



## 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](mailto:advice@farmingadvice.org.uk)

[farmingadvice.org.uk](http://farmingadvice.org.uk)

You can view a text-only version of the March Newsletter [by clicking this link](#).



## March 2024 – Issue 97

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## Key dates to be aware of...

<b>31 March</b>	If you hold a winter or all year round water abstraction licence (authorising abstraction outside the period April to October), the Environment Agency will ask you to submit your record of actual 2023/2024 abstraction. You have 28 days to submit your record of actual abstraction to the Environment Agency. ( <a href="#">GOV.UK</a> ).
<b>1 April</b>	You must not burn heather, rough grass, bracken, gorse or vaccinium on land, <b>other than in upland areas</b> , from this date. ( <a href="#">GOV.UK</a> ).
<b>1 April</b>	If you hold a water abstraction licence, from 1 April the Environment Agency will generate and send you your annual bill (or first-part charge if you hold a two-part tariff agreement) for the forthcoming financial year ( <a href="#">GOV.UK</a> ).
<b>16 April</b>	You must not burn heather, rough grass, bracken, gorse or vaccinium in <b>upland areas</b> from this date. ( <a href="#">GOV.UK</a> ).

## In case you missed them...

<b>20 March</b>	Applications for the <b>Animal Health and Welfare grant</b> through the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund (FETF) 2024 opened. Further details about eligibility and items the grant can cover are included in this <a href="#">Defra Farming Blog post</a> .
<b>4 March</b>	Defra published the <a href="#">results for the hedgerow consultation</a> on 4 March, with the proposed legislation being submitted to Parliament following the previous cross compliance rules.  As before, they will require a 2-metre buffer strip measured from the centre of the hedge, where no cultivation or application of pesticides or fertilisers must happen. This is to prevent harm to the structure and health of the hedge.  The new regulations will also follow the cross compliance approach and ban the cutting of hedges between 1 March and 31 August, protecting nesting birds during that period.
<b>28 February</b>	For any land located in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ), this date is the end for <b>quantity restrictions for applying organic manures</b> with a high, readily available nitrogen content. This is subject to compliance with the <a href="#">Farming Rules for Water</a> and there being agronomic justification. ( <a href="#">NVZ Guidance</a> ).

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

## Upcoming grant deadlines

<b>17 April</b>	The deadline for applications to be submitted for <b>productivity and slurry items</b> as part of the <a href="#">Farming Equipment and Technology Fund 2024</a> is midday on 17 April 2024.
<b>1 May</b>	The deadline for applications to be submitted for <b>Animal Health and Welfare items</b> as part of the <a href="#">Farming Equipment and Technology Fund 2024</a> is midday on 1 May 2024.

## In case you missed them...

**From 3 January the following grants opened for application**

- [Capital Grants 2024](#)
- [Higher Tier Capital Grants 2024](#)
- [Protection and Infrastructure Grants 2024](#)
- [Woodland Management Plan \(WMP\) Grants 2024](#)
- [Woodland Tree Health \(WTH\) Grants](#)
- [Implementation Plan Grant \(PA1\) or Feasibility Study Grant \(PA2\)](#)

**Farming  
Advice Service**

# 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](mailto: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](http://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) or the session from 21 February ('Discussing the farming offer in 2024', with Amelia Rome and Fraser Hugill), you can watch the recordings on the [FAS website](#).



You can also listen to these webinars, as well as previous episodes in the series, as podcasts through the [FAS website](#) and Spotify, Audible, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

## Technical articles available on the FAS website

Four new technical articles are now available on the FAS website:

- [The end of cross compliance: what does that mean for compliance requirements on farm?](#)
- [Environment Agency initial prospects for irrigation – forecast for 2024](#)
- [Animal welfare: compliance requirements for farmers](#)
- [Soil health in UK farming](#)

These new articles are among a number that FAS and its partners have produced covering a range of topics, from farming practices to farming regulations. The full catalogue can be found [here](#).

