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INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT

Briefing 3613

Andersons AgriBrief – March 2021 Sustainable Farming Initiative Pilot

Summary

Details have been published on the Pilot phase of the Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI). This gives a first indication of what this component of Environmental Land Management will look like in terms of payment rates and requirements. However, this is just a stage in the development of the scheme and the final details may well alter.

The contents of this paper have been selected from last month's Anderson's Agribrief Bulletin. The full Bulletin covers more ground than this and contains more detail on the subjects summarised here. The contents list for this month's edition is given at the end of this paper. You can subscribe to Andersons Bulletins via their Professional Update service: <https://abcbooks.co.uk/product/professional-update/>

Details have been published on the Pilot phase of the Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI). This gives a first indication of what this component of Environmental Land Management will look like in terms of payment rates and requirements. However, this is just a stage in the development of the scheme and the final details may well alter.

Defra is looking for 'several hundred' farmers to take part in this Pilot phase. The window to submit an Expression of Interest opened on 15th March and closes on 11th April. Defra will select farms so that they get a representative sample across English agriculture. Those selected will be notified by 24th May and will be asked to make a formal application from that date, with agreements set to begin in October. Pilots are expected to run until 2024. Details of how to register an Expression of Interest can be found via – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-farming-incentive-expression-of-interest> The EOI is submitted through the Rural Payments system.

Those looking to apply must be currently claiming the BPS and have management control of the land until 2024. The land to be entered into the Pilot must not be in an existing agri-environmental scheme (i.e. Countryside Stewardship – CS). *The idea seems to be to test the scheme with farmers who are not used to being in a scheme. It also means there is no overlap with existing CS provisions. It is intended that, when the SFI is launched in 2022 (see below) it **will** be available on land in existing CS agreements but, presumably, won't pay twice for the same actions.*

For the Pilot there will be eight 'Standards', each with three 'Levels' – Introductory, Intermediate and Advanced. The payments rise for the higher levels, but a greater level of intervention is expected. The table on the following page summarises payments and the actions required. *At present, payment levels are based on existing CS calculations. These may change before the SFI 2022 is launched. Payments will be monthly in arrears. It is not known whether this will be carried into the 'proper' SFI.*

It is possible to have more than one Standard operating on the same parcel of land (e.g. the Grassland Standard and the Grassland Soils Standard). Different Levels can be chosen for different Standards – i.e. it is possible to enter as Introductory in one, whilst going for Advanced in another. Other Standards are likely to be introduced in future – Peat soils, Unenclosed uplands (i.e. Moorland), Common land and Animal Health & Welfare.

From looking at the actions in the table it will be seen that there is still a degree of uncertainty on what is required. Many of the prescriptions are currently vague e.g. 'provide resources for birds and insects', without giving details of what exactly needs to be provided and in what quantities.

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) Pilot – source Defra			
	per Ha	Base Actions	Additional Actions
Arable and Horticultural Land Standard			
Introductory	£28	Resources for birds & insects Nutrient management plan Rapid incorporation of slurry/manure	Buffer for in-field trees - £10 per tree
Intermediate	£54	All of the above, plus Nutrient budget Rotational ditch management Soil mapping	As above
Advanced	£74	All of the above, plus Tall vegetation and scrub Habitats for pest predators Precision application of N	As above
Arable and Horticultural Soils Standard			

