

ELMS update



Future Farm Resilience

What the government's Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs) proposals mean in practice

By Jerry Alford, Senior Farming Advisor, Soil Association

[The government's recent announcement](#) about ELMs has clarified some of the questions we have been asked during previous [Future Farm Resilience meetings and webinars](#). Broadly there is good news for organic farmers, although obviously we would have liked more! In all cases we await full details, but it is a start.

>> [Read the full proposal from Gov.uk](#)

Headline information

The current proposal is for a baseline Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) payment with the local nature recovery plan replaced by an enhanced Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CS+) There have been guarantees that farmers and land managers will be able to easily stack multiple SFI standards on the same agreement and alongside a Conservation Stewardship+ (CSP) agreement.

They have also added more SFI standards for

- hedgerows
- integrated pest management
- nutrient management
- arable and horticultural land
- improved grassland
- low input grassland

All of these are areas where organic farmers should be able to claim, and you will be able to claim these in addition to existing schemes.

It has also now been announced that [funding for Farming in Protected Landscapes](#) (FiPL) will be extended to March 2025 - that's an extra year, and applies to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), National Parks and the Broads.

When you cannot claim SFI payments

There is a 'but' here in that, other than the organic conversion/management options, you cannot claim SFI payment on any land which you have another CS option on and so I assume the same may apply here. So if you have BE3 hedge management option, you will probably not be able to claim the hedge SFI on that hedge.

There will be a **flat rate payment** of £20 per hectare for first 50 ha that are claimed on, to acknowledge that there is some time required in managing this. This is helpful to smaller scale farmers.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)

For those with HLS agreements, it is now possible to have a second Countryside Stewardship agreement on additional land, in the same way that it has been possible to have two CS agreements on different land parcels. This may not be relevant for organic farms because of organic conversion/management payments, but it is now possible to convert additional land.

Tenant farmers and those with short term Farm Business Tenancies (FBTs) were finding it difficult to apply, but the new scheme will allow a landlord's countersignature rather than consent where agreements may clash with tenancy agreement and there is a shorter three-year term, giving less rigidity.

Additional payments for all grassland and arable farmers

Most of the existing stewardship options will continue, but significantly there are two areas where an additional payment will be made for all grassland and arable farmers.

These are:

- an adviser visit to assess and advise on integrated pest management and help to produce a plan
- an adviser visit to review and improve nutrient use efficiency.

This will be part of the integrated pest management standard and the nutrient management standards and will get payments of £989 per year and £589 per year. As organic farmers we will already be doing this and so should easily be able to claim, but we will have to arrange for a qualified advisor to visit, and pay them for the report.

Other new Stewardship options

Grassland

Existing CS options continue but Defra have said that 'We will improve these existing actions where possible as we evolve CS by making them more outcome-focused, less prescriptive, and more flexible about how to achieve the intended outcomes'.

In addition, new options will be:

- establishing and maintaining legumes in an existing grass sward (£102/ha)
- managing floodplain meadows (£200-£300/ha)
- managing scrapes and gutters for waders and wintering waterfowl

Arable land – still more supported than grassland!

Again, the same CS options will remain but also new options

- Establishing and maintaining in-field flower-rich strips, which will provide habitat for natural pest enemies (£673/ha)
- establishing and maintaining grassy field corners and blocks (£590/ha)
- establishing a companion crop for integrated pest management (£55/ha)
- no use of insecticide (£45/ha)

Permanent Crops

Including orchards, bush fruits, miscanthus, nursery crops, short rotation coppice. Existing options will continue along with establishing in fields flower strips, no insecticide use options.

Moorland and upland peat

Existing options plus new proposals to be announced on management of land and moss to slow water flows etc and restoration and maintenance of peatland.

Lowland peat

Review of existing options ongoing.

Woodland, Trees and Agroforestry

English Woodland Creation offer still offering up to £10200/ha as well as all exiting options but there will be a new option for Establishment and maintenance of silvoarable and silvopastoral agroforestry systems with payment rates proposed of up to £300/ha plus payment for options on land under trees whether arable or grassland.

Hedges and Boundaries

There is a new standard which will pay £10 per 100 metres per side for hedge management, £3 per 100metre for assessing and recording and also £10 per metre for maintaining or planting hedgerow trees.

Also £15-20 for management of drystone walls, and stone-faced hedge banks, as well as funding for earth-bank hedges (Devon hedges). More detail coming in the summer 2023.

Watercourses

New options on buffers, riparian strips and connectivity of waterbodies.

A new era

We understand that these payments do not replace income loss from loss of BPS and do require applications and record keeping. However, in many cases, such as £45/ha for zero insecticide use, it is payment for doing something that we already do. The legacy of inspectors with clip boards rejecting work and fining people is hopefully a thing of the past with a more inclusive and understanding policy in place. Many of the options appear less rigid and prescriptive and so we see this as a sign that local and regional practices can be continued without penalty.

For smaller and organic farms who tended to feel that they have been doing the right thing anyway, the payments for existing practices is proof that we have been right and are now being supported.

Next steps

If you have attended an online or in-person [Future Farm Resilience workshop](#), we will be happy to talk this through over the phone or on a one-to-one visit.

Contact us by phone at 0117 314 5100 or email at ffr@soilassociation.org.