# Future of hedgerow protections

In June 2023, Defra launched a consultation on [Protecting hedgerows in England](#). As a result of this consultation, regulations to continue to protect English hedgerows will be brought into law later this year.

The proposed regulations (which are similar to those from the previous cross compliance rules and will include exemptions and derogations) follow an approach most farmers are already familiar with.

- **To prevent harm to the structure of and health of the hedgerow** the regulations will require a 2-metre buffer strip, which is to be measured from the centre of the hedgerow. Farmers must establish and maintain green cover of this buffer strip and must not cultivate it or apply any pesticides or fertilisers.
- **To protect nesting birds** the regulations will ban the cutting of hedgerows between 1 March and 31 August. This means they can't be cut (or trimmed) on 1 March, 31 August or the period between.

Although the rules themselves will be familiar, enforcement of the proposed new regulation will be different, with a focus on being fair and proportionate and using an advice-led approach.

Defra will share more information when they can, but in the meantime, you can find more detail in the links below:

- Hedgerow regulations to be brought into law to protect wildlife [press release](#).
- [Summary of responses and government response](#); including a summary of replies, government's responses, proposed next steps and details of proposed exemptions to the requirements.



# Farming Equipment and Technology Fund now open

Funding is now available for farming equipment and technology that will help farmers with animal health and welfare and improve productivity and slurry management through the [Farming Equipment and Technology Fund](#).

The deadline to apply for productivity and slurry management item grants is midday on 17 April 2024.

The deadline to apply for animal health and welfare items is midday on 1 May 2024.

You can apply for one grant from each of the three themes of productivity, slurry management and animal health and welfare.

Farmers, foresters, growers and contractors to those sectors can apply.

[The Rural Payments Agency \(RPA\)](#) will allocate funding after all applications have been received and scored. If you are successful in your application, you could receive all or some of the funding that you applied for.

Successful applicants will receive a grant of:

- a minimum of £1,000 and a maximum of £50,000 towards productivity items
- a minimum of £1,000 and a maximum of £50,000 towards slurry items
- a minimum of £1,000 and a maximum of £25,000 towards animal health and welfare items.

Defra will pay a percentage of the cost depending on the item. This percentage is an increase on last year.



This funding will go towards either:

- an item that costs you the same or more than the expected average cost in the item lists – in this case Defra will pay the average item cost
- an item that costs you less than the expected average cost in the item lists – in this case Defra will pay the actual item cost.

For further information on the grants and items included please read the [grant guidance on GOV.UK](#).

Defra hosted a webinar covering the grants available on 12 March 2024. [Click here](#) to watch the recording.

# Water abstraction licence reminder and Local Resource Option (LRO) screening studies

## Water abstraction licence reminder

If you hold an abstraction licence that authorises abstraction during the winter and all year period (the authorised period of abstraction does not fall wholly between 1 April and 31 October), the Environment Agency (EA) will ask you at the end of March 2024 to report your water abstraction return for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

You will need to submit your return by 28 April 2024.

You can submit your return online by registering with the EA's [online service](#).

If you already have an online account and have applied for and received a new licence, including a renewal of a licence which previously expired, since April 2023 you will need to link the new licence to your account. You can do this by accessing your account and selecting the 'add licence' option.

If a licence expired during the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2024 (inclusive), a return may still be requested. To submit the return you will need to request a paper return form from the EA rather than submitting online.

## LRO screening studies

The EA is inviting farmers to join a free Local Resource Option (LRO) screening study to assess and rank water resources in their area, with the aim of helping farmers and their neighbours to understand and improve their water resilience.

### What is an LRO?

*"A water resources solution that improves resilience or the supply of water for a small group of farmers in their area."*

### Examples:

- farm storage reservoirs
- water rights trading or sharing
- water efficiency tools
- demand and leakage reduction
- improved connectivity of existing sources
- treated effluent reuse
- drainage water use
- managed aquifer recharge
- rainwater harvesting
- conjunctive use schemes.



