

OFC announcement 2024 - Forestry messaging

Our vision

- We are encouraging farmers and land managers to plant more trees in the right places and manage more of our woodlands by improving and simplifying our current offer and introducing new agroforestry actions into Environmental Land Management Schemes and continuing to support woodland creation through the England Woodland Creation offer.
- The actions for trees and woodland can:
 - capture and store carbon
 - support nature recovery and increase biodiversity, by providing food and habitat for wildlife
 - improve air and water quality
 - reduce flood risk
 - improve farmers' resilience, helping crops and livestock to better withstand climate threats and adapt to a changing climate
 - improve farmer and land managers' ability to deal with tree pests and diseases
 - protect heritage assets and landscape character
 - improve access to woodlands to benefit public health and wellbeing, and connection with the landscape
 - support timber security and the rural economy through increased productivity.
- Through the Environmental Land Management schemes, we are funding actions that support woodland management and restoration as well as a new in-field agroforestry offer.
- We will take a phased approach to the transition of England Woodland Creation offer (EWCO) and Woodland Creation Planning Grant (WCPG) into the Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs), to ensure there's no gap in offering grants to applicants for woodland creation. Future Countryside Stewardship (CS) woodland creation offers will largely mirror the EWCO offer to ensure fairness for current scheme participants and secure the benefits of this groundbreaking scheme.
- Additionally, we will expand the tree health support through CS capital grants, using learning from the Tree Health Pilot. The current Tree Health Pilot grants (Tree Health Restoration, Tree Health Improvement) will continue until the transition into ELMs, ensuring that there is no gap in support.
- We are reviewing rates for the England Woodland Creation Offer and related forestry grants alongside the new ELM rates announced today.

To achieve these ambitions, we are taking the following action:

What is new

- Within our woodland management offer, we're introducing new actions to improve resilience, flood and drought mitigation, manage our most precious woodland habitats, wildfire management, provide educational and public access, and new capital items for restocking, coppicing and ride creation. These will be introduced from 2024 onward.

Agroforestry:

- We are introducing new actions to create and maintain in-field agroforestry systems.
- Agroforestry is tree planting that is deliberately combined with food production on the same land. It can:
 - reduce soil erosion
 - improve water and air quality
 - provide shelter for livestock and crops
 - reduce flood risk

- increase biodiversity
- capture and store carbon
- improve climate change resilience
- We are introducing a suite of in-field agroforestry actions across various tree densities to encourage more trees in the farmed landscape alongside agricultural production. The agroforestry actions have been designed to appeal to the widest range of farmers and be applicable on the widest range of land possible to service our ambitious objective on agroforestry to deliver net zero, alongside wider biodiversity and environmental benefits.
- The lower tree density actions enable agroforestry to be done on land with low sensitivity to tree planting without requiring Environmental Impact Assessments, which makes agroforestry accessible to those that want to try this innovative approach and to tenant farmers. The higher tree density actions provide for those who want to maximise the benefits from agroforestry planting, including those already confident with implementing agroforestry practices.
- These new actions supplement agroforestry offers already available in CS (see below) and EWCO providing land managers with more flexibility when incorporating trees into agriculture - including hedgerow, wood pasture and parkland, traditional orchard, shelterbelt and riparian planting.

What has been improved

- We have improved payment rates in Countryside Stewardship (from 1 Jan 2024), SFI and the SFI Pilot (from the start of the current agreement year for SFI).
- We are improving the existing woodland management offer by:
 - reducing the minimum threshold from 3ha to 0.5ha, so more farmers and land managers can access funding;
 - increasing payment rates to ensure funding better reflects the costs incurred by woodland managers;
 - making it simpler and more flexible including removing the deadline for when Woodland Management Plans must be submitted for the woodland improvement offer;
 - expanding the range of supplements to target priorities with 9 new actions available;
 - retaining existing capital items, for example to produce a plan for action within woodlands (Woodland Management Plan);
- To improve our offer on wood pasture we will:
 - be less prescriptive, making actions simpler and more flexible;
 - combine actions for lowland and upland wood pasture, having aligned the payment rates earlier this year.
- We are improving our species management support to protect trees, woodland habitats and threatened woodland species by:
 - continuing to control the population of invasive non-native grey squirrels where they're causing significant damage to woodlands and trees;
 - managing the impact of deer on crops and in woodland through the introduction of new and amended actions and expanded eligibility
 - enhancing bracken and rhododendron control and management,
 - expanding the threatened species supplement to cover woodland species
 - introducing measures to control the population of invasive edible dormice that cause damage to trees and orchards by stripping bark, compete with hole-nesting birds for nest sites, and prey on eggs and nesting birds.
- We are improving public access and engagement with woodlands to benefit public health and wellbeing by adding new actions for permissive access, and expanding the current educational access option so that more people can visit woodlands to learn about woodland management and forestry.