16 July 2026

Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme (SFIS)

Questions and Answers

Round 1 (2026)

Contents

ABOUT THE SCHEME

1. What is the Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme (SFIS)

Ans: The Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme will provide grant support to help primary food producers in the agricultural and horticultural sectors improve both their environmental performance and business efficiency.

2. Who can apply to the scheme?

Ans: Primary food producers, across livestock, arable and horticulture sectors with a Category 1 Farm Business ID will be eligible for the scheme. Further information on Farm Business IDs is available at: New Farm Business | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

3. Why is the scheme only supporting primary food producers?

Ans: Primary food producers across livestock, arable and horticulture sectors, make an essential contribution to food security in Northern Ireland, as well as a significant contribution to the wider economy, rural jobs and social fabric.

This scheme will help the sector meet the challenges it faces in terms of environmental impact, performance and market volatility.

4. Why is the scheme based on a pre-selected list of eligible items?

Ans: Using a list of specified, pre-selected equipment is the best way to quickly deliver a high volume of investment support, which delivers against the Department's objectives and is straightforward for applicants and scheme delivery.

5. How have the reference prices for items on the list been determined?

All items have been given a reference price based on prices received from a range of suppliers. There will be no requirement to provide quotes with an application. This is a similar approach to the previous capital scheme – the Farm Business Investment Scheme Tier 1.

6. How much funding will be available under the scheme?

Ans: The scheme will seek to deliver up to £40 million in grant support over a number of rounds in the next 3 to 4 years, subject to scheme uptake and available budget.

The scheme has a grant rate of 40%, with a maximum grant amount of £25,000 available per farm business across the scheme.

7. What is the minimum grant or project cost?

Ans: The minimum grant is £1,200 and the minimum project cost is £3,000 for each round of the scheme. This means you must apply for at least £1,200 grant support, or your application will be ineligible.

8. Is the maximum grant limit per round or for the scheme?

Ans: The maximum grant limit of £25,000 is how much you can apply for across the scheme and not each round. The £25,000 does not have to be used in a single round and can be spread over future rounds (subject to budget availability) to best meet the investment needs of your business.

9. Will the new scheme prioritise younger farmers / women / those with qualifications?

Ans: No, as we want to encourage all farm businesses to improve their environmental performance regardless of age, gender or qualifications.

We want to ensure that the new scheme is simple and easy to access.

10. Is "Value for Money" (VFM) scoring going to be used?

Ans: This type of scoring is not being used for the new Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme, given the focus on environmental improvements and the aim of making the scheme simple and easy to access.

VFM underbidding was more appropriate for FBIS Capital, given the scheme's central objectives around productivity improvements.

11. Do I have to complete the 'Making it Safer' Risk Assessment**?**

Ans: A completed 'Making it Safer – Farm Risk Assessment', dated after 01 July 2026, must be submitted along with your claim.

The risk assessment can be accessed through the following link – SAFEr Farmsafe Action Plan | FarmSafe. A PDF will be generated which needs to be uploaded with your claim documents.

12. Do I need an indication of support letter from the bank?

Ans: No, this is not a requirement of this scheme.

13. What is the amount of funding available for this round?

Ans: The amount of funding provided within each round, including this first round, will be subject to budget availability and uptake within and across budget periods.

14. Will there be more rounds in the future?

Ans: It is anticipated that there will be more rounds of the scheme subject to budget availability and uptake. Future rounds may include additional items to those listed in Round 1. DAERA may also remove or change items, and descriptions in future rounds.

APPLYING TO THE SCHEME

15. What do I need to apply to the scheme?

As the scheme application and notifications will be online, you will need a Government Gateway or NI Direct Account (NIDA) to access the system. Most farm businesses will already have these set up. But if you do not already have either type of account, further information is available at: Registering for Government Gateway (GG) and NIDA Accounts | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

If you do not already have one, then register your business for a DAERA Category 1 Farm Business ID as you will need one to be eligible for the scheme.

Ensure the names and contact details, including your email addresses listed under your DAERA Category 1 Farm Business ID number, are up to date.

16. What should I do before applying to the scheme?.

Ans: You should carefully consider your current and future investment needs and priorities, including affordability, before applying to the scheme. Consider the level of investment needed against the grant limit of £25,000 spread across all rounds including what benefits you hope to derive from each item.

You should ensure that you understand the scheme requirements and obligations, including those for equipment in the item list. You can find this information at Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme.

17. Why is a DAERA Category 1 Farm Business ID required for the scheme?

Ans: It is important that valid commercial food producers across livestock, arable and horticulture sectors are supported by the scheme. By having a Category 1 Business registered with DAERA we will be able to determine if your business is eligible to receive grant-aid from the scheme.

18. How do I get a DAERA Category 1 Farm Business ID?

Ans: Information on how to register your business for a Category 1 Farm Business ID number is available at New Farm Business | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Please allow sufficient time for this before the scheme closes on 3 September 2026.

19. When does the scheme close for applications?

Ans: All applications must be submitted through the online Scheme Portal by 11.59pm on 03 September 2026. Please refer to details in the