OFC announcement 2024 – ENGO messaging

Our vision

- We are on track to have 70% of land in Environmental Land Management schemes by 2028; By early 2024 we expect to be more than halfway to that target with 38,000 farmers in schemes.
- Around 8,000 farmers to date have applied to the Sustainable Farming Incentive and have taken up actions that mean 147,000ha of arable land is being managed without insecticides, 56,000ha of low input grassland is focused on improving sustainability, and 11,000km of hedgerows are under management.
- There has also been a 94% increase in Countryside Stewardship agreements since 2020, with 32,000 agreements already in place across England for 2023.
- In 2024, we will go even further to upgrade our offer so it delivers for the environment, including increasing access to actions that will have the most positive environmental impact.

What is new

- From 2024, we are introducing around 50 new actions to the Countryside Stewardship and the Sustainable Farming Incentive offer, bringing the total to more than 180 actions farmers can do to support environmental outcomes.
- Expanding the range of land management actions available and offering farmers the flexibility they need to make our Environmental Land Management schemes work for their business are the best ways to achieve the level uptake from farmers necessary to create positive change for the environment.
- In 2024 we will also start introducing premium payments for actions that have big environmental impact and for combinations of actions that deliver benefits at scale. We want to encourage and incentivise more ambitious scheme agreements, to bring about the change our great British countryside needs.

What has been improved

- We have taken actions that were limited to Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agreements and changed them for the new combined offer so that more farmers and land managers can access them. For example, for later in 2024 farmers will be able to get funding for managing newly created or restored species rich and wet grasslands, meaning more people can get involved in protecting such priority habitats and supporting threatened species.
- To enable more people to access Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agreements, we will:
  - evolve our offer through a process of continuous improvement.
  - make the application process easier and more flexible by introducing online applications and a rolling application window. This will be in Summer 2024.
  - increasing the quality and speed of our advice by improving administrative processes to free-up expert advice. We will also use external advice, where available, to support specific habitats and targets.
  - This year we will improve the application process, so it is easier for people to identify the actions that are relevant to them. This will help more farmers design

packages of actions that make sense to deliver together and work well for the environment

- We will also enable agreement holders to combine actions on the same land and add more actions and land each year. By providing increased opportunities for farmers to create more ambitious agreements we will further promote environmental sustainability.
- We will offer an expanded and improved facilitation fund to make it easier for farmers to learn from each other and work together to create habitats that benefit the environment, like more joined up hedgerows that can provide an extended, safe route for wildlife.
- We will support greater coordination between our schemes and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).
- We are helping farmers to prevent harms to the environment and avoid errors by improving geospatial and other remote monitoring mechanisms, as well as increasing the use of proactive advice and guidance-led activity. These changes are helping to make regulatory services clearer, fairer and more effective.

Annex 1 from the ATP update: Our plan for achieving environmental outcomes

We set out our target outcomes for the environment and climate in the Environmental Improvement Plan and Net Zero Growth Plan.

Some of our target outcomes require large-scale uptake of actions that can be delivered without external advice or support and that we know can be made to work in every setting.

We currently pay for these through productivity grants, the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, SFI and some of the CS Mid Tier revenue and capital actions. We also set and manage regulations, where universal action is required to protect the environment, public health or animal and plant health and welfare. In terms of outcomes, large-scale uptake of standardised actions is particularly important for:

Maintaining and supporting farm productivity and resilient domestic food production through more sustainable and efficient management of soil, water, nutrients and pests.

Reducing nutrient pollution by at least 40% by 2038. There is an interim target of 10% by January 2028, and 15% in catchments containing protected sites in unfavourable condition due to nutrient pollution by 31 January 2028. These outcomes require large-scale action to reduce run-off into watercourses, such as:

- winter cover crops where we have 58,500ha under agreement across CS Mid Tier and Higher Tier
- better management of seasonal grazing where we have 25,000ha under CS agreements

Seeing 65% of farms adopt nature-friendly practices on 10 to 15% of their land. This will support our targets of halting and then reversing the decline in biodiversity and improving water quality. This includes actions such as managing wet grassland for breeding waders and habitat strips next to waterbodies.

Supporting the development of the Nature Recovery Network by creating hedgerows, buffer strips, corners and blocks to join across farmed landscapes. In total this will help

create or restore 48,000km of hedgerows by 2037 and 72,000km of hedgerows by 2050, compared to a baseline of 10,500km restored and 1,500km created in CS up to 2023.

