Using greening features on your farm in 2021

In 2021, the 'greening' requirements previously attached to 30% of farmers' Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) payment came to an end. In this article, we provide information on how the existing greening features on your farm can be retained to benefit your business and the environment. This article has been produced in collaboration with Championing the Farmed Environment (CFE). If you would like to find out more about what CFE does, please visit the website.

BPS recipients will still be required to meet 2021 cross compliance rules, but the specific greening requirements for crop diversification, Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs), and connection between greening rules and permanent grassland will no longer apply. There are still non-BPS related rules that will apply to permanent grassland going forward, such as those covered under Environmental Impact Assessment criteria.

Although actions under greening will not be tied to the BPS payment, it is expected that many farmers will choose to retain former greening options. EFA options in particular because of the environmental and business benefits they can offer.

Here are some examples of the potential benefits associated with retaining and upgrading you options in 2021:

EFA Option	Environmental/business Benefit	Options to 'upgrade'
Buffer strips and field margins - at least 1 metre wide (but those greater than 3 metres offer maximum benefits) adjacent to a field boundary, hedge or watercourse.	• biodiverse buffer strips and field margins can provide a habitat for insects, therefore contribute to pest management and pollination; • protection for fertiliser and plant protection product overspray; and run-off for drains, ditches and watercourses.	Sow a pollen and nectar, wildflower or wild bird cover mix to enhance margins for biodiversity.
Hedges or trees in a line	• protect against soil erosion; • create shelter belts for crops and livestock; • provide habitat for beneficial insects and other farmland wildlife.	Allow hedgerow trees to grow up within an existing hedge to create additional habitat, shelter and carbon capture.
Nitrogen-fixing crops	• reduce nitrogen input needs for the follow-on crop; • reduce nitrate leaching to ground water.	Introduce a mix of legume, ideally with different flowering seasons and root system depths, to provide extra food for pollinators and improve soil structure.
Fallow land	• help to address weed burden issues; • recharges soil nutrient levels; • can be incorporated into a mixed rotation as pasture.	Further improve soil composition by upgrading fallow land with nitrogen-fixing crops.
Catch crops or cover crops	• reduce the risk of soil erosion; • lock nitrogen into soil; • improve soil structure; • suppress weeds; • promote biological activity in soil, e.g. earthworms; • offer grazing opportunities in a mixed farming system; • help protect water quality.	Incorporate companion cropping into your catch and cover crops to harness greater benefits, including pest management and pollination.