found in [Annex 3](#)

Countryside Stewardship 2024

Applications for Countryside Stewardship 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 Countryside Stewardship will also be available through the SFI from summer 2024. Applications for Countryside Stewardship Capital Grants opened on January 3rd; details available on the [Capital Grants 2024 pages](#).

On 26 January 2024, the Farming and Countryside Programme Director Janet Hughes, SFI policy lead Jonathan Marsden and colleagues from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) held a webinar for farmers to explain the actions and payments available through the environmental land management schemes in 2024. **The webinar recording can be found [here](#).**

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) advice on better slurry management

Good slurry management can improve farm efficiency and reduce impacts on the local environment.

If you are interested in improving slurry management on your farm, please contact your local Catchment Sensitive Farming Adviser (CSFA) by **14 February 2024**. **Your local CSFA** can offer advice on slurry management. CSF may also offer you a free advice visit or signpost you to other help available locally. This advice is optional and not a condition for securing grants. CSFAs are available to provide support for farmers and land managers to improve the quality of air, water and flood management through the Agricultural Transition. Find contact details for your local CSFA [here](#).



Need extra support?

We understand that it can be difficult to keep up to date with all the changes affecting the farming industry at the moment, and that the amount of information available can be daunting. The [FAS](#) is here to help and you can also find the most up-to-date information on grants and payments at [GOV.UK](#).

If you are feeling overwhelmed and are not sure where to turn, the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution ([RABI](#)) and the Farming Community Network ([FCN](#)) offer support services by email and phone. A range of other organisations also offer complementary forms of support for the farming community; [click here](#) to view support organisations by topic.

The FCN receives between 100 and 150 calls from farmers each month, and they have now produced an article highlighting the learnings from these calls. For information on their top 10 observations from these calls, please [click here](#).

Sustainable Farming Incentive update

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) rewards farmers for farming practices that help produce food sustainably and protect the environment. You can read the full list of reasons to apply and what SFI can offer you on [Defra's dedicated SFI campaign page](#).

As part of the agricultural transition, Defra will be taking the following actions to update SFI:

- Increase payment rates by 10% for the average value of scheme agreements
- Offer more SFI actions, available in Summer 2024, to better reflect the full spectrum of farming interest. Further detail on these new actions will be available in the coming months
- Once in the SFI scheme, you can add more into your agreements at the annual review point and can have additional agreements if you wish outside of that cycle
- The RPA has launched a new digital service (replacing the eRLE1 form) for customers to notify Defra of mapping changes called Rural Land Changes. This online service will mean the RPA can update the land quicker, and you can begin your application for SFI sooner. You can find the guidance for the new online

service and the link to the RLE1 form (which is still available) on the [Make changes to your rural land maps online or get an RLE1 form](#) page. Applicants should aim to resolve any required mapping changes for their land before they begin their SFI application to ensure their holding data is correct. It can be a good idea to review the SFI information to make sure no mapping changes are required before beginning your SFI application

For further details on the SFI announcement please read the post on [Defra's Farming blog](#). Following this post, Defra has published a [series of blog posts](#) regarding specific sectors to highlight the offer for farmers and help them understand what this means for their farm.



Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Agriculture) regulations: improved guidance on getting permission to make changes to your land

Improved guidance on [Changing uncultivated, semi-natural and rural land](#) has been produced and is effective immediately. The guidance is split into three stages:

- Check if you need a screening decision
- Apply for a screening decision
- Apply for a consent decision.

This will help you more easily meet the requirements of EIA (Agriculture) regulations.

Guidance on permission to make changes to your land

EIA (Agriculture) regulations protect land in England from damage caused by changes in agricultural activities and restructuring rural land. They apply to anyone who wants to change the use of uncultivated, semi-natural or rural land.

Although the **rules have not changed**, the guidance will make it clearer:

- When you need to apply for permission to make changes to your land
- What stages you need to go through

New online forms have also been produced so that:

- All the information that you need to submit to apply for a screening decision is now collected in a single application form
- Paper forms for scoping and consent decisions that were only available by request are now on GOV.UK as part of the EIA guidance
- Standardised consultation request forms are available for all projects
- Information needed to make decisions can be collected more quickly

If you have existing EIA forms saved to your device, please discard these and use the new forms.