Bringing at least 40% of agricultural soil into sustainable management by 2028 and 60% by 2030. This will provide benefits for flood risk mitigation, drought, biodiversity, food production, and carbon storage.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, for instance through the deployment of precision farming and improved animal health

Supporting increased uptake of agroforestry so that it becomes an increasingly normal part of farm businesses for 2050.

Through SFI and our grant offers, we are helping reduce the costs and risks associated with adopting these actions and accelerating their large-scale adoption.

We will keep actions under review, so we can adapt them to best achieve our target outcomes. For example, our slurry management grant offer is time-limited in the expectation that farming regulation will be the main method for preventing pollution arising from slurry management in future.

In 2024, we will be expanding the range of actions available. We will make it more straightforward to understand, access and manage SFI and CS Mid Tier agreements as part of the combined offer - continuing to make the schemes more flexible and workable for farmers.

Increased, impactful uptake of tailored actions specific to certain habitats, features and settings

Some of the actions required will be more specific to certain habitats, features and settings. This means they may be implemented differently in different areas and may require formal consent or support from a statutory body or commercial advisers.

We pay for these actions through CS (Mid Tier and Higher Tier) and Landscape Recovery and they are particularly important for:

- improving **farm productivity and profitability**, by enabling farmers and land managers to generate an income for public goods produced on less productive areas of land or land not suitable for farming
- increasing **tree canopy and woodland cover** to 16.5% of total land area in England by 2050, which:
    - encourages carbon sequestration (the process by which trees store carbon from the atmosphere) as part of our efforts to achieve net zero
    - improves tree and woodland management by funding tree planting as well as woodland creation, restoration, and management
- increasing and improving restoration and maintenance of 240,000ha of **peatland** by 2050, to retain existing soil carbon and encourage carbon sequestration, as part of our efforts to achieve net zero
- creating and restoring 500,000ha of **wildlife rich habitat** by 2042
- restoring 75% of **protected sites** to favourable condition by 2042

- supporting delivery of our commitment to protect 30% of our land by 2030 (**30by30**) and ensuring these areas are effectively managed and ensuring these areas are effectively managed
- supporting continued favourable management of existing **priority habitat** already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs:
    - reducing invasive non-native species
    - tackling pressures on our rarest species (including through management of species that present a threat to threatened native species or to habitats)
- mitigating **flood risk and other climate-change related impacts** for example risks to tree health as the climate changes
- continuing to support **access, heritage and engagement** in farming and the countryside

Longer-term, larger-scale action

Some locations and businesses are better suited to longer-term, larger-scale interventions.

We pay for these through Landscape Recovery, which offers funding to projects covering at least 500ha and running for at least 20 years. These projects will particularly contribute to:

- halting the decline in species abundance by 2030, and then increasing abundance by at least 10% to exceed 2022 levels by 2042, through the protection of specific species and habitats:
    - our first round of Landscape Recovery projects will target the conservation of over 260 species
- supporting continued favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through our new farming schemes by 2042
- contributing significant area towards the EIP target of restoring 75% of **protected sites** to favourable condition by 2042
- creating and restoring 500,000ha of **wildlife rich habitat** by 2042
- supporting delivery of our 30by30 target, by ensuring that positive outcomes for biodiversity will be sustained over the long-term
- improving the GB Red List Index for species extinction risk by 2042 (compared to the 2022 baseline)
- increasing England's tree canopy cover and woodland cover to 16.5% by 2050, encouraging carbon sequestration as part of our efforts to achieve net zero
- restoring and maintaining 240,000 ha of peatland by 2050, from a 2025 baseline, retaining existing soil carbon and encouraging carbon sequestration, as part of our efforts to achieve net zero
- improving water quality – for example, our first round of Landscape Recovery projects will fund 3,000ha of new woodland along England's rivers and restore over 600km of rivers

The round 1 and 2 projects currently in the scheme cover around 250,000ha. We expect the round 1 projects to start entering implementation in 2024, and the round 2 projects by 2026.

We will run a further competitive round of funding in 2024 and plan to run further rounds each year after that.

Targets and delivery mechanisms

This summarises how we expect to deliver our target outcomes through our combination of offers.

The specific contribution of different actions is not fixed, and we will keep this plan under review over time as we continue to improve and expand our policies and schemes.

Delivery mechanisms for each target are listed in approximate order of contribution.

Target A: Improve farm productivity and maintain food production

Schemes: paying for actions that can improve farm productivity, support resilient food production, and deliver environment and climate outcomes

Grants: providing support towards the cost of equipment, technology and farm infrastructure that helps farmers and growers improve productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability.

