

# Protein Crop Scheme – Q&A

## SCHEME OPERATION

### 1. How will growers apply for the scheme and when?

You must apply for the Protein Crops Scheme (PCS) using the online Single Application and Map Service. Submit your single application on or before the closing date for the scheme, which is 15 May 2026 (except in cases of Force Majeure / Exceptional Circumstances (FM/EC)).

### 2. What crops are eligible?

Spring Peas	(Land use code - NF1)
Spring Field Beans	(Land use code - NF2)
Winter Field Beans	(Land use code - NF3)
Spring Sweet Lupins	(Land use code - NF4)
Winter Sweet Lupins	(Land use code - NF5)

*Note:* The forage crops clover, alfalfa/lucerne are not eligible for aid under this pilot scheme.

### 3. My farm business has applied for a Nutrient Action Programme (NAP) Derogation in 2026. If successful, can I grow protein crops?

No. The NAP Derogation means that you are already likely to be adding extra nitrogen to the soil. One of the conditions of the derogation is that crop rotation shall **not** include leguminous or other plants fixing atmospheric nitrogen. If you grow protein crops, you will be in breach of one of the conditions of your derogation and you could face penalties and be ineligible to apply for a NAP derogation in the following year. You will also not receive any payment under the PCS.

### 4. Will physical inspections be carried out on land declared as growing a protein crop? And by whom?

A proportion of claims under the PCS will be selected for inspection to ensure that the eligibility conditions of the scheme have been met. An on the ground inspection will be carried out by an inspector from the Inspectorate Branch.

### 5. Is there a maximum area allocated to each farm business that they can grow?

No. There is no maximum area allocation to each farm business. However the total area eligible for payment under the pilot scheme will be capped at 1,300 ha. This cap will apply in 2026. If more than 1,300 ha is determined as eligible, a linear scale back will be applied to the determined area to reduce the total Northern Ireland area paid on to 1,300 ha.

### 6. Explain the process and effect on payment if uptake in year one exceeds 1300ha?

Payment will be made on the scaled back area. For example –

Total area determined - 1,500 ha

Difference = 200 ha

Scale back =  $200 / 1,500 \times 100 = 13.33\%$ .

Therefore a determined area of 18 ha would be reduced by 13.33% to 15.6 ha and payment made on 15.6 ha.

**7. My farm business works in partnership with another farm business. It claims FSP on land we are intending to grow a protein crop. Can I claim the protein payment?**

No. Only one farm business can claim both FSP and PCS on the same field parcel. It is possible for one farm business to operate as a partnership.

**8. Does end market or market location affect payment i.e. if marketed for human consumption or marketed outside the United Kingdom?**

The end market / use of the crop does not affect the payment.

**9. Will areas eligible for the protein payment also receive Farm Sustainability Payment?**

Yes, if claimed by the same farm business. Dual claims i.e. two different farm businesses, one claiming FSP and the other PCS, on the same field parcel is not permitted.

**10. Can I sow more than one of the eligible protein crops in the same field?**

Yes – you are permitted to sow more than one of the eligible crops in the same field.

**11. What penalty will be applied if a field claimed for the protein payment is deemed ineligible?**

An over-declaration penalty will be applied in line with the current FSP scheme rules.

If the difference does not exceed 3% of the area determined <u>and</u> 2 ha	No penalty applied. Payment is based on the number of eligible ha determined.
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<p>If the difference is more than <u>either</u> 3% of the area determined <u>or</u> 2ha</p>	<p>Penalty calculated on the basis of 2 x the difference between the areas declared and the area determined. For example an over declaration of 1.4 ha which equates to 4.5% of the area determined would attract a penalty as it is more than 3% of the area determined. To avoid a penalty the over declaration must not exceed <b>both</b> thresholds.</p>
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**12. Can countryside management options such as margins be placed in the same field as the protein crop?**

Yes. The area of protein crop claimed should reflect the reduced area.

**13. What records do I have to keep of the protein crop I grow?**

You should keep all records including details of seed purchase and sowing. This is especially important in the event of partial or full crop failure. Statutory records in line with Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) requirements must be kept.

