

Food & Farming

U-turn on Countryside Stewardship

Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements starting on 1 January 2023 will now benefit from a 48% increase in payments for capital items. Defra originally stated the [new rates](#) would take effect from 5 January, excluding thousands of farmers who had applied for grants last year as part of new five- and 10-year agreements for 2023. Farming Minister Mark Spencer announced capital payment rates would increase by an average of 48% at the Oxford Farming Conference.

While farming organisations are relieved their lobbying has proven worthwhile, the NFU has advised that some farmers may wish to consider amending parts of their agreement to benefit from the increased rates. If a CS or Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot began in 2022 or earlier, applicants do have the option to withdraw part of the agreement, e.g. individual capital works, or to withdraw the whole agreement and reapply. The next CS application window for multiannual agreements is due to open in the Spring for agreements to start on 1 January 2024. Those withdrawing and reapplying would therefore be applying in the same pool as others applying for CS 2024 at their own risk. The costs and benefits will be unique to each applicant.

Through the government's Future Farming Resilience Fund, Savills Food and Farming team offers farmers in England free business advice to help them understand the changes to agricultural support, the potential impact on their business and to identify options to adapt their business models. Please click [here](#) to find out more and register your interest.

Emergency authorisation for neonicotinoid

Government has issued an emergency authorisation for the use of a neonicotinoid product with sugar beet. Such authorisations have been possible since rules were introduced in 2018 only permitting the use of three neonicotinoid compounds (clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam) in emergency circumstances. Cruiser SB, a seed treatment which contains thiamethoxam, may be used on sugar beet to protect against yellow virus provided certain conditions are met:

- There is a danger which cannot be controlled by other reasonable means
- There are circumstances requiring deviation from a standard approach to authorisations
- The emergency authorisation may only allow limited and controlled use of the treatment.

Farming minister Mark Spencer has concluded these conditions have been met and granted a 120-day emergency authorisation subject to additional conditions:

- Use is only permitted if the predicted virus incidence level is 63% or above, as determined on 1 March 2023
- Only a specific list of crops, none of which flower before harvest, are permitted to be planted in the same field as treated sugar beet within 32 months
- No further use of thiamethoxam seed treatments in the same field within 46 months
- A maximum application rate of 75ml per 100,000 seeds and drilling rate of 115,000 seeds per hectare
- Treated seed must be entirely incorporated in the soil and fully incorporated at the end of rows. Spillages should be buried or removed.

Tesco rolls out low carbon fertiliser

The supermarket is trialling the use of low-carbon fertiliser with five of its largest field vegetable suppliers across 1,300 hectares of crops. A 20% reduction in carbon emissions associated with fertiliser use is expected. Plans are in place to scale up to 4,000 hectares in 2024, which would produce 200,000 tonnes of vegetables. Eight products are being tested this year, which are manufactured from materials including food waste, chicken litter, algae and even fire extinguisher waste, as the powder in them contains Nitrogen, Phosphate and Sulphur.

Replacing pasteurisation

Pasteurisation, a process used to sterilise beverages for close to 160 years, could be superseded in future. It heats the liquid in question to eliminate harmful microorganisms, extending the shelf life of the product and making it safer to consume. Lyras, a Danish company, believes there may be an alternative to this energy-intensive process. The

company applies UV wavelengths to a turbulent flow of the liquid to eliminate any harmful microorganisms in a process known as ralsylation. According to the company, the main benefit of the process is it doesn't harm whey proteins, and instead preserves milk's flavour and nutrient levels. It can also cut energy consumption by 60-90% and water use by 60-80%.

Policy

Environmental Land Management details unveiled

Defra has published its [prospectus](#) for the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme for England. The long awaited document provides more clarity on all three tiers of the scheme. A further six Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) 'standards' will be launched in 2023, including hedgerows, nutrient management and low input grassland. The 'mid-tier' of ELMs will be a continuation of the Countryside Stewardship scheme, meaning the Local Nature Recovery scheme has been dropped. A revised CS offer will be available from 2024. The paper also confirms that a new round of funding for the third scheme, Landscape Recovery, will be launched this year. Payment rates will be reviewed on a regular systematic basis from 2024 to ensure that outcomes for farmers and the government are being met. For a full summary and analysis please see our Rural Research Briefing Note.