## Local Resource Option (LRO) screening studies

### Why would working with neighbours help?

Working in a group of four to ten farms could create benefits of scale for developing water resource options. Sharing capital costs allows larger scale projects to be completed at a lower cost/m<sup>3</sup>. Developing a combined solution can also create resilience due to variation in demand and supply across the group and year, giving an opportunity to maximise abstraction licences and improve the reliability of supply.

### What the study will do

The screening study will look at potential options to improve farmers' and land managers' water supply resilience. It will screen and rank the options based on cost, yield, deliverability and suitability for the required water use.

The study and advice will be specific to the needs and opportunities of farmers and land managers in your area. It will outline requirements for the best options, including guidance and next steps for implementation and barriers to progression.

### How the study will work

The EA will appoint and fund water resource consultants to run the screening study.

The consultants will work with farmers and land managers to identify, screen and rank options. Farmers will be required to facilitate a site visit and attend two or three group meetings to discuss and give feedback on the options before the consultants finalise and share the study report.

### The screening study will not:

- provide legal agreements for setting up a water sharing company between members of the group
- design engineering specifications for local water resource options
- reduce or remove requirements for any abstraction licence applications and planning permissions
- change the likelihood of the acceptance of permit, licence or planning applications due to a farmer's or land manager's involvement in a study.

*Taking part in the screening study will not affect any current abstraction or impounding licences held by the farmers or land managers involved.*

### How to apply

You can apply for a screening study if you:

- are a group of two or more farming businesses in the same catchment (preferably part of a Water Abstractor Group or similar)
- are currently abstracting, or would like to abstract, water for irrigating arable, horticultural, aquaculture, including ornamentals or forestry nurseries, or livestock husbandry located in England.

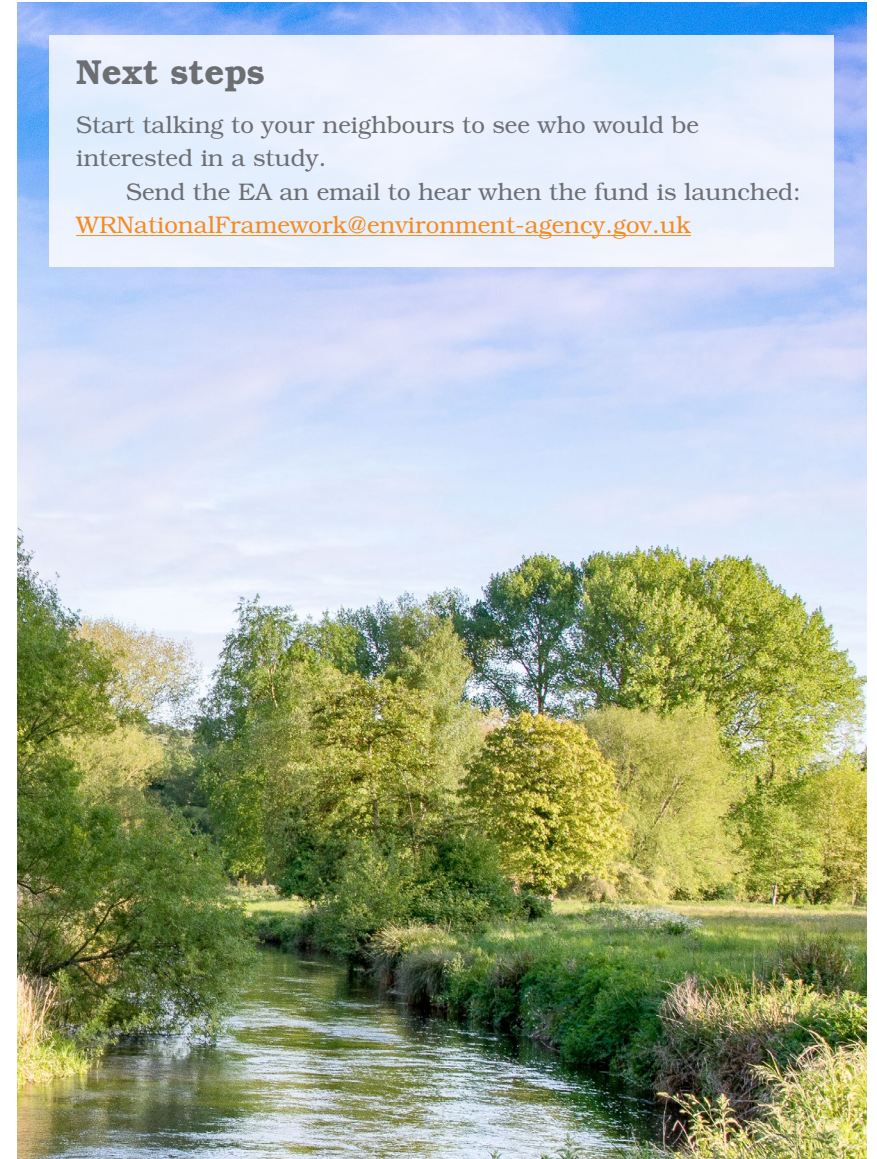
Application forms will be published on GOV.UK in April 2024.