Research and development (R&D): investing in R&D on innovative new methods and technologies to help farmers and growers use new methods and technologies to become more productive, environmentally sustainable, and resilient (for example, on data, crop and livestock production). Funding R&D partnerships to support the development of large-scale solutions to substantially improve productivity and environmental sustainability.

Regulation: protecting animal health and welfare for farm animals and maintain biosecurity, which in turn can support reduced waste and improved trade opportunities.

Animal Health and Welfare Pathway: payments for farmers to receive bespoke vet advice and support eradicating endemic diseases, which can in turn reduce costs and waste and help maintain food production and productivity.

Capital grants for equipment, technology and infrastructure that supports farmers to improve animal health and welfare and improve their efficiency.

Target B: Halt and reverse the decline in species abundance through:

- management of protected sites
- creation and restoration of wildlife-rich habitats
- adoption of nature-friendly farming practices
- bespoke species recovery actions
- woodland management
- management of invasive native and non-native species

SFI: large-scale uptake of actions to provide habitat and food year-round, while promoting the recovery of river and lake habitats by reducing runoff and soil erosion.

HLS, CS and Landscape Recovery: specific, targeted action to create, maintain and improve protected sites, other important sites, and specific habitats and species under threat (including woodland), and manage invasive, non-native species.

Regulation: preventing damage to biodiversity through improvements in farm regulation relating to landscape features, habitats, water and air pollution and biosecurity.

Private schemes: payment for actions to improve biodiversity and create habitat.

Target C: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture

SFI: large-scale uptake of actions to reduce emissions (for example, nutrient management).

Grants: development and adoption of equipment, technology, and infrastructure to make farms more efficient and reduce emissions from livestock.

Research and development: funding of R&D to support new technologies and practices that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Private schemes: payment for carbon reductions in agriculture that can be sold through the developing carbon trading market.

Animal Health and Welfare Pathway: improving animal health and controlling and eradicating endemic diseases to reduce GHG emissions from livestock.

Target D: Increase tree canopy and woodland cover, including increased levels of agroforestry

CS and HLS: increase tree planting, accelerate the adoption of agroforestry, improve tree health, and expand effective woodland management, maintenance, and resilience (taking on delivery from the Nature for Climate Fund).

SFI: accelerate the adoption of agroforestry.

LR: establish and maintain larger areas of new woodland and other tree cover.

Target E: Peatland restoration, maintenance, and sustainable management

CS and HLS: restoration and re-wetting of areas peatland on individual holdings (including join-up across multiple holdings).

LR: longer-term, larger scale projects to re-wet and restore larger areas of peatland.

Private schemes: payment for carbon sequestration.

Regulation: Preventing inappropriate burning and providing protection to designated sites and upland landscapes.

SFI: more sustainable management of farmed areas of peatland.

Target F: Water quality and management:

- reduce Nitrogen, Phosphates and sediment pollution
- 66% increase in water storage by 2050
- 60% of agricultural soil (3.5 million hectares) in sustainable management by 2030

Regulation: More effective implementation, communication, and management of regulations on water quality and management.

SFI: large-scale adoption of more sustainable approaches to nutrient, soil, and pest management and riparian buffers to protect rivers and lakes from runoff, soil erosion and nutrient leaching.

CS and HLS: enhancing and restoring watercourses, ponds and lakes for natural flood management, water quality and biodiversity.

Grants: equipment and infrastructure to improve soil and nutrient management, improve slurry storage and management, and improve water storage and management. R&D to support the next generation of solutions to these issues, including technologies to utilise organic manure as fertiliser.

LR: larger-scale, longer-term projects to restore and maintain sensitive rivers, wetlands, and other waterbodies, including riparian habitat to intercept and reduce runoff and soil erosion.

Private schemes: payments to improve water quality.

Target G: Improve air quality

Regulation: tackling air pollution from farming, including slurry and manure spreading, pesticide application, livestock management, and burning crop residue, heathers, and grasses.

SFI: support improved use of fertiliser and on farm nutrients.

CS: screen and buffer habitats from sources of air pollution; capital grants to reduce emissions from agriculture.

Slurry management scheme: grants to improve slurry storage and management, which includes reducing ammonia emissions and continued research into new technologies and practices.

Target H: Beauty, heritage, and engagement

CS and HLS: support for improvements to heritage, beauty, educational and public access to farms and woodland.

LR: specific longer-term projects over a larger area, including public access and engagement.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL): grants to support beauty, heritage, and engagement in protected landscapes.

Regulation: protecting landscapes against inappropriate intensification and development and protecting rights of way.

CS and HLS: payments for educational and public access on farms.

As well as these specific targets, we have designed our measures to help farming and the natural environment respond to a changing climate.