

April 2020 – e-news issue 50

Welcome to the Farming Advice Service newsletter

Thank you for subscribing to the Farming Advice Service (FAS) newsletter. This is the 50th edition.

If you do not already receive the FAS newsletter straight to your inbox, but would like to, please email bookings@farmingadvice.org.uk with 'Register for newsletter' in the subject line. Your details will not be shared with any third parties.

We will now be publishing the newsletter on a monthly basis rather than every other month.

Please contact us with any feedback or suggestions on topics you would like to see in future editions.

FAS technical advice line:

Telephone: 03000 200 301

Email: advice@farmingadvice.org.uk

Website: www.gov.uk/government/groups/farming-advice-service



**Farming
Advice Service**

In this issue

Key dates

How can FAS help you?

Countryside Stewardship mid-tier advice for farmers

Coronavirus: information for farmers, landowners and rural businesses

Relaxation of crop diversification rules

Basic Payment Scheme applications 2020

Complying with the cross compliance rules

Farming rules for water: Rule 1 – requirements for nutrient applications

Nitrate Vulnerable Zone reminders

Water abstraction and Coronavirus
Sign up to FAS services

Key dates

Below are details of recent and forthcoming key dates that you should be aware of.

1 March	You must not cut or trim hedges or trees from this date, but you can carry out hedge and tree coppicing, and hedge laying from 1 March until 30 April. Fruit and nut trees in orchards, or trees acting as windbreaks in orchards, vineyards, hop yards or hop gardens are not included in the ban. (GAEC* 7a and GAEC 7c)
12 March	Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application window open. (BPS 2020)
31 March	If you hold a winter or all year round water abstraction licence (the authorised period of abstraction does not fall wholly between 1 April to 31 October), you (and, if appropriate, your agreed returns contact) will receive an update from the Environment Agency about the submission of winter and all year 2019/20 water abstraction returns. (GAEC 2)
April	If you hold a water abstraction licence, expect to receive your annual bill (or first part charge if you hold a two-part tariff agreement) for the forthcoming financial year. (GAEC 2)
1 April	You must not burn heather, rough grass, bracken, gorse or vaccinium on land, other than in upland areas, from this date. (GAEC 6)
16 April	You must not burn heather, rough grass, bracken, gorse or vaccinium outside the burning season. The burning season is from 1 October to 15 April for uplands and from 1 November to 31 March for land not within an upland area. (GAEC 6)
30 April	If you held a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) grassland derogation for 2019, you must submit your 'fertilisation account' to the Environment Agency by this date. (SMR** 1)
30 April	If you have land in an NVZ, you must have recorded the number of 'specified' livestock kept on your farm during the previous calendar year and calculated the amount of nitrogen they produced. You must also record the number and type of livestock in a building or hardstanding during the previous storage period. (SMR 1)
1 May	In addition to the closed period for cutting or trimming hedges or trees, which started on 1 March, you must not carry out hedge or tree coppicing, or hedge laying from 1 May. (GAEC 7a and GAEC 7c)
1 May	Ecological Focus Area (EFA) period for nitrogen fixing crops begins (until 30 June). (BPS 2020)
15 June	BPS 2020 - the deadline to submit your application without penalty has been extended to midnight on 15 June. (BPS 2020)

For more details about the information provided in the key dates table, please visit the [Guide to cross compliance in England 2020](#) and [Basic Payment Scheme: rules for 2020](#) pages of GOV.UK.

How can FAS help you?



Free and confidential advice

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) regulations require an advisory system covering cross compliance, greening, water protection and aspects of pesticide use. In England, this is provided by the Farming Advice Service (FAS). Under these regulations, the

advice given to individual farmers must be **confidential** – that is, FAS must not disclose any personal or individual information, or data it obtains during its advisory activity.