Type of land protected

EIA regulations protect land from damage by:

- Increasing productivity
- Physically changing field boundaries
- Moving, removing or adding materials

The types of land protected are:

- Uncultivated land – land that has not been cultivated in the past 15 years by physical means (for example ploughing or an activity that breaks the soil surface) or by chemical means (for example adding organic or inorganic fertiliser or soil improvers)
- Semi-natural land, including priority habitats, heritage or archaeological features, or protected landscapes

Cross compliance

You will still need to comply with EIA regulations following the end of cross compliance on 31 December 2023.

Environmental land management schemes

Your land management practices may change when entering or leaving an environmental land management scheme, such as Environmental Stewardship and the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI). If you propose to change the use of uncultivated, semi-natural or rural land, check [when you need permission](#) to do so.

Contact Natural England

If you need more information, please contact:
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Agriculture) Unit
Email: eia.england@naturalengland.org.uk
Freephone: 0800 028 2140



Recent rise in Schmallerberg virus infection causing birth defects in lambs and calves

In sheep, goats and cattle, Schmallerberg virus (SBV) is most commonly associated with malformed animals born alive or dead at term, or aborted, following infection of the dam. Malformations observed externally include bent limbs, fixed joints (arthrogryposis), and deformities of the spine or jaw. This may involve all limbs and spine, or only some limbs or joints. Postmortem examination may detect brain deformities and abnormalities of the spinal cord.

The virus can cause acute clinical disease in adult cattle, presenting as fever, reduced milk yield, inappetence, loss of body condition, and diarrhoea. Adult sheep and goats are unlikely to show signs of clinical disease. The virus was first identified in Germany and Belgium in 2011 and spread to the UK in 2012 via infected windblown midges. Following infection, animals usually develop immunity. This results in peaks and troughs of disease incidents, with the disease “disappearing” for 4–5 years, and then peaking again once immunity has waned. Peaks were recorded in 2017, and again at the end of 2023 and early 2024.

Malformed lambs and calves may lead to lambing or calving difficulties, and farmers are advised to contact their veterinarian, as a caesarean may be required. Lambs or calves delivered alive with severe malformations must be euthanised for welfare reasons.

Between 1 December 2023 and 16 January 2024, a total of 63 cases, where SBV infection of the dam was suspected, were submitted to the Animal & Plant Health and Welfare Agency (APHA). To date, 10 of these have been confirmed as SBV on laboratory testing. All were malformed and stillborn, and the majority were lambs. These cases have been confirmed in the following counties: Worcestershire, North Somerset & South Gloucester, Dorset, Devon, Herefordshire, and Oxfordshire. In one confirmed case, 12 from

30 synchronised ewes had deformed lambs born at the end of December.

Early lambing flocks and spring calving herds are more likely to be affected, as they would have been pregnant at the risk period in autumn. The midges that spread the infection are most abundant and active in late summer and autumn. During the autumn, APHA also received reports of acute disease in cattle (milk drop and malaise), as well as poor fertility in sheep flocks.

The advice from APHA is not to assume a malformed lamb or calf is due to SBV, but to get the case investigated and the cause confirmed. Malformations can be caused by a number of other diseases, including congenital swayback, Border Disease and even Bluetongue, so please contact your veterinarian to discuss investigation and diagnosis. **APHA currently offers free testing for Schmallerberg disease.**

Vaccines were available after the initial outbreak, but none are currently commercially available in the UK. Postponing mating until later in the season (for sheep flocks) is the most practical solution for minimising Schmallerberg risk, however midge numbers may remain high until late autumn with the current warmer weather patterns.

Further information on the disease can be found on the [National Animal Disease Information Service website](#).



Trees on Farms

New Agroforestry Payments & Tree Planting Webinar

New agroforestry payments have been announced under Environmental Land Management

As part of the Agricultural Transition Plan update, the government has announced that around 50 new actions will be added to Environmental Land Management schemes from summer 2024. Six of these new actions are focused on in-field agroforestry.

Agroforestry is the integration of trees into the farmed landscape, including productive areas of farms while maintaining the farm's main agricultural output.

There are two key types of in-field agroforestry systems listed below, although the arrangements and densities of trees delivering agroforestry benefits is flexible, to allow you to decide what is best for your own circumstances.