### Next steps

Start talking to your neighbours to see who would be interested in a study.

Send the EA an email to hear when the fund is launched:

[WRNationalFramework@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:WRNationalFramework@environment-agency.gov.uk)



# Trees on farms

## England Woodland Creation Offer and Ips Typographys Monitoring Study for Spruce Trees

### England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) payment rates increased to benefit farmers, land managers and woodland creation

On 18 March, Defra and the Forestry Commission announced an increase in payments for the EWCO.

The increase offers farmers and land managers more tailored tree-planting incentives to encourage woodland creation where it is best suited, whilst also protecting productive farmland for food production.

The current maximum rate per hectare available from additional contributions has increased from £8,000 to £11,600 – a 45% increase. That will increase to £12,700 in stackable payments if the land is also eligible for the new Low Sensitivity Land Payment. Standard costs payments will remain at up to £10,200 per hectare.

As part of the enhanced package, new measures include:

- A new payment to encourage EWCO applications on low sensitivity land has been introduced, avoiding land most suitable for food production. When planting on low sensitivity land you can now receive £1,100 per hectare.

- A new 'Nature Recovery – Premium' payment option (£3,300 per hectare) has been added to the Nature Recovery Additional Contribution. This is designed to encourage the planting or natural colonisation of highly biodiverse woodlands next to ancient woodland.
- Uplifts have also been made to some of the other existing additional contributions, with a focus on riparian buffers, flood mitigation and access. For example, payments for flood risk management have doubled from £500 to £1,000 per hectare, and recreational access has increased from £2,200 to £3,700.
- Annual maintenance payments have been raised from £350 to £400 per hectare, per year, for 15 years – recognising that caring for new trees is vital if new woodlands are to flourish.

This approach to raising EWCO payment rates continues delivering on the Government's pledge that no one will be unfairly

disadvantaged if they start planting now, rather than waiting for future government schemes.

EWCO can help farmers and land managers to diversify whilst preserving their most productive land for agriculture. Food security continues to be a government priority on England's 9.3 million hectares of farmland.

More information on the EWCO payment uplifts can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The Forestry Commission has also announced the launch of the new [Woodland Creation Fast Track](#), which will see those EWCO applications with at least 90% of land located on low sensitivity land processed within 12 weeks (60 working days) – as long as the application is complete, UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) compliant, and provides the correct information from the outset.

### Ips Typographys Monitoring Study for Spruce Trees

*Do you have spruce growing in woodland on your farm? If so, the Forestry Commission needs your help by joining a new national monitoring project for the invasive pest Ips typographus*

This new national monitoring project, run by the Sylva Foundation, Forest Research and the Forestry Commission, aims to help prevent the potential spread of the larger eight-toothed European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*), a serious pest to our spruce trees.

Volunteers are wanted from England, Wales and Scotland who have spruce growing in woodland that they own or manage, and who are willing to host and collect samples by installing a spruce bark beetle trap.