Scotland: investing in sustainable agriculture

The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) will provide 680 rural businesses with a share of more than £14 million towards protecting the environment and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Successful applicants have received an average of £20,600 each. However, some popular measures will be cut from the next round of funding, including improving public access, pond creation, muirburn and heather cutting, and bracken treatment (mechanised and chemical). Creation of hedgerows will be available but limited to 500 metres per application.

Applications for AECS 2023 are now open. The window for slurry stores closes on 24 March while the window for agri-environment and organic conversion and maintenance is longer this year, running to 7 June rather than late April. The points threshold for agri-environment application assessment this year has been set at 22. Full scheme guidance is available [here](#), if you would like to discuss the scheme please contact Hamish Logan or Alice Jackson.

Environment & Natural Capital

Wales: Woodland Creation Grants

Window 2 for Woodland Creation Grants opens on 13 February 2023 and closes 24 March 2023. The scheme is designed to support woodland creation for farmers and land managers. To be able to apply for the Woodland Creation Grant, applicants must first apply to the Woodland Creation Planning Scheme and get their woodland plan confirmed by Natural Resources Wales by 10 March 2023. Woodland created now will contribute towards the target in the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme which will require farmers to have at least 10% tree cover on their farm. There will be no disadvantage to farmers by choosing to create woodland in advance of the new scheme launching. Window 3 will open on 22 May and Window 4 on 21 August. Full scheme guidance is available [here](#) and if you would like to discuss the scheme please contact [Adam Todd](#).

Environmental improvement plan published

The first revision of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) has been [published](#). The document outlines the progress made against the ten goals initially outlined in the 25YEP, including the "apex goal" of improving nature by improving environmental quality, as well as improving the use of resources, improving climate change mitigation and improving biosecurity. Plans to achieve these goals include:

- A baseline map of soil health will be published by 2028
- Restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife habitat and 400 miles of river
- A new species survival fund to target some of the most threatened UK wildlife
- 160 wastewater treatment works to be constructed by 2027
- A plan for 65-80% of landowners to adopt nature-friendly farming practices on 10-15% of their land.

This final objective has been criticised for a lack of supporting detail, particularly around exactly how such an ambition will be funded. Mark Tufnell, president of the CLA, said "the more the government asks of us, the more we need guarantees as to the long-term budget". Tim Farron, Liberal Democrat environmental spokesperson, said "these environmental targets will be a complete waste of paper if there are no farmers left to put them into practice". For a full summary and analysis of the Environmental Improvement Plan please see our Rural Research Briefing Note.

Concern also continues over the impact of the retained EU law Bill's sunset process on environmental protections. Campaigners say as many as 1,781 environmental laws could be scrapped, more than triple the initial estimate of 570 laws. Ruth Chambers of Greener UK said, "the government want to make this about reclaiming sovereignty", adding "aiming to scrap or reform so many environmental regulations in 11 months is not only reckless but a huge waste of public resources".

A nature reserve in every county

A rewilding charity wants to create a series of nature reserves with one in each county of England. The charity Heal has purchased 460 acres of land in Somerset which will become its first reserve and a blueprint for 47 other sites to be created in England by 2050. "Heal Somerset" is currently grassland, with three small tributaries of the River Frome, miles of hedgerows, mature oaks and other trees and a number of traditional buildings which the charity hopes to renovate. The charity plans to introduce small numbers of rare breed cattle, pigs and ponies to graze the land in a natural way. Other ideas for the site include food growing areas and a community meeting space. A fundraising appeal will soon be launched to repay loans and seek support from major donors.

Property & Development

Is this what net zero developments will look like?