FAS updates the farming sector on relevant EU and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) policies. It explains the requirements under and objectives of CAP, EU directives, national legislation and policies; and the actions that can be taken to help meet compliance. FAS provides free, confidential advice on cross compliance and the greening requirements, some aspects of the Water Framework Directive (such as silage, slurry and agricultural fuel oil (SSAFO) and waste exemptions) and the Sustainable Use (of pesticides) Directive.

The cross compliance rules apply to you if you are a Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Countryside Stewardship or Environmental Stewardship claimant.

Getting in contact with the advice line

Farmers requiring telephone advice from FAS can contact the **Rural Services Helpline** on 03000 200 301 Monday to Friday between 08:30 and 17:00. In light of the current situation, please be assured that our helpline will be operating as normal and we will continue to support farmers.

The Rural Services Helpline provides a single number for all **FAS, Rural Payments Agency, Animal and Plant Health Agency, Natural England** and forestry enquiries. By providing a single point of contact, the Government aims to make it simpler for farmers to access technical guidance on a range of topics, including cross compliance, greening, CAP payments and animal health inspections.

You can also email enquiries to advice@farmingadvice.org.uk

Countryside Stewardship mid-tier advice for farmers



In line with Government advice regarding coronavirus (COVID-19), Natural England is suspending the on-farm, mid-tier advice sessions. These have been replaced with an online and telephone support service to help with mid-tier applications.

Details of how to book your advice session can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

Coronavirus: information for farmers, landowners and rural businesses

To find out what to do if you are self-employed, an employer, need to self-isolate, wish to travel or just want to find out more about the Government's response to Coronavirus (COVID-19), you should visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). This page is updated regularly with the very latest information and guidance as it becomes available.

If you are worried about your health or the health of others, you can find medical advice on the [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk).

To find out about social distancing at work and, in particular, in relation to visiting a farm for animal health and welfare reasons, please go to [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) now has a dedicated page for COVID-19 on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) where updates will be posted for farmers, landowners and rural businesses. It will be important to check this page regularly.



The RPA is committed to maintaining its service to customers, but has made changes to adapt to the current emergency. In line with Government guidance, the RPA has closed most of its offices and staff are now working from home. To ensure you are following Government guidance on social distancing, **please do not visit RPA offices** – even if it is to hand in documentation.

What you need to do

Please use electronic options where you can. This is the safest and quickest way to contact the RPA. When emailing the RPA, make sure the subject line clearly states what your email is regarding as this will help it get to the correct department. Please remember, the RPA can only accept emails from email addresses registered with the [Rural Payments Service](https://www.rps.gov.uk) (RPS).

Updating your details held by the RPS

It is important that your details held by the [RPS](https://www.rps.gov.uk) are kept up to date as this is what will be used to contact you about important issues. To check your contact details, sign into your account on the RPS website, go to 'Your businesses' and click 'View and amend personal details'. If you send

information to RPS by email, it will only be accepted if the email address you use is registered in the system. Text message reminders are also possible. If you would like to receive these, make sure to update your mobile phone number in 'View and amend personal details'.

If you would like to [add someone](#) to act on your behalf, the individual must be registered with the RPS and you will need their customer reference number (CRN). A short video explaining this process is available on the [RPS website](https://www.rps.gov.uk).

If you have anything urgent that you cannot email, please use the following address:

Rural Payments Agency
PO Box 352
Worksop
S80 9FG

Important information about farm visits and inspections

Farm visits and inspections have been paused until further notice. The RPA is considering its approach to future visits in line with developing national public health guidance.

Please sign up [here](#) to receive email alerts when information changes on the RPA pages.

Relaxation of crop diversification rules

There have been **recent changes** to the greening requirements for 2020. Due to the extreme weather events experienced between 2019 and the early part of 2020, the Government is processing plans to remove the crop diversification rule for all farmers in 2020. This means you will not be penalised if you are not able to plant the required combination of arable crops.

You must still complete your [Basic Payment Scheme \(BPS\) application](#) declaring all of your arable land using the appropriate crop codes. Once applications are processed and Parliament has agreed the changes, the crop diversification rules will not be applied to determine eligibility for the BPS greening payment.