By taking part in this project, volunteers will become part of an early-warning system and help action to be taken to limit the impacts of this pest. They will also be contributing crucial data to science that will help researchers better understand the biology of this pest and help shape policy and guidance for the sector.

Another benefit of taking part is that if this pest is discovered breeding in a volunteer's woodland, prompt action can be taken to limit damage. Whether the pest is found in their woodland or not, volunteers will gain insights into management actions, which may reduce the vulnerability of their woodland.

Watch the [project launch video](#) where volunteers Tim Read and Andy Stott share their experiences of joining the project.



# 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.

## Inheritance tax changes – How inheritance tax is changing for environmentally managed land

As part of the Spring Budget 2024, the Government has announced an [extension to the existing scope of Agricultural Property Relief](#).

This will mean that agricultural property relief will be extended from 6 April 2025 to land managed under an environmental agreement with, or on behalf of, the UK government, Devolved Administrations, public bodies, local authorities or approved responsible bodies.

This will include all environmental land management schemes, including the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship (and other stewardship schemes) and Landscape Recovery, as well as the England Woodland Creation Offer from 6 April 2025.

Eligibility requirements include that relief will only apply where the land was agricultural land for at least two years immediately prior to the land use change and includes all land where there is an agreement in place on or after 6 March 2024.

As a result, farmers and land managers should not lose agricultural property relief if they decide to enter an agreement to convert some areas of their land to woodland or agroforestry (or other environmental land management). The relief will continue where an agreement has concluded if the land continues to be managed in a way that is consistent with that agreement.

## Guidance on reducing disease risk from animal feed storage units

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) has published [guidance on reducing the risk of disease from animal feed storage units](#).

Defra is asking all cattle farmers to participate in a short survey on feed silos, which has now been updated following the issuing of this guidance.

The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. The survey can be accessed [here](#), while a Welsh version can be found [here](#).

The aim of the survey is to support the application, this summer, to the World Organisation for Animal Health for official Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) negligible-risk status. Achieving this status would help facilitate international trade in British beef and beef products.

Defra needs to assess how many silos, or similar loose feed containers that predate the 1996 reinforced feed ban, are still in use or are still on farms. Defra is asking farmers to complete the survey even if they do not have a silo that was in use before 1 August 1996, as it needs to achieve a response rate that is representative of the whole cattle farm population.

The information is being requested on a voluntary basis and is subject to data protection legislation.





## 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.

### Share your views: Government consulting on targeted culling with increased use of badger vaccination

*On Thursday 14 March, Defra launched a consultation setting out proposals for the next phase of the badger TB control policy, which are part of delivering the next phase of the Government's bovine TB eradication strategy.*

While the majority of our disease control measures focus on cattle, the five-week consultation proposes retaining badger culling as an option in targeted parts only of the High-Risk Area and Edge Area, where there are high levels of infection in cattle, and where evidence suggests badgers are part of the problem in the spread of disease to these herds.

Culling would continue in these targeted areas until the disease situation has been deemed to have improved, following an annual review by the

UK's Chief Veterinary Officer. At this point, badger vaccination would be used to ensure the results achieved through culling are maintained. This sets out a clear exit strategy to non-lethal control preventing the return of disease in these areas.

The proposal builds on our investment in wider scale badger vaccination, which is now much more of a reality, with more farms involved in vaccination programmes than ever before.

The consultation also seeks views on proposals to reduce the administrative burden placed on farming groups delivering badger culling and vaccination, as well as options for publishing additional information about animal and herd level bTB risk on the ibTB interactive mapping tool, to help those purchasing cattle to better manage risks when sourcing new stock.

Learn more and share your views [here](#) before the consultation closes on **Monday 22 April**.

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## 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](https://farmingadvice.service.org.uk) and enter your email address into the newsletter sign-up box.

Alternatively, please email [bookings@farmingadvice.service.org.uk](mailto: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/](https://www.farmingadvice.service.org.uk/events/privacy/).