Introductory	£30	Soil assessment Prevent run-off & compaction Improve organic matter Cultivate across slopes Soil cover over winter	Land at High-risk of run-off or flooding - dense green winter cover - £114 per Ha
Intermediate	£47	<i>All of the above, plus</i> Additional organic matter Reduced tillage depths Reduce tillage on High risk fields	<i>As above, plus</i> applies to land assessed as 'Moderate' risk
Advanced	£59	<i>All of the above, plus</i> Additional organic matter Soil Management Plan Reduce field traffic	<i>As above, plus</i> convert some land to Perm. Pasture - £311 per Ha
Improved Grassland Standard			
Introductory	£27	Minimum sward height Uncut margins Cover on areas of historic interest Nutrient management plan Areas taken out of cutting and grazing	Buffer for in-field trees - £3 per tree
Intermediate	£62	<i>All of the above, plus</i> Altering timing of silage cuts Rotational ditch management Nutrient budget Slurry testing and low emission applications Clover and legume swards	<i>As above</i>
Advanced	£97	<i>All of the above, plus</i> Higher sward height Legume and herb rich swards Ryegrass left to seed Soil mapping Precision application equipment	<i>As above</i>

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) Pilot cont – source Defra

	per Ha	Base Actions	Additional Actions
Improved Grassland Soils Standard			
Introductory	£6	Soil assessment Prevent run-off, compaction, and poaching Winter cover when reseeded on High risk areas	Land at High-risk of run-off or flooding – managing stock densities - £88 per Ha <i>plus</i> maintain as Perm. Pasture - £56 per Ha
Intermediate	£6	<i>All of the above, plus</i> Reduced tillage on High risk areas	<i>As above, plus</i> applies to land assessed as ‘Moderate’ risk
Advanced	£8	<i>All of the above, plus</i> Soil Management Plan Reduce field traffic	<i>As above</i>
Low and No Input Grassland Standard			
Introductory	£22	Manage weeds to reduce herbicide use Buffer in-field trees Limit N applications Uncut margins Minimise supplementary feeding impacts Rotational ditch management Minimum sward height	None
Intermediate	£89	<i>All of the above, plus</i> No artificial fertilizer Manage rush where present Tall vegetation and scrub Hay or haylage production	None
Advanced	£110	<i>All of the above, plus</i> Hay and haylage on a greater proportion of grassland	Block drains to extend areas of wet grassland - £127 per Ha <i>or</i> increase sward diversity on floodplains - £127
Hedgerows Standard			
Introductory	£16/100m	Uncut lengths of hedge Hedgerow trees	None
Intermediate	£21/100m	<i>All of the above, plus</i> More uncut lengths Hedge buffer strips	None

Advanced	£24/ 100m	<i>All of the above, plus More hedgerow trees and buffer strips</i>	
Farm Woodland Standard			
Introductory (one standard only)	£49	<i>Ride and open spaces Deadwood management Woodland Condition Assessment (£100 payment) Attend pest threat webinar (£25 one-off payment)</i>	None
Waterbody Buffering Standard			
Introductory	£16	<i>Run-off and soil erosion assessment Grass buffer strips</i>	<i>In-field measures to intercept runoff - £500 per Ha</i>
Intermediate	£29	<i>All of the above, plus Increased buffer strip sizes</i>	<i>As above</i>
Advanced	£34	<i>All of the above, plus Wildflower mix on buffer strips</i>	<i>As above</i>

Those entering the Pilot will be expected to provide Defra with information about how the scheme works. It is estimated that this might take 10-15 hours per month. There will be an expectation that a Land Management Plan will be drawn up over the lifetime of the agreement and that participants will take part in workshops, interviews surveys etc. There will be additional payments (not yet disclosed) on top of the Standards payments to compensate for this. There are also likely to be Capital payments under the scheme. *Although not stated, it seems likely that these will be similar to those seen under the present CS Capital Grants Scheme.*

What is learnt from the Pilots will help design the full Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme. More information on the SFI2022 is promised for summer 2021. It should open for applications in 'mid 2022'.

For more details see –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-farming-incentive-expression-of-interest>

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RuSource briefings provide concise information on current farming and rural issues for rural professionals. They are circulated weekly by email and produced by Alan Spedding in association with the Arthur Rank Centre, the national focus for the rural church. Previous briefings are archived on the Food and Farming Futures website. You can locate them by searching for the title you are looking for or simply the Briefing number: [NLAF - Technical and Business Information](#)

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