

Sustainable Agriculture Programme

Farming with Nature

- Supporting sustainable farming
- Rewarding environmental action



DAERA

Department of Agriculture,
Environment and Rural Affairs

An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí
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Farming with Nature Transition Scheme

A practical approach to sustainable farming

Farming plays a vital role in shaping our countryside. The **Farming with Nature Transition Scheme** supports farmers in balancing productive agriculture with environmental improvement and protection, recognising that:

- **Healthy land means productive land**
- **A healthy environment supports long-term profitability**
- **Farmers are key partners in tackling climate and biodiversity challenges**

What is the Farming with Nature Transition Scheme?

The Scheme provides **financial support** for farmers who take practical steps to:

- **Enhance biodiversity**
- **Protect soil and water**
- **Improve sustainability across the farm**

It is designed to **support working farms**, not replace them, by encouraging changes that fit well with **everyday farming practices**.

For up-to-date information on actions and payment rates, go to:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/farming-nature-package

or scan the QR code.



How does it work?

The Scheme is **flexible**, allowing you to choose actions from a range of **practical** measures that work whether your farm is arable, livestock or mixed.

The Scheme actions contribute to **more resilient land and soils**, building on what you already do and delivering real benefits for **farm and environmental sustainability**. Some actions can also help to reduce fertiliser and pesticide use, helping to **lower input costs**.






Why is it important?

The Farming with Nature Transition Scheme offers actions which make good business sense, support long-term food production, and help boost nature on your farm. A healthy, functioning natural environment is essential for food production and can help ensure your business' resilience to climate or global supply chain shocks.



Finding the right actions for your farm

Explore the key actions available and see which ones suit your farm whether it is arable, livestock, or mixed.

| Action | Arable | Livestock | Mixed |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Planting new hedgerows |  |  |  |
| Riparian buffer strips |  |  |  |
| Farmland tree planting |  |  |  |
| Herbal leys |  |  |  |
| Arable - unharvested cereal margin |  | |  |
| Arable - grass margin |  | |  |
| Arable - flower-rich grass margin |  | |  |
| Multi-species winter cover crop |  | |  |
| Retention of winter stubble |  | |  |

Planting New Hedgerows

Hedgerows provide a wide range of practical benefits for farms. They act as natural windbreaks, reducing wind speed and helping to protect livestock from exposure to rain and cold conditions. Once fully established, they also serve as effective natural barriers, helping to contain and manage livestock, contributing to farm biosecurity.

In addition, hedgerows play an important role in improving land quality and environmental resilience. They help reduce surface runoff and soil erosion while improving soil structure over time. By linking habitats such as woodlands, ponds and other hedgerows, they allow wildlife to move more freely across the landscape. They also act as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and contributing to efforts to tackle climate change.



Riparian Buffer Strips

Fencing off areas beside streams and rivers delivers significant benefits for farms. By keeping livestock out of the water, riverbanks are protected from damage, stopping erosion and keeping banks stable. This helps keep the water cleaner as fewer sediments and nutrients reach the watercourse.



These fenced buffer strips improve how water moves across the farm. They trap soil, nutrients, and pollutants before they reach the stream, helping to protect water quality, which benefits fish and other aquatic species. They can also slow down rainwater running off fields, which reduces the risk of flooding. Additionally, these areas create valuable habitats for wildlife, providing safe spaces and movement routes for birds, insects, and mammals.

Farmland Tree Planting

Planting trees on farmland can bring a range of long-term advantages. Woodland blocks act as natural windbreaks, helping to protect nearby crops and livestock from harsh weather. Airborne pollution can be reduced by trees slowing down winds and capturing ammonia around animal housing.



Trees improve soil and water management across the farm. Their roots help bind the soil, reducing erosion and surface runoff, while improving how water soaks into the ground. By slowing down water movement and capturing nutrients, tree planting can help reduce flood risk and limit pollution entering nearby waterways. Trees capture and store carbon, contributing to climate change mitigation.

Herbal Ley

The success of a herbal ley comes from its diversity – each plant species has a different role and together they create a stronger, more productive and resilient sward.

