

SFI limited reopening



On Monday 7 July, Defra's Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) 2024 offer for farmers in England reopened to a limited number of eligible applicants for six weeks. These include farmers and land managers who started an SFI 2024 application on or after 12 January 2025, but had not submitted it before SFI applications closed suddenly on 11 March 2025.

The scheme was closed without notice because the available budget had been spent. Previously, when saving an application, farmers and land managers were shown a message stating that they would receive six weeks' notice before the scheme closed. This was unintended and has since been attributed to a technical error. The additional notification stating that saved applications would be retained for two months before deletion was correct, and this has informed the eligibility criteria for the "started but not submitted" group that can take advantage of the limited reopening of the scheme.

Eligible farmers and land managers who can apply during this summer's six weeks have been notified in writing by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), and split into four groups:

Started but not submitted

Farmers or land managers who started and saved an application on or after 12 January 2025 but did not submit the claim before the closure on 11 March.

SFI pilot exception

Farmers or land managers who were part of an SFI pilot scheme, where the expiration date of the agreement prevented them from making an SFI 2024 application before the closure on 11 March.

System issues exception

Farmers or land managers who experienced known system issues with the portal that prevented their claim from being submitted before the closure on 11 March.

Assisted digital exception

Farmers or land managers whose applications were delayed while waiting for help from the RPA to apply online.

Full guidance on the application process during this window can be found on the [RPA website](#). There is a lot of information on options and eligibility, but the available options, land-area-restricted options, and endorsed options remain the same as before the scheme closure. Our May 2024 [briefing note](#) provides a more detailed summary of the action areas and available options. If you believe you may be eligible to apply for the reopened SFI 2024 offer, but the RPA has not written to you to confirm you're eligible to apply, the RPA asks you to use its complaints process.

It is essential to thoroughly read and understand the rules and guidance published by the RPA when applying. However, some individual restrictions have been placed on the groups defined above, which are highlighted in the table below. The "eligible started but not submitted" category cannot increase the area of their rotational options after year one, and SFI Pilot applicants can only apply on land that was included in their pilot agreement.

Exception	One application per Single Business Identifier	£9,300 per year limit*	Cap on rotational actions after year one	Limit on land type
Eligible started but not submitted	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
SFI Pilot	Yes	No	No	Yes
System issues	Yes	No	No	No
Assisted digital	Yes	No	No	No

*The £9,300 annual income limit does not include the SFI management payment. The rate for the management payments applies only to the first 50 hectares of the land under the agreement and remains at £40 per eligible hectare for year one and £20 per eligible hectare for years two and three.

Annual application limit: self-validation and endorsed actions

To control the cost of the limited reopening, annual application values for the “eligible started but not submitted” group have been capped at £9,300 (the median average agreement value for existing SFI 2024 agreements). Under the current scheme rules, you can hold more than one SFI agreement, so further options could be applied for in 2026, but there is a risk that the eligibility rules could change.

The SFI 2024 application portal will not prevent farmers and land managers from submitting a claim that exceeds the upper limit of £9,300 per year (excluding the management payment); therefore, it is important to correctly calculate the value of the options being applied for. If a submitted application exceeds the maximum annual agreement limit, you will be allowed to start and submit one further application during the six-week window. If this subsequent application still exceeds the maximum annual agreement limit, it will be rejected and you will have no further chance to apply.

If applications are submitted with options that are not compatible, are on land or features that are not eligible, or are on land already in another scheme that would lead to “double funding”, these options will be removed. There will be no opportunity to amend the application. It is therefore essential to check the selected options are suitable for the land.

Applications that include land under endorsed action GRH6 (manage priority habitat species rich grassland) where Natural England does not endorse this action, will have GRH6 removed from the application with no opportunity to amend it. If there is any doubt about whether an endorsement will be granted, it may be better to apply for other options instead.

Key dates

Applications open noon 7 July 2025

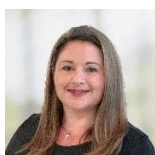
Applications close 11:59pm 18 August 2025

Summary

This limited reopening of SFI 2024 will be a welcome opportunity for eligible farmers, especially because delinked payments for 2026 will be reduced by 98% to a maximum of £600 per year, and Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier applications remain on an “invitation to apply” basis.

It is now even more important for farmers, land managers, and rural business owners to evaluate the performance of their enterprises and explore alternative revenue streams in order to mitigate potential risks associated with further reductions in proposed government support.

Looking forward to SFI 2026, the revised offer is due to be announced in summer 2025 with applications opening in “early” 2026. So far there have been no specific announcements - Daniel Zeichner the Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs has previously told Parliament the SFI would be reformed “to direct funding towards SFI actions which are most appropriate for the least productive land and, [therefore], have the strongest case for enduring public investment”. This suggests the SFI could evolve to align more closely with the upcoming land use framework and focus more funding on the uplands, the goal being to incentivise land use change to improve biodiversity, forest cover, and cut greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, Environment Secretary Steve Reed told an audience at the Groundswell Festival the SFI will return to the principle of public money for public goods, particularly in relation to water quality and biodiversity. The scheme will be simplified and offer packages of actions that deliver more for nature when delivered together. This sounds more like the “standards” based approach that was trialled in the SFI pilot.

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