Please note, you will still need to meet the rest of the greening rules:

- maintaining at least 5% equivalent area of an Ecological Focus Area if you have more than 15ha of arable land;
- following the rules for managing permanent grassland.

Farming Recovery Fund

The Government has recently announced that **£6 million of funding** will be added to the existing Farming Recovery Fund to help farmers recover from flooding. Support will be available for farmers affected by recent flooding in parts of East and North Yorkshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Nottinghamshire and Herefordshire. This additional funding means the total funding available to farmers has now increased to £10 million.

The Farming Recovery Fund allows affected farmers in eligible areas to claim grants between £500 and £25,000 to cover several uninsurable

repairs costs, such as recultivating farmland, including reseeded, replanting cover crops and alleviating soil compaction.

Please refer to the [Farming Recovery Fund page](#) on GOV.UK, which has information on how to apply for the grant and eligibility within affected counties. Farmers who have been affected by recent flooding and have already repaired damage caused by the flooding should keep records of all relevant evidence, including receipts and before-and-after photos. This will help the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) process eligible applications promptly.



Basic Payment Scheme applications 2020

The deadline for submitting a Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application for 2020 without penalty has been extended to midnight on 15 June. This extension is in light of the disruption caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Farmers and land managers are still encouraged to submit applications sooner rather than later. Applications need to be made annually and you will not be automatically re-enrolled to receive payments for this scheme year (January to December 2020).



Applying online

In line with Government guidance, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has closed most of its offices and staff will be working from home. Therefore, it is important that you submit your BPS application online. To apply online, go to [GOV.UK](#), and click 'start now'.

There are resources available on [GOV.UK](#) to assist you with completing your application. This includes a step-by-step guide on how to complete your online application, a BPS 2020 checklist, and a list of questions and answers.

All BPS payments will be made in pounds sterling starting from the 2020 BPS scheme year and the Government intends to use the same

exchange rate as last year (€1 = £0.89092). Payments made under the scheme will now be funded by HM Treasury instead of the EU which, to date, has funded payments under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This change will not affect the timing of BPS 2020 payments, which will start from December 2020. The level of funding available for BPS payments for 2020 is the same as that for 2019.

Please refer to the [BPS 2020](#) page on GOV.UK for the latest support, guidance and information about the BPS.

If you require any support, you can contact the Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301 and follow the options for the RPA.

Complying with the cross compliance rules

Every year, the Farming Advice Service (FAS) helpline receives enquiries from farmers and land managers regarding liability for adhering to the cross compliance rules. Below are some of the key questions that have been raised.

When do the cross compliance rules apply?

If you are a Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), Countryside Stewardship or Environmental Stewardship claimant, the cross compliance rules apply for the whole calendar year, across the whole area of your holding and to all agricultural activities.

Who is responsible for making sure that the rules are followed?

As a claimant, you are responsible for making sure the cross compliance rules are met.

You will be held liable for the actions of employees, workers and family members. You may also be held liable for the actions of third parties (e.g. agents, contractors and agronomists). This will depend on your actions, such as your choice of third party, the instructions you give to them and

how you monitor them. It is important that all employees, workers, family members and contractors who work on your land are aware of the cross compliance requirements if you are receiving payments under the BPS, Countryside Stewardship or Environmental Stewardship schemes.

However, for those Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) concerned with identifying and tracing animals, it is the person with day-to-day responsibility for the animals (the keeper) who is responsible for meeting the rules (even if they do not own the animals, the land that they graze on or the buildings they are kept in).

Responsibility for the welfare of all farmed animals lies jointly with:

- the person who has day-to-day responsibility for the animals (the keeper);
- the owner of the animals.

Who is responsible for meeting the rules if land is transferred?

If you declare land on your BPS application and then transfer that land to another business in the same year, and the business you have transferred the land to is:

- Also a BPS claimant that year, then, after the transfer, the new business is responsible for making sure the cross compliance rules are met on the land for the rest of the year (even though the business did not declare it on its BPS application).
- Not a BPS claimant that year, then, after the transfer, you are still responsible for making sure the cross compliance rules are met on the land.