- **Silvoarable:** where trees are planted at wide spacings and intercropped with cereal, horticultural or other crops; and
- **Silvopastoral:** where trees are combined with forage grassland and livestock production

Planting trees as part of agroforestry systems can allow farmers to access environmental benefits of trees that improve the resilience of their farm business and enhance food production potential.

Key benefits can include:

- Provide additional sources of income
- Make existing income streams from farmland more profitable
- Support biodiversity and species abundance
- Capture and store carbon
- Increase resilience to climate change

- Provide shade/shelter for livestock and crops
- Improve air quality
- Increase flood resilience
- Improve water quality

The agroforestry and tree planting schemes are designed to work with food production. Defra and the Forestry Commission want to ensure that the right tree is planted in the right place, thereby providing a net benefit to the environment and society.

The new actions have been designed to be flexible, covering a wide range of farmers and land types, and allow farmers to take advantage of this approach to farm business resilience and the environment.

The lower tree density actions enable agroforestry to be done on land with low sensitivity to tree planting without requiring Environmental Impact Assessments, which makes agroforestry accessible to those that want to try this approach and to tenant farmers. The higher tree density actions provide for those who want to maximise the benefits from agroforestry planting, including those already confident with implementing agroforestry practices.

The Forestry Commission and Defra will be releasing more detail on these new agroforestry offers, as well as new capital items to support farmers to create productive and resilient agroforestry systems, in the coming months.

You can read a recent [Defra farming blog post](#) highlighting the new agroforestry payment rates that will be available later this year.

Brought to you by **PUT DOWN ROOTS** with Woodland Creation

Powered by **FARMERS WEEKLY**

TREE PLANTING
- BENEFITS, GRANTS AND SUPPORT

Tuesday 13th February
5:00pm - 6:15pm

REGISTER NOW

Webinar:

Tree Planting – benefits, grants and support

Date: **Tuesday 13 February 2024**
Time: **5pm – 6.15pm**

Join our presenters for this **free** webinar hosted by Farmers Weekly, which will present the [woodland creation grants](#) currently available, along with the free expert advice, to support your tree planting projects to suit the needs and goals of your farm and business.

Hear from someone who has benefited from a grant to successfully create woodland and find out more about the support they received from woodland creation teams, who can guide you through the full process from plans to planting.

Presenters:

- **Suzie Horne**, Business Editor, Farmers Weekly
- **Anna Brown**, Director of Forest Services, Forestry Commission
- **Rob Cleaver**, Forestry Creation Manager, The National Forest Company
- **Seb Tighe**, Field Manager, Woodland Creation, East and East Midlands, Forestry Commission
- **Vincent Hedley-Lewis**, Owner and Tenant, Birkholme Manor

[Click here to register for the free webinar](#)

Environment Agency

Water Abstraction Updates

Irrigation prospects

The Environment Agency (EA) will be publishing their initial prospects for irrigation forecasts for 2024 on the technical articles section of the FAS website at the end of February. With the generally wet conditions that have prevailed so far this winter, initial prospects are currently anticipated to be positive, reflecting ongoing refill of farm storage reservoirs and recharging of groundwater.

Abstraction licence application queue

The queue of abstraction licence applications has reduced significantly to six weeks.

The EA are working with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) to ensure they can determine those abstraction licences associated with the Water Management Grant Round 2 in time to meet the full application deadline of 31 October 2024.

Applicants should submit their applications as early as possible to allow enough time (four to six months) for the EA to complete the determination ahead of the deadline. If you are concerned about the delays to determining your licence application to help qualify for a water resources' funding grant, please clearly mark on your application form ([Form WR328 Section A1.4](#)) and covering letter that this relates to the grant. The EA will then be in touch to discuss timescales.

Pre-application advice service

Until now, the National Permitting Service has prioritised formal applications over pre-applications because of statutory timeframes and to ensure that applicants are not waiting longer than necessary for licences. Understandably, applicants often decided to forego pre-application advice due to time constraints. The queue has now reduced and so the EA are encouraging applicants to use the pre-application service again.

You can get advice before you apply for a water abstraction or impounding licence on [GOV.UK](#). Pre-applications can improve the quality of formal applications and reduce unexpected delays at the determination stage.

