

Food & Farming

Capital Grants now open for applications

The Capital Grants scheme is currently accepting new applications from farmers and land managers in England. A total of 78 items are available through the offer, including four recently added options supporting woodland access, the creation of a wildfire checklist, stone wall repairs, and educational visits.

Items are organised into six groups: air quality, assessments, natural flood management, improvements, water quality and boundaries, trees and orchards. Funding limits apply to four groups: water quality, air quality, and natural flood management. Each has a £25,000 limit, boundaries, trees, and orchards have a £35,000 limit. Applicants may include items from these groups up to the specified funding caps, as well as additional items from the assessments and improvements groups. Only one successful application per Single Business Identifier will be accepted annually.

A total of £150 million is available. When this funding is allocated, the scheme will close, so prompt action is recommended. The complete list of supported items is available [here](#). For more information, contact [Georgina Sweeting](#) in the Food & Farming team.

Rules for the reopened SFI 2024 offer

The Sustainable Farming Incentive 2024 (SFI) has reopened for a selected group of eligible farmers in England. These include farmers and land managers who started a SFI 2024 application on or after 12 January 2025, but had not submitted it before SFI applications closed suddenly on 11 March 2025 (“Started but not submitted”). And farmers who qualify for one of three exceptions: participants in the SFI pilot, individuals who experienced system issues, and those classified as “assisted digital”.

To control the cost of the limited reopening, annual application values for the “started but not submitted” group have been capped at £9,300. These farmers also cannot expand the area of their rotational options after year one. There is also a restriction on the SFI pilot group, which means they can only enter land included in the initial SFI pilot. The RPA has written to farmers and land managers who will be eligible to apply for the reopened SFI 2024 offer. For more information, see our [briefing note](#).

Policy

10-Year health plan for England

“[Fit for the Future](#)” is the name of the newly launched 10-year health plan, with big aims to move the UK from “sickness to prevention”. Food forms a large part of the prevention plan, which includes actions such as restricting junk food advertising targeted at children, reforming the soft drink industry levy to drive soft drinks manufacturers to reformulate, and introducing mandatory healthy food sales reporting for large food companies. The latter will also feed into the development of mandatory targets on the average healthiness of food sales.

This reporting will likely require companies to report their sales-weighted average tonnage of high in fat, sugar and salt products (HFSS), the average nutrient score across their product portfolio, the percentage of total sales from HFSS products, and the sales-weighted average calorie content per 100g. This methodology has been used by the Food Data Transparency Partnership’s health working group, which has been working since April 2024 to develop a metric for healthy food reporting.

For the wider rural sector, this signifies an early step towards food policy becoming more integrated. With health policy now reaching further into the realm of food regulation, a next step could see the upcoming food strategy increase the policy integration between health and agriculture. However, its advisory board’s composition could also suggest a health and food processing focus for this strategy, as there is only one agricultural representative on it.

The Environment Agency sets out its five-year plan

The Environment Agency (EA) has set out its plan for the next five years, and beyond to 2050. The plan (EA2030) includes three strategic goals: Healthy air, land and water, sustainable growth and a nation resilient to climate change. These will be “guiding principles” on how the EA will operate in the future. Included in the plan are actions to meet these goals, including reforming water regulation, bringing more farmers into Environmental Land Management, supporting the nature market accelerator and taking a more “robust” approach to environmental breaches.

The plan will work towards regulation that rewards innovation and good practice, and says this will include reducing requirements for businesses with the best environmental performance. How this would work in practice is unclear, but it risks potentially leaving the door open for greenwashing and avoidance. Much of the plan is reflective of The Corry Review, which was published earlier this year and focused on whether Defra’s regulatory landscape is fit for purpose. Our [briefing note](#) on the review provides more information.

Steve Reed speaks at Groundswell

Speaking to a packed tent at Groundswell, the Environment Secretary Steve Reed sat face to face with farmers and professionals who were, in his words, “the pioneers of the agricultural transition”. The speech was optimistic, with messages of increased collaboration, innovation and environmental responsibility woven throughout. He stressed the importance of food security, bringing out the well-known “food security is national security” line, but caveating with a new point – food security can only be achieved by restoring nature, a task “central to the government’s approach”.

On this point, the Environment Secretary offered a small insight into what the next iteration of the SFI may look like, saying “[the] reformed SFI will maximise benefits for the environment, particularly around water quality and biodiversity”. He also said his department would look to simplify the SFI by offering packages of options that have more impact when delivered together – this sounds similar to how the SFI pilot was structured.

The similarity between the original pilot version of SFI didn’t end there in Mr Reed’s speech – he spoke of returning to the principle of “public money for public goods”, a phrase originally coined by George Eustice, one of Steve Reed’s predecessors.

Environment & Natural Capital

The fightback against ash dieback

New research reveals wild ash trees in the UK are rapidly evolving resistance to ash dieback, a fungal disease that has devastated millions of trees in the UK since 2012. Scientists from Kew Gardens and Queen Mary University of London found younger generations of ash trees, grown after the fungus arrived, show greater genetic resistance, offering hope for the species’ recovery. However, researchers caution that resistance may not evolve quickly enough to outpace the disease, which is expected to kill up to 85% of older ash trees. Natural regeneration is key, but human intervention, such as selective breeding or gene editing, may also be needed. The findings underscore the importance of preserving genetic diversity and allowing natural processes to support woodland resilience. To find out more about mitigating tree disease and pest impacts, read our [Forestry Spotlight](#).

