

Food & Farming

The government proposes gene editing to increase food security

The government has introduced a Bill to parliament to pave the way for genetically edited plants and animals to be grown and raised for food in England. The new legislation would relax regulations for gene-edited products and would at first apply only to plants. Until now use in England has been restricted under European law, but post Brexit, the UK is now able to set its own rules in relation to gene editing. The process involves switching certain genes on and off within an organism by snipping out pieces of DNA and is different to genetic modification as it does not involve combining different types of DNA. Defra believes that precision technologies such as gene editing will speed up the breeding of crops that have a natural resistance to diseases and climate change, enabling higher yields with less dependency on pesticides and fertilisers. For more information on the distinction between genetic modification and gene editing see this [blog](#).

New PPP registration process introduced

Defra and the Health and Safety Executive have published new requirements for users of professional plant protection products (PPPs). Businesses and other organisations that use PPPs and any adjuvants in the UK are now legally required to register basic details of their activities with Defra by 22 June 2022.

Defra is collecting this information for the whole of the UK and any businesses need to register if they:

- Use professional PPPs as part of their work including:
 - Agriculture such as maintaining arable crops, forage crops or livestock
 - Amenity such as those carrying out work in gardening and grounds maintenance
 - Forestry including tree management, planting and use of woodland
- Have professional PPPs and any adjuvants applied by a third party as part of their work in agriculture, horticulture, amenities or forestry

The NFU has questioned the rationale behind these new requirements and is concerned about the lack of consultation on how registration is going to be implemented. The stated aim from the government is to ensure compliance with existing pesticide legislation, however the NFU believes the regulations appear to overlook the UK's farm-level assurance that is already designed to ensure PPPs are used responsibly within agriculture. The registration form can be accessed [here](#).

Policy

Grant funding for 'adding value' to agricultural products

The government in England is launching a new grant this month as part of the broader Farming Investment Fund. This new £30 million fund is focused on the theme of 'adding value' and it will support farmers and growers to process, diversify and add value to their products. The fund will offer grants of between £25,000 and £300,000 for up to 40% of eligible project costs. The grants awarded through the adding value fund will pay for capital items to enable producers to add value to eligible agricultural products after they have been harvested or reared.

Examples of types of eligible capital items include equipment for preparing or processing for added value sales, equipment for processing inedible agricultural products into new products (for example, flax, hemp, wool, hides and skins), equipment for retailing agricultural products (for example vending machines) and the construction of premises for preparation and processing, including storage areas. Growers of agricultural products and businesses that process agricultural products (and are at least 50% owned by agricultural producers) are eligible to apply once the fund opens this month.

Environment & Natural Capital

Somerset Wetlands 'super' National Nature Reserve created

A new 'super' National Nature Reserve (NNR) has been created across parts of Somerset, designated as the Somerset Wetlands NNR. The NNR will protect 6,140 hectares of saltmarsh, heath and wetland habitats, home to

nationally significant wildlife populations such as the Skylark, Bittern and Avocet as well as a variety of insects including the hairy dragonfly, silver diving beetle and the raft spider. The new site knits together six existing nature reserves and is intended to demonstrate how the government is delivering on the Environment Act to deliver bigger, better and more joined up nature restoration. It is hoped that local tourism businesses and residents will benefit from the newly designated nature reserve through making access to nature easier for those in local towns, which will improve the health and wellbeing of residents and help to develop wildlife tourism opportunities.

OEP says 10% biodiversity net gain not enough

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) has said that the government's plans for requiring a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) for all future building developments is not enough to meet the government's current biodiversity targets. The OEP believes mandatory BNG set at 10% will only achieve no net loss rather than any actual gain in biodiversity levels and that a higher figure needs to be set in statute if the government wants to successfully reverse England's biodiversity decline. Although 10% is set as a minimum, the OEP is concerned there is no evidence to suggest that in practice developers will strive to achieve a higher rate of net gain, or that authorities will follow councils such as Lichfield District Council in setting a higher net gain value. As well as a concern over the lack of ambition, the OEP also highlighted that BNG is not the same as environmental net gain, which covers all forms of natural capital, not just biodiversity. Environmental net gain is one of the goals of the 25-year Environment Plan, but the government remains focused on BNG. The OEP stressed that putting environmental net gain into action is a 'crucial next step' for the government.