If land has been transferred to you and you declare it on your BPS application in the same year, and the business you've received the land from is:

- Also a BPS claimant that year, then that business is responsible for making sure the cross compliance rules are met on the land before the transfer takes place (even if the business did not declare it on its BPS application). You are responsible for making sure the cross compliance rules are met on the land after the transfer takes place.
- Not a BPS claimant that year, then you are responsible for making sure the cross compliance rules are met on the land for the whole year.

Who is responsible for cross compliance on common land?

You must meet the relevant rules across the whole of your holding, regardless

of the amount of land you entered into the BPS, Countryside Stewardship or Environmental Stewardship applications. This includes common land that you exercise or hold rights of common over (including rights in gross).

This also applies to all land including forestry for which payments are claimed under rural development schemes.

A utility company wants to undertake work on my land that would breach a cross compliance rule, what should I do?

Exemptions can be granted if work carried out under a statutory authority stops you from meeting one of the rules (e.g. if a pipeline or railway is being built on your land). However, once the work that is being carried out under a statutory authority is finished, you must return the land to a state that meets the cross compliance rules.

The Rural Payments Agency would not expect statutory bodies to have to use their statutory powers to get permission for access or to carry out work where voluntary consent already exists.

Further information

If you would like more information on liability for adhering to the cross compliance rules, exemptions or derogations (written permission to temporarily allow you not to meet a rule), please visit the 'Meeting the rules' page on the online [Guide to cross compliance in England 2020](#) or page 8 of the pdf.

If you require any support to understand or adhere to the cross compliance requirements, please contact the FAS helpline on 03000 200 301 or email advice@farmingadvice.org.uk.

Farming rules for water: Rule 1 – requirements for nutrient applications

Since 2 April 2018, all farmers in England have had to comply with rules aimed at protecting water quality. The rules introduce an approach to regulating farm practices that, in time, might be rolled out to reduce other environmental impacts beyond water quality. There are eight rules in total (five about managing fertilisers and manures, and three on managing soils). In future FAS newsletters, we will be featuring an article on each of these rules. This is the first article in the series.

Rule 1 of the farming rules for water sets out the requirements for nutrient applications. It details how the application of organic manures or manufactured fertilisers must be planned, and match the need of the crop and soil. This will reduce the risk of water pollution, while considering the weather conditions at the time of application. Your planning must consider the results of soil testing, which must be carried out at least every 5 years on land that is cultivated by physical or chemical means. Soil nitrogen supply can be used to assess nitrogen levels instead of soil testing.