The enhanced application process also has significant additional benefits to applicants, providing critical information about proposals before they submit the full application charge. These include:

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

Environment Agency

Water Abstraction Updates

GOV.UK water resources licence pages

The EA has updated all of the water resources' permitting pages on GOV.UK to make them easier for customers to use to find the information they need. The information can help you work out whether you need an abstraction or impounding licence and, if so, what to provide when applying. The pages all link together so you can click between them easily, depending on what you need.

The EA has recommended that two good starting places are [Check if you need a licence to abstract water](#) and [Check if you need a licence to impound water](#). There is also a page to explain using the enhanced pre-application service to get [advice before you apply for a water abstraction or impounding licence](#). The enhanced pre-application service is a paid-for service which has been provided by the EA to help applicants understand if you are likely to get a licence, what restrictions your licence may have and how to submit a quality application that is likely to be accepted. There are also pages with full details of how to apply for a licence, manage your licence online or apply to change your existing licence.

If you have comments on these pages the EA would welcome feedback. Please email PSC-WaterResources@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Agricultural water resilience projects

The EA is progressing a government funded project linked to agricultural water resilience. It follows on from an initiative announced by the Prime Minister at the [“Farm to Fork Food Summit”](#) held in May 2023, which was to support farmer led groups to identify Local water Resource Options (LROs). LROs could include rainwater harvesting, on-farm reservoirs, effluent re-use, water trading/sharing and other developments that support groups of farms to manage water supply, as well as demand management side applications such as leakage management.

As published in the Autumn Statement, initial funding for this project (which will include pilots) is being made available through the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to support improving resilience in agriculture in the Greater Cambridgeshire area. The DLUHC's written statement details that new funding has been allocated to [“improve the barrier of water scarcity”](#) in Cambridge. This money will then be followed by Defra funding in the next financial year (from April 2024) to roll out these methods across more catchment areas in England.

The project will create a methodology for identifying and screening LROs. It will provide a repeatable approach to assess and compare development options at specific locations.

In the next financial year, there will be an opportunity for Water Abstractor Groups (WAGs) to apply to have an LRO screening study undertaken in their area. An aim of the project is to establish more WAGs across the country and the EA will be working with the sector to achieve this.



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.

Defra launches applications for Bees' Needs Champion Awards 2024

On 8 January, Defra opened applications for the [Bees' Needs Champions awards 2024](#). These awards celebrate exceptional actions local authorities, community groups, farmers and businesses or individuals have taken to support pollinators.

Defra gives Bees' Needs Champion awards to people and organisations who have done inspiring things (big and small), that help pollinators thrive. This could include creating a wildflower patch, educating the local community or even taking special measures to help pollinators on your farm or in and around your workplace.

There are two categories to nominate yourself or someone else for an award: local communities or farming.

Applications close on 12 May 2024. For further details on how to apply, please visit [Bees' Needs Champions Awards](#).

Current and upcoming Defra funding programmes

The Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF) will get you ready for private investment. Farmers are now able to apply for individual grants up to £100,000 to prepare nature projects that will attract investment from the private sector from a total fund of £5 million. The deadline for applications is midday (12:00pm), 16 February 2024. Information on [how to apply](#) is now available on the [Defra Farming blog](#).

Farming Innovation Programme – Research Starter competition opened on 18 December 2023. Farmers, growers and foresters in England are able to apply for a share of the £850,000 Research Starter funding to get innovative new projects off the ground if they have the potential to move the agricultural sector to Net Zero. The deadline for applications is midday (12:00pm) 14 February 2024. Find out more and how to apply [here](#).

Farming Innovation Programme – Large Research and Development (R&D) competition Round 3 opened on 15 January 2024. Businesses can apply for a share of the £7.8 million Large R&D fund, which supports industrial research or experimental development projects. The deadline for applications is Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 11:00am. For more information please click [here](#).

Farming Investment Fund – Improving Farm Productivity grant opened on 25 January 2024. Businesses can apply for an initial share of this £30 million fund that provides capital grants of £25,000 to £500,000 towards robotic and automatic equipment, with further funding potentially available depending on levels of interest. For the first time, it will also fund grants of between £15,000 and £100,000 towards solar equipment that can be fitted on rooftops and float on irrigation reservoirs to help increase energy resilience and the take-up of renewable energy generation on farms. For more information and how to apply, please read the [Defra farming blog](#).

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/.