Five Nature Recovery projects launch

Five unique nature recovery projects spanning nearly 100,000 hectares have been announced by Defra and Natural England. They are equivalent in size to all 219 current National Nature Reserves (NNR) and will make a significant contribution towards the national delivery of the international commitment to protect at least 30% of land and sea by 2030 and the Environment Act's legally binding target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. These large-scale restoration projects are part of the Nature Recovery Network and distinct from the Landscape Recovery projects which are being progressed under the Environmental Land Management scheme. The Nature Recovery Network projects include Purple Horizons heathland restoration in the West Midlands, the Cambridge Nature Network, Somerset Wetlands with the new NNR at its heart, the Wendling Partnership in Norfolk and a pioneering investment model in the Wye Valley, Peak District.

Property & Development

Boiler upgrade scheme launches

New grants are available to encourage property owners to install low carbon heating systems through the Boiler Upgrade Scheme. The scheme is intended to help property owners overcome the upfront cost of low carbon heating technologies. It is open to domestic and small non-domestic properties in England and Wales and will run from 2022 to 2025. Private landlords and second homeowners are eligible and can apply even if they have already received separate funding for energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation, doors or windows. These grants are not available for social housing, new build properties and properties that already have government funding for a heat pump or biomass boiler. The grant will fund:

- £5,000 off the cost and installation of an air source heat pump
- £5,000 off the cost and installation of a biomass boiler
- £6,000 off the cost and installation of a ground source heat pump

Applicants can apply for one grant per property and hybrid heat pump systems, for example a combination of an oil boiler and air source heat pump are not eligible. The new heating system must have been commissioned on or after 1 April 2022. Further details are available [here](#).

Business & Economy

Community projects to rescue pubs, clubs and farms

Eight community projects across England and Northern Ireland are set to be 'rescued' by more than £2.2 million from the government's Community Ownership Fund. The grants will help community groups take control of venues in their area, as part of the government's drive to level up communities and boost businesses. One of the projects to receive funding is Hartcliffe City Farm in Bristol, where 30 acres of land is being regenerated to benefit the local community. The £150 million Community Ownership Fund delivers on the government commitment to strengthen community rights and support community groups to protect and take over assets of community value. The fund will run over a total of 4 years until 2024/25.

Other Rural News

Remote regions leapfrogging with renewables

Inhabitants of the world's most remote locations often rely upon aging infrastructure or standalone systems that in turn rely upon alternative fuels such as oil, LPG and solid fuels for energy generation; as expensive as they are bad for the environment. Yet the advent of renewables, energy storage and smart grids means some of the world's most remote regions have now leapfrogged ahead of their urban counterparts and already enjoy energy independence and self-sufficiency. The latest edition of Savills flagship global research publication Impacts takes a look at six case studies around the world:

- Isle au Haut, USA
- Sustainable City, UAE
- Orkney, UK
- El Hierro, Canary Islands
- Onslow, Australia
- Tokelau, New Zealand

To find out more read Savills [2022 Impacts report](#).

And finally...

Arctic town raises awareness of the climate crisis with fake bid to host summer Olympics

Residents of Salla, an Arctic town in Lapland, are so concerned about the climate crisis and the rate at which local temperatures are rising, that they have made a fake bid to host the summer Olympics in 2032, to raise awareness about global warming. Salla is the coldest town in Finland but is living on the frontline of the climate crisis, warming nearly three times faster than the rest of the planet. Weather has become much less predictable, threatening the local way of life. Using a heat-exhausted reindeer as their Olympic mascot, one resident says in the promotional Olympic bid video 'I've never felt warmth before, but I'm sure it's coming' while another wields a surfboard, mocking 'I can't wait for the snow to melt for good'.

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