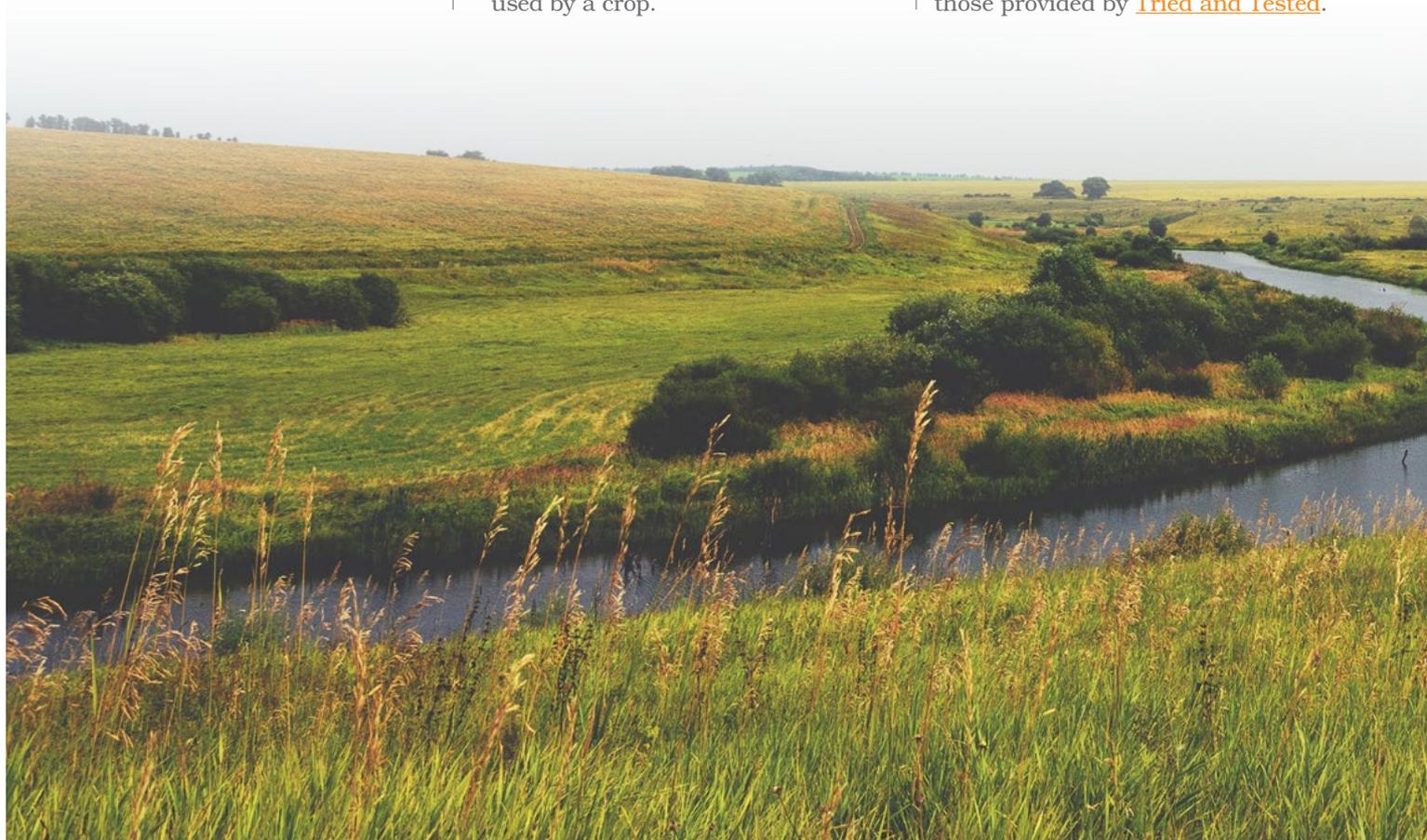
Nutrient management planning

To comply with Rule 1, you will need to demonstrate how you have planned your nutrient needs. To do this, you will need to:

- plan what nutrients you are going to spread on the land;
- ensure that these nutrients are only applied in quantities that are sufficient to meet and not exceed the crop or soil need on cultivated agricultural land;
- ensure that they must only be applied at a time when they will be used by a crop.

Nutrients from all sources, including organic manures from your own operations, off-farm digestates and biosolids, and manufactured fertilisers must be considered in your plan.

You should calculate the crop nutrient requirement for each land parcel using a manual such as the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board's [Nutrient Management Guide \(RB209\)](#) or a professionally produced nutrient management plan (for example produced by an agronomist or FACTS adviser). Alternatively, you can use farm software like [MANNER-NPK](#) or nutrient management tools such as those provided by [Tried and Tested](#).



Spreading – basic information and evidence required

To demonstrate you have calculated the crop nutrient requirements for each land parcel, you can record the high-risk and no-spreading zones on a map, while taking into consideration any risks arising from weather conditions at the time of spreading. For more information on this, please refer to [Protecting our Water, Soil and Air: A Code of Good Agricultural Practice for farmers, growers and land managers \(the 'CoGAP'\)](#).