Real estate developer Human Nature has created a plan that it believes will act as an exemplar for sustainable developments. The plan for the Phoenix Industrial Estate in Lewes, East Sussex comprises 700 homes: mostly one, two and three bedroom apartments, with 210 policy compliant affordable homes. Affordable homes will be available first to people who have a family connection with the town of Lewes. Human Nature plans to employ reused and repurposed materials and focus on building highly efficient homes to enhance the sustainability of the development. There will be a river walk along the length of the site and the neighbourhood will contain strategic flood defences for the site and Pells area, designed to protect against a one in 100-year flood event, plus an allowance for climate change.

Business & Economy

Government swerving New Zealand concerns

MPs have accused the government of "swerving" concerns around the New Zealand trade deal. An inquiry by the international trade committee initially recommended the creation of an overarching trade strategy. Following the government response to its recommendations, the committee went on to say the "absence of a single, clear trade strategy" would leave "agricultural producers exposed to risk". The committee's chairman, Angus Brendan MacNeil MP, added "some might go as far as to characterise this as playing fast and loose with agriculture in the UK". The committee called for a debate in Parliament on future agreements, to which the government has agreed. However, it disagreed that MPs should be able to vote on them.

Rural Shop Report released

More than a third of all convenience stores in the UK are rural. A [report](#) by the Association of Convenience Stores ACS found 41% of those stores were isolated, and a further 46% located on a small parade with up to five other small businesses nearby. The report shows these stores could be helping with the cost of living crisis; close to two thirds of consumers believe they save fuel money by travelling shorter distances for their groceries. Around half say they are able to better manage both food waste (55%) and money (47%) by buying smaller quantities more often at their local convenience store. 59% save money on fuel due to the range of services offered by these stores; around a quarter offer parcel collection (26%), grocery deliveries (27%) and a post office (24%).

Other Rural News

Wild camping tradition restricted

A Dartmoor landowner has won the right to remove wild campers from his land in what has been seen as a test case for countryside access. Alexander Darwall, a hedge fund manager, and his wife Diana have owned a 4,000 acre estate on southern Dartmoor since 2013. Dartmoor was the only part of England and Wales where there had been an assumed right to backpack or wild camp without the landowner's permission. A High Court judge ruled the presumption of this right under the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 was legally wrong and permission was needed as the byelaw relating to open-air recreation did not specifically reference wild camping and the activity was therefore excluded. The judge, Sir Julian Flaux, Chancellor of the High Court, said if there was such a right, "the landowner would have suffered a loss of control or a usurpation of his rights over his own land". He added that there was "no local custom of camping which has the force of law" and it was apparent some wild campers on the Darwalls' land did "cause problems in relation to livestock and the environment".

The Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) had been fighting to maintain full access to the moor, arguing that camping was covered by the definition of “open-air recreation” found in section 10 of the byelaws, provided the participant arrived on foot or horseback. Dr Kevin Bishop, Chief Executive of the DNPA, said it is “really disappointed with the outcome” and the DNPA members have decided to seek permission to appeal the High Court judgment. The DNPA has also reached agreement in principle with landowners for a permissive system to allow backpack/wild camping to continue on designated areas. However, this has attracted criticism from campaign group Right to Roam and others, as it covers 18% less land and involves payments to landowners of up to £300. Some landowners have said they will be donating this back to DNPA’s Donate for Dartmoor fund.

And finally... man’s true best friend

It has long been said that dogs, loyal and affectionate, are man’s best friend. Yet research from Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary suggests pigs could be just as deserving of the title, if not more so. The study initially set out to discover if another social and domesticated animal, such as a pig, would look to humans to help solve problems, as dogs do. Scientists found that in a neutral situation, pigs turn to humans and initiate interactions as much as dogs do. Yet in a problem solving situation, the two species behave differently: pigs will keep trying to solve the task on their own whereas dogs often stop trying alone and display human-oriented communicative behaviours.

If you have queries regarding any of the articles, please contact Andrew Teanby.

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