## GROWING THE CROP

**14. Are there going to be guidelines set on variety sown, seed rate, etc.**

No, however all crops must be sown in line with normal husbandry practices. This means that you must prepare the land and sow seeds in a manner, and at a seed rate, that would be expected to produce a normal marketable crop.

**15. Can I use home saved seed to establish the crop?**

Yes in line with best practice it is advisable to get a germination test. In the event of crop failure, it will be difficult to provide evidence of crop establishment.

**16. Do I have to keep a receipt of the seed sown or a seed label for inspection?**

It is advised that you retain a record of purchase as it may be required as evidence of planting if crop failure occurs.

**17. Is there any consideration given to site suitability for this crop? For example land type, soil type, topography?**

There is no specific requirement, but claiming on areas clearly unable to sustain a protein crop may result in an over declaration penalty being applied if a crop is not produced at normal marketable levels. Bare soil margins or headlands should not be claimed.

**18. Is there a latest date I have to have my protein crop sown by?**

The crop should be sown by the date on which the single application is made.

**19. Can I take a crop off a field and then sow my protein crop later in the season? For example I have short term grass ley for cutting, can I take an early cut of hay/silage and sow my protein crop after that in late May?**

The crop should be sown by the date on which the single application is made and must not be harvested until **after 31 July**.

**20. If I choose to direct drill my protein crop into a grass ley will it still be eligible? Will the grass have to be sprayed off?**

The grass ley must be desiccated. There must only be one crop growing in the area claimed.

**21. Can I under sow grass with my protein crop?**

No, only the protein crop can be grown in the area claimed.

**22. Are there any stipulations in relation to fungicide/herbicide application during the growing season?**

No, there are no stipulations.

**23. Can I apply nitrogen fertiliser to my protein crop?**

Only where a crop requirement for nitrogen can be demonstrated.

**24. Can I apply slurry or farmyard manure to my protein crop?**

Yes – to meet crop requirements and in compliance with the Nutrient Action Programme (NAP) regulations.

**25. I'm an organic grower. Can I sow my protein crop with a companion crop to suppress weeds?**

No – the protein crop must be grown on its own.

**26. Crops need to be still un-harvested on 31<sup>st</sup> July, after this date is there any stipulation on how they should be harvested? Can they be harvested as Wholecrop or must they be combined?**

There are no restrictions on the method of harvesting the crop after **31<sup>st</sup> July**.

**27. Must the straw be baled?**

No.

## CROP LOSS/FAILURE

- 28. In the event of poor weather/ growing conditions, will a poor crop, or one that is not viable to harvest still receive payment support? Do I have to harvest a minimum yield to qualify for protein payment?**

There is no specific minimum yield but normal marketable levels would be expected. In the event of partial or complete crop failure you should submit a FM/EC form (Form FML1) within 15 working days of being in a position to do so, indicating the extent and cause of the failure.

- 29. If I successfully establish a protein crop and then accidentally scorch/stunt or kill my protein crop when applying herbicide or fungicides will it still be eligible?**

A crop failure due to poor husbandry is not eligible for FM/EC. In this event a SAF3 should be submitted amending the area claimed to the area available for inspection. The SAF3 must be submitted prior to being notified of an inspection.

- 30. If parts of my field fail to establish (due to drought, flooding, pests or compaction) will the whole area seeded be eligible or will it just be the area where there is a viable crop?**

In the event of a significant area of the crop failing to grow you should submit a FM/EC form (Form FML1) within 15 working days of being in a position to do so, indicating the extent and cause of the failure.

## ADVICE & SUPPORT

- 31. Where can I get advice about growing, harvesting and storage of protein crops?**

Contact your local CAFRE Crops Adviser or BASIS qualified Agronomist.

- 32. Is there a market for protein crops?**

Markets are available but should be investigated prior to committing to grow a protein crop.

- 33. I am thinking of growing a protein crop to feed to my beef cattle and sheep. Where can I get advice on feeding rates and rations?**

Contact your local CAFRE Beef and Sheep Adviser or Animal Nutritionist.