When visiting a farm, Environment Agency officers will expect you to demonstrate that you have considered basic information relating to the risks of spreading, including:

- location and approximate direction of field drains;
- location of watercourses (including ditches) and coastal waters;
- location of boreholes, wells and springs;
- slope of the land – particularly if its greater than 12°;
- soil type and condition of the land (e.g. soil wetness and compaction).

Spreading organic manures – evidence required

Environment Agency officers will be checking that the following is in place for each cultivated field used for spreading materials:

- A calculation considering crop or soil need based on RB209 or other evidence that the Environment Agency has agreed with you in advance of spreading. This calculation should be adjusted to reflect the results of soil testing.
- That you can demonstrate what has been spread and when, and that this is in accordance with your crop and soil needs or was not likely to cause significant diffuse water pollution.

Organic manures can be plant, animal or human derived. They may be generated on the farm or come from off-farm sources and may be controlled by permits. Further information on [complying with land spreading permits](#) is also available and gives details of the types of materials you can spread on your land. The NFU has also provided a [checklist](#) that you can refer to.

Soil testing – evidence required

Keep your soil analysis results to demonstrate that you are complying with the requirement for up-to-date soil testing.

You will need to know what the existing levels in the soil are. Rule 1 (Regulation 5) requires you to use the results of soil testing for nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and magnesium for every cultivated field. These must be no more than 5 years old. Nitrogen levels may be determined by assessing the soil nitrogen supply (SNS) using, for example, the [AHDB's Nutrient Management Guide \(RB209\)](#). It is recommended that you use an accredited laboratory for soil sample testing, please see [Tried and Tested](#) for a list of providers.

If you require any help with the farming rules for water requirements, please contact the FAS helpline on 03000 200 301 or email advice@farmingadvice.org.uk.



Nitrate Vulnerable Zone reminders

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) are areas designated as being at risk from agricultural nitrate pollution. They account for approximately 55% of agricultural land in England. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) undertakes a review of the designated NVZ areas every 4 years to account for changes in water quality.

You will need to comply with the NVZ rules if any of your land is within a designated NVZ. To find out, please check the interactive map on [GOV.UK](https://gov.uk).

30 April deadline reminders

Returns if you were granted an NVZ grassland derogation in 2019

If you held an NVZ [grassland derogation](#) for 2019, you are required to submit field and farm information known as a 'fertilisation account' to the Environment Agency by 30 April 2020. Records must be submitted to the Environment Agency for the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019 that show:

- The total agricultural area in hectares of the derogated holding; the area covered by winter wheat, spring wheat, winter barley, spring barley, winter oilseed rape, sugar beet, potatoes, forage maize and grass; and the area covered by any other crops.
- The number and category of livestock kept on your farm, and the amount of nitrogen and phosphate in the manure produced. These categories are given in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) standard values table that can be downloaded from the ['Using nitrogen fertilisers in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones'](#) page on

GOV.UK, together with standard values for manure nitrogen and phosphate.

- The amount and type of livestock manure imported to or exported from your farm, together with the total amount of nitrogen and phosphate in that manure.
- The weight (tonnes) and nitrogen content of all manufactured nitrogen fertiliser stocks kept on, imported to or exported from your farm.
- You can submit your records electronically by email (regaware@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Livestock manure nitrogen farm limit

By 30 April, you must complete a calculation to show you have kept within the livestock manure nitrogen farm limit for the previous calendar year. The nitrogen content of livestock manure that can be applied on your holding (directly by grazing livestock or by spreading) is limited to 170kg/ha per calendar year. You must plan how much nitrogen will be applied to your land so you do not exceed this limit. The limit applies as an average across your holding.

You must use standard values to work out how much nitrogen is produced by the livestock on your farm or brought on to your farm. These standard values can be found in the [blank field records and standard values tables](#) on GOV.UK.

Livestock records

By 30 April, you must record the following information for the previous calendar year:

- The area of your holding in hectares.
- The number of livestock kept on your farm during the previous year together with a calculation of the amount of nitrogen produced by these animals and volume of manure produced during the storage period.
- Any imports/exports of livestock manure.
- A copy of your sampling and analysis of manures and/or output from software (for example [ENCASH](#)).
- The dates and locations of any field sites used for storing manure.