Legumes such as clover and lucerne can fix nitrogen from the air, reducing the need for chemical fertiliser, lowering costs and cutting emissions. Deep-rooting herbs like chicory and plantain help break up compacted soil, improving drainage and air flow, while at the same time increasing organic matter and soil life. Their deeper roots allow plants to access water during dry periods, helping growth continue in drier weather.

Different plant species grow at different times, which creates a longer growing season, a more reliable supply of forage, and better recovery after stress such as grazing or dry weather. A more varied diet also improves livestock nutrition, providing higher protein and a wider range of minerals, which can lead to better growth rates. Some herbs have natural anti-parasitic properties, which can improve animal health and reduce the need for treatments.

Having a greater variety of plants boosts biodiversity, with flowering species providing nectar and pollen which attract insects, pollinators and birds. In addition, deeper and more extensive root systems help store more carbon in the soil, supporting long-term soil health.



Multi-species Winter Cover Crop

Planting a multi-species winter cover crop can deliver many benefits on farm. It can improve soil structure, making the soil easier to work and better for growing crops. As well as this, it can reduce the need for chemical fertilisers by adding nutrients naturally. Cover crops help break pest and disease cycles, which can lower problems in future crops.

These crops protect the soil during winter. They reduce soil erosion, runoff and loss of sediment caused by heavy rain. Their roots add organic matter to the soil and can help store more carbon. Winter cover crops also support wildlife on the farm. They provide food and shelter for insects and earthworms, helping to boost biodiversity.



Retention of Winter Stubble

Retaining winter stubble is good for agricultural production and the environment because it protects and improves the soil while at the same time supporting wildlife.

Stubble acts as a protective cover, shielding the soil from heavy rain and strong winds, reducing erosion and maintaining soil structure. It slows down water movement, allowing more rainwater to soak into the ground instead of running off. Reduced soil disturbance keeps nutrients in the soil, supports beneficial microbes and earthworms, and reduces the risk of nutrients being washed into waterways during winter.

Over time, the stubble breaks down, adding organic matter to the soil, and improving its long-term health and fertility. In addition, it provides shelter for wildlife, and any leftover grains can be an important food source for birds and small mammals during the winter months.



Arable - Unharvested Cereal Margin

Leaving an unharvested cereal crop margin along field margins provides important benefits for both farming and wildlife. It creates shelter and habitat for insects, seed-eating farmland birds and small mammals, and provides them with a valuable food source in late summer and during winter, when food can be scarce.



Because the cereal is left unsprayed, insects such as pollinators and beneficial predators can thrive. This can help improve natural pest control on the farm. The margins also offer safe nesting areas for birds and protection from harsh weather. Unharvested margins can help conserve wildflowers and other arable plants which may struggle to grow in more intensively managed fields.

Arable - Grass Margin

Planting grass margins on arable land provides many benefits for both farming and wildlife. These margins provide valuable habitats for overwintering insects, including species that prey on crop pests, helping with natural pest control. They also offer shelter and safe nesting and feeding areas for birds and small mammals.



Grass margins develop strong, dense root systems which help slow the movement of water across fields, especially on slopes. This reduces the risk of soil erosion. The margins also act as natural filters, trapping sediment, nutrients and pesticides before they can reach hedgerows, ditches or watercourses. In addition, they help link different habitats across the farm, making it easier for wildlife to move around and thrive.

Arable - Flower-rich Grass Margin

Establishing flower-rich grass margins on arable land provides many farming and environmental benefits. These margins create habitat and feeding areas for insects, pollinators and farmland birds. Flower-rich margins are excellent sources of nectar and pollen throughout spring and summer, attracting bees, butterflies, and moths.

Greater numbers of pollinators on farms can improve the pollination of nearby crops, leading to higher yields and better crop quality. Flower-rich margins also support beneficial predators which can help reduce the need for chemical pesticides.

(Courtesy of Georgie Bray, RSPB Hope Farm)



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What next?

If you would like to take part in Farming with Nature, you can find up-to-date information about how to apply, guidance on how to complete the actions, payment rates and more at:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/farming-nature-package

Alternatively, you can get in touch by e-mail:
FarmingwithNature@daera-ni.gov.uk

or by calling DAERA Grants and Funding
on 0300 200 7848.

If you would like to find out more about the Sustainable Agriculture Programme visit:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/sustainable-agriculture-programme



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