

OFC announcement – Arable and Horticulture messaging

2024 will see the biggest upgrade to farming schemes since the start of the agricultural transition; we are backing our farmers by: increasing payment rates by 10%, making schemes more flexible and easier to access, and publishing detailed information to give farmers greater certainty.

Our vision

- Arable and horticultural farmers will continue to grow crops, coupled with actions that will also support farmland wildlife.
- We are launching around 50 new actions, which will enable arable and horticulture farmers to receive funding for things like precision farming for the first time. These actions are inspired by what innovative farmers are already doing.
- We will continue to pay for the existing actions available in SFI and CS, including integrated pest management, improving soil health and nutrient management.
- We're paying more consistently for both 'creation' and 'maintenance' actions so those who have already made changes are not disadvantaged, meaning more habitats created and appropriately managed.

What is new

- We are introducing new actions which will pay arable farmers for managing landscape features in place to hold flood waters and/or improve resilience to drought, such as bunds.
- We are introducing 3 new actions that will pay farmers to help them improve their soil health. There will be a new action to adopt no till, and two actions for having a cover crop in between two harvestable crops – one for a spring/summer and the other for a summer autumn cover crop.
- Recognising that many farmers face challenges in achieving the existing lowland peat offers for raising water levels, we are introducing new, more accessible options to better enable farmers to raise their water table in their peat soils to more achievable levels.
- A new action will pay farmers for providing permissive access so farmers can support responsible access in a way that works for their land.

Precision Farming

- Precision farming involves using technology to target farming activities and reduce the use of costly pesticides or fertilisers.
- This can:
 - reduce costs
 - improve yields
 - improve productivity
 - benefit biodiversity and soil quality
 - improve air and water quality
- We are introducing 4 new actions to pay for using precision farming approaches.
- We will also be awarding contracts, with an initial value of up to £15m, to drive crop innovation.
- By offering payments which support agricultural technology, such as robotic mechanical weeding technology, in addition to launching more grants in 2024 we are helping farmers adopt new technology or practices so they can grow more, sell more and have more resilient businesses.

What we are improving

- We're increasing scheme payment rates by 10% on average.

- If farmers have a live Countryside Stewardship or Sustainable Farming Incentive agreement, they don't need to do anything to benefit, we will automatically apply any uplifts to existing agreements where applicable.
- We are increasing payment rates for existing CS actions that convert land to organic management and manage existing land under organic management.
- We will be increasing the payment rate for the existing action that funds the management of peat in arable systems.
- We are making the existing woodland management offer within CS simpler, by changing the structure of the offer to include more supplements and bring in line with EWCO based on feedback from woodland managers. We are making it more flexible by removing the deadline for when Woodland Management Plans must be submitted. We are also ensuring payments cover more of the costs.
- We will expand existing actions for farmers to manage habitats next to waterbodies to include arable land.
- Farmers will be able to sign up as a member to access the full complement of resources from 'The Institute of Agriculture and Horticulture' (TIAH), from 10 January. TIAH (which is part-funded by Defra) will play a pivotal role in creating a highly skilled, technically proficient, agricultural workforce.