Grassland management

By 30 April, you must have records on how any grassland was managed in the previous calendar year.

N-max

Nitrogen fertilisers can be manufactured (inorganic and bagged) fertilisers that are bought, other materials containing nitrogen (like waste soil), or organic manures that are produced on or brought onto a holding.

Organic manures come from animals, plants or humans. They include:

- Slurry.
- Poultry manures.
- Solid manures (such as farmyard manure, sludge cake and compost).
- Sewage sludge (also called biosolids).
- Other liquid manures (such as abattoir waste or anaerobic digestate).

There is a limit on the average amount of manufactured fertiliser and crop-available nitrogen from organic manure that you can apply to most crops each year. This is known as the N-max limit.

More information on N-max can be found in the [Guide to cross compliance in England 2020](#) or on the NVZ pages on [GOV.UK](#).

Table 1 provides details of the N-max limit for specified crops.

Table 1: N-max limit for specific crops

Crop	N-max (kilograms of nitrogen per hectare)	Standard crop yield (tonnes per hectare)
Autumn or early winter-sown wheat	220	8
Spring-sown wheat	180	7
Winter barley	180	6.5
Spring barley	150	5.5
Winter oilseed rape	250	3.5
Sugar beet	120	n/a
Potatoes	270	n/a
Forage maize	150	n/a
Field beans	0	n/a
Peas	0	n/a
Grass	300	n/a
Asparagus, carrots, radishes, swedes, individually or in any combination	180	n/a
Celery, courgettes, dwarf beans, lettuce, onions, parsnips, runner beans, sweetcorn, turnips individually or in any combination	280	n/a
Beetroot, brussels sprouts, cabbage, calabrese, cauliflower, leeks individually or in any combination	370	n/a

You are able to make adjustments to nitrogen limits (N-max) shown in Table 1 under the following conditions:

- For wheat and barley, you can use an additional 20kg of nitrogen per hectare for every tonne that the expected yield exceeds the standard yield.
- You can use an additional 80kg of nitrogen per hectare if you have used straw or paper sludge on the previous or current crop.
- On milling wheat varieties, you can use an additional 40kg of nitrogen per hectare.
- On autumn and winter-sown wheat and winter barley you can use an additional 20kg of nitrogen per hectare on fields with a shallow soil type (except on shallow soils over sandstone).
- On winter oilseed rape, you can use up to 250kg of nitrogen per hectare. This includes a maximum autumn (closed period) application of 30kg of nitrogen per hectare of manufactured nitrogen fertiliser. If you use 30kg of nitrogen per hectare in the autumn, you can only use up to 220kg of nitrogen per hectare in the spring. However, you can increase this by an additional 30kg of nitrogen per hectare for every half tonne that the expected yield exceeds the standard yield.
- On grass that is cut at least three times in a year, you can use an additional 40kg of nitrogen per hectare.
- On grass grown for dehydration or chlorophyll production, you can use nitrogen up to the level recommended in writing by a FACTS-qualified adviser if you are growing grass to achieve a protein content of at least 16% in the dried product.



Plan your nitrogen use

You must plan all your applications of nitrogen on each crop in each field (including grass). This is your fertilisation plan and it must be kept as part of your farm records. To help with your plan, you can use tools like the [Tried and Tested](#) nutrient management tool. To calculate how much nitrogen is available in different types of livestock manure, please use the blank field records and standard value tables available to download from [GOV.UK](#).

Your plan must demonstrate that you have taken the following steps before you apply nitrogen to a field for the first time where you are going to or have planted a crop:

- 1) Calculated the amount of nitrogen in the soil that is likely to be available for a crop to use during the growing season.
- 2) Calculated the optimum amount of nitrogen that should be applied to the crop, taking into account the amount of nitrogen already available in the soil.
- 3) Calculated the amount of nitrogen from any planned applications of organic manure that is likely to be available to the crop in the growing season in which you spread it.
- 4) Calculated the amount of manufactured nitrogen fertiliser you need.

