

A Monthly Briefing for UK Farmers – November 2023

- There is no longer a requirement to submit an EoI prior to a **Sustainable Farming Incentive** (SFI) application; those wishing to apply can simply do so via their Rural Payments account. Farmers who were invited to the 'early rollout' and have a SFI agreement which commenced on 1st October 2023 have received the 'accelerated payment'. This payment is worth 25% of the annual value; it is paid in the first month of the agreement to those who have a live scheme by the end of 2023. All SFI 2022 agreements holders should by now have been informed when their agreement will end. On termination, the holders will receive a compensation payment the amount will be dependent on the Standards they entered into.
- A further round of the **Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund** is now open for applications and will close on 15th January 2024. The Fund supports groups of farmers and landowners in England to come together to support environmental priorities.
- **Higher Level Stewardship** (HLS) agreements coming to an end in 2024 may be offered a 4-year extension. The RPA has said that Natural England will assess expiring agreements to see if they meet the necessary criteria (i.e. no breaches, options remain appropriate for the priority target features on the holding etc.) and, where appropriate, will recommend that RPA offer an extension. RPA will be contacting expiring agreement holders shortly.
- The AHDB is proposing to increase its **Levy rates** from the start of the 2024/25 financial year. The Levy Board has said it needs additional funding if it is to deliver more key services. These include marketing and exports for the Beef & Lamb, Dairy and Pork sectors, and more independent research for the Cereals & Oilseeds sector as requested in feedback through the Shape the Future vote undertaken last year. The proposed increases vary: Beef & Lamb 25%; Cereals 26%; Oilseeds 25%; Dairy 33% and Pigs 20%.
- The majority of **Welsh farmers** will have received their **BPS 2023 advanced payment**. The Rural Affairs Minister, announced 96% of claimants were due to receive 70% of their estimated claim value by 12th October. Furthermore, Rural Payments Wales is operating a 'payment window' this year running from 12th October to 15th December, meaning those who have not received their payment on the first day, but whose claim is subsequently validated before 15th December, will receive an advanced payment. Full and remaining balances will be made from 15th December, subject to full validation of the claim.
- No agricultural trades have been included on the latest **Shortage Occupation List** (SOL). This follows a major review carried out by the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC). The report, which can be found at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651557b86dfda600148e37ba/Review_of_the_Shortage_Occupation_List_2023.pdf recommends eight occupations to be included in the List. However, none are within the food and farming industry. This will be a major disappointment to those in the sector who are having real difficulty in recruiting labour.
- The Government has announced legislation will be enacted to allow further temporary access to ensure **imports of seeds and sprays** from the EU can continue. For treated seed, any product approved in the EU will be allowed to be imported to the UK until 1st July 2027. For PPPs, there will be an extension of existing parallel spray permits until 31st December 2024.
- British Sugar and the NFU have still not agreed a contract **beet price for the 2024 crop**. They are now taking the matter to independent arbitration. The Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution will assist the two parties to come to an agreement.
- Defra is inviting views on changes to **bovine identification, registration and movement in England**. The current Cattle Tracing System (CTS) was introduced back in 1998 and according to Defra is unable to accommodate any further development. A new system is required to ensure ongoing confidence to consumers, and the international community. The full consultation can be found via <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/bovine-id-and-traceability-policy-team/changes-to-bovine-identification-registration-and/>. Responses need to be submitted by 15th November.

Slurry Infrastructure Grants

Defra has announced it will be opening Round 2 of the Slurry Infrastructure Grants this month (November). It has also already published the full guidance to help farmers prepare in advance, this can be found at <https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2023/10/12/slurry-infrastructure-grant-guidance-now-available-for-round-2/>. In summary, the grant provides funding of between £25,000 and £250,000 to improve on-farm slurry storage to go beyond legal minimums. Defra has also announced, based on feedback, that Round 2 will have the following five changes compared with the first round;

- Pig farms will be funded for up to 8 months storage to allow pig producers with less land to safely store organic nutrients until they can spread it or export it. Cattle farmers will remain at 6 months.
- Grants towards a slurry separator can be part of the project to increase storage capacity.
- Support for covering existing stores that are 'fit-for-purpose' with impermeable covers.
- Adding the option to build in-situ cast concrete stores as an alternative to circular and panel stores, lagoons and bags.
- Introducing an option for landlords to underwrite grant funding agreements.

Due to these changes Defra will contact all Round 1 applicants with a 'time-limited' opportunity to update their application if they want to change it to reflect these updates.

In terms of managing demand, Round 1 was heavily oversubscribed. Defra has said it will be able to invite more projects to submit a full application this year and is encouraging everyone who would like a grant to submit an EoI when the online checker opens wherever they are located. It says if it does have to limit applications, it will ensure public money is targeted to where it will make the biggest environmental improvements. It will prioritise projects in areas where coordinated action is needed to reduce water and air pollution from farming. However, these areas have been significantly increased for Round 2 (these areas can be viewed on MAGIC Maps (see <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx>) by selecting Slurry Infrastructure Grant – Round 2 (England)). Furthermore, those who aren't shortlisted in Round 2, will have another opportunity to apply in 2024, when Defra will look to further widen the target areas.

To get ready for the opening of the online checker, applicants can work out how much slurry storage they require to reach the scheme storage requirements. This must be done using the latest version of the AHDB's Slurry Wizard (see <https://ahdb.org.uk/slurry-wizard>).

Defra has also answered a common question it receives – whether all slurry stores will need to be covered by 2027? It has said 'we do not expect that any new rules will require existing stores to be covered with impermeable covers by 2027'.

If you would like advice or help with submitting a Slurry Infrastructure Grant or you would like to discuss anything in this month's Farming Focus please contact one of our [Consultancy Team](#)

For further information please visit our website:

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