Natural England chair is ‘enthusiastic’ about lynx rewilding

Tony Juniper, the Chair of Natural England, has expressed strong support for reintroducing lynx to Britain, ideally within his two-year term. The Lynx UK Trust has proposed a trial release in Kielder Forest, Northumberland, using animals sourced from Sweden. Lynx, the Labrador-sized cat once native to Britain and hunted to extinction by the Middle Ages, pose no threat to humans and primarily prey on deer and rabbits. They could potentially help manage overabundant deer populations. Despite successful reintroductions across Europe, the UK effort faces legal barriers under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act, which The Lynx UK Trust argues a simple legal amendment could resolve. Natural England stressed the need for community engagement, particularly with sheep farmers, whose opposition remains firm. Meanwhile, similar efforts in Scotland recommend compensation schemes for livestock losses to support coexistence. Advocates highlight lynx are ideal apex predators for Britain’s biodiversity recovery.

Property & Development

Decent Homes Standard consultation

The government is consulting on a reformed Decent Homes Standard (DHS) to ensure all rented accommodation in England is free from hazards. Significantly, rather than maintaining separate standards for social and privately rented homes, the government has proposed a unified standard applicable to all types of rented housing. The

proposal also includes a recommendation that compliance becomes mandatory for privately rented properties by 2035 or 2037.

The current DHS may classify a home as not meeting standards based on the age of the facilities rather than their actual condition. Under the new standard, any poorly maintained features, regardless of age, will be regarded as not meeting the standard. Additional criteria for compliance include the quality of floor coverings, security measures, and minimum size and quality requirements for kitchens and bathrooms. The revised standard will also be connected to Awaab's Law, which covers mould and damp regulations and is currently under consultation.

The DHS consultation also invites feedback on proposed enforcement mechanisms for local authorities. It suggests councils are given the power to issue civil penalties of up to £7,000 for more pressing cases. It also proposes fines will be raised for non-compliance from £30,000 to £40,000. The [consultation](#) is open until 10 September 2025.

Renters' Rights Bill update

As the Renters' Rights Bill prepares to move onto its third and final reading in the House of Lords, a flurry of last-minute amendments has been pushed through. One of these, aimed at securing accommodation for seasonal or self-employed farm workers, has been approved by a majority of 253 votes to 150. This amendment addresses the fact landlords could only reclaim possession of properties to house directly employed staff. The change has been welcomed by the NFU, saying, "without this amendment, businesses could face real difficulties planning for their workforce and keeping their day-to-day operations running smoothly".

A proposal included initially in the Renters' Rights Bill to balance giving tenants enhanced rights to keep pets in rental properties, taking out special insurance, has been dropped. Ministers cited concerns over the availability of suitable insurance products and amended the legislation in the House of Lords. In response, Conservative and crossbench peers narrowly passed an alternative amendment by 206 votes to 198, allowing landlords to charge a refundable pet deposit of up to three weeks' rent to cover potential damage. This sets the stage for further debate when the Bill returns to the House of Commons for consideration of amendments, where the government is expected to oppose the change.

Scotland: Right to Buy

The Scottish government has launched a consultation on amending the legal rights available to help community groups take ownership of local land and assets. Proposals include:

- Combining the current four rights to buy into two, one compulsory and one non-compulsory.
- Modifying the requirements that determine a community body, specifically reducing the requirement that 75% of the members must be residents of the community to 50%.
- Changing the voting thresholds for petitions and ballots that demonstrate community support.
- Altering requirements around late applications.

Since 2003, 268 applications for Right to Buy have been submitted by community groups interested in acquiring assets, with 175 of these approved by Scottish Ministers. The [consultation](#) runs until 5 October 2025.

Business & Economy

Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy

The Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy outlines 42 actions to address the key barriers to onshore wind development in the UK. The 42 actions fall under six key areas:

- Scoping, planning and consenting
- Networks and systems
- Communities and public perception
- Aviation and defence
- Financial and routes to market
- Supply chains, skills and the workforce

Planning policy and guidance for onshore wind will be updated to ensure planning decisions are based on up-to-date technical information and evidence. A consultation will also be held on permitted development rights to support small-scale deployment and repowering, and updated community benefits guidance will be published. A new Onshore Wind Council will be established to oversee the implementation of this strategy and develop further actions needed to achieve targets in the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan.

Grocery watchdog investigates Amazon

Amazon is currently under investigation by the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) regarding its treatment of suppliers. The GCA has announced an inquiry into whether the US-based online retail company violated regulations by making late payments to its suppliers. As part of this process, the GCA is requesting suppliers provide evidence of their interactions with Amazon. The GCA is responsible for regulating Britain's 14 largest grocery retailers to ensure fair treatment of suppliers. Only a year ago, Amazon was directed by the GCA to implement "swift and comprehensive action" to enhance its compliance with industry standards that are aimed at safeguarding supplier interests.

Other Rural News

And finally... nature-based solution ruffles a few feathers

After commuters, pigeons are probably Euston Station's most prolific presence, though their bathroom habits make them decidedly less welcome. That could all be about to change as Euston employs a nature-based solution with a difference. Meet Oscar, the latest member of the Euston station team. He's also a Harris Hawk. Under the care of professional handler Adel Letchford, Oscar will be on weekly patrol for the next few months, soaring around the station to discourage pigeons from roosting, nesting and feeding. To keep the birds guessing, his flights will vary in time and location, ensuring they never get too comfortable. He's previously been deployed in surrounding areas with noticeable success, and staff have already reported a sharp drop in pigeon populations within the station.

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