Steps 1 and 2 must be carried out before applying any nitrogen fertiliser or manure for the first time and steps 3 and 4 must be carried out every time you apply nitrogen fertiliser or manure.

Storing solid manures

You must store solid manure, including poultry and other types of organic manure, or animal bedding that contains organic manure in one of the following ways:

- In a container.
- On a waterproof base, where you can collect and store runoff.
- In a roofed building.
- In a temporary field heap.

When locating and constructing a temporary field heap to store manure you must:

- Make sure the field heap is at least 10 metres from any surface water (such as a river, pond or ditch) or land drain, or 30 metres if the land slopes at 12 degrees or more.
- Make sure the location of the field heap is not prone to being waterlogged or flooded.
- Locate field heaps at least 50 metres from a spring, well or borehole.
- Move the field heap at least every 12 months.
- Leave a 2-year gap before returning to the same site.
- Keep a record of the sites used for field heaps and the dates of use.

You must also show all the low-risk areas suitable for temporary field heaps on your risk map if you plan to use them.

Temporary field heaps must:

- Be made from manure solid enough to be stacked in a freestanding heap.
- Not give rise to free drainage from within the stacked material.
- Be covered with a waterproof material if they contain poultry manure without bedding or litter.
- Occupy as small a surface area as is needed to support the weight of the heap without it collapsing.

If you require any support to understand or comply with the NVZ requirements, please contact the FAS helpline on 03000 200 301 or email advice@farmingadvice.org.uk. FAS has produced a technical article on the NVZ rules, which can be downloaded for free from the FAS website ([Nitrate Vulnerable Zones: Back to basics](#)).



Water abstraction and Coronavirus



The Environment Agency recognises the challenges caused by Coronavirus (COVID-19) across the country and that some customers are particularly affected by the recent moves to restrict the impact of the virus. The Environment Agency is writing to customers to offer changes to payment plans if they experience difficulties in paying their bills on time. Further information on this will be included within the correspondence.

2019/2020 winter and all-year abstraction returns

In response to COVID-19, and in line with Government guidance, the Environment Agency has decided to delay the winter and all-year abstraction returns collection cycle that was planned for the end of March. Licence holders will be contacted to explain the approach being taken. This is an administrative change and abstractors are expected to continue to comply with their abstraction licences. Abstractors will be formally notified by the Environment Agency of the requirement to submit their returns for the reporting period 1 April 2019 to

31 March 2020, subject to the COVID-19 situation, later in the year. In the meantime, abstractors registered with the [‘Manage your water abstraction or impoundment licence’](#) service can submit their returns online.

Hands off flows

The Environment Agency will continue to provide timely information to abstractors about current river and stream flows and levels in comparison to hands off flow conditions within their abstraction licences. This routine practice helps protect water supplies for people, businesses, industry and the environment. These conditions

are activated in periods of dry weather when river flows and levels fall below certain limits. Hands off flow conditions are a standard part of some abstraction licences – they usually mean abstractors must stop or reduce the amount of water they are taking.

Irrigation prospects

The Environment Agency will be releasing its updated irrigation prospects at the end of April. The initial prospects produced at the end of February showed that many areas were classed as ‘good’, while others were ‘good to moderate’ or ‘moderate’ under the most likely rainfall scenarios. Rainfall since then has been below average across the country. The current long-term forecast is for the largely sunny, settled conditions to continue until the end of April. Then, showery, unsettled conditions may become more widespread and extend further north.

Sign up to FAS services



Get the latest updates by following FAS on Twitter

Follow us on [@DefraFAS](https://twitter.com/DefraFAS) for up-to-the-minute updates on publications, events and industry information.



Subscribe to the free FAS Newsletter

If you don't already receive the FREE monthly FAS newsletter, please email bookings@farmingadvice.service.org.uk with **'Register for newsletter'** in the subject line.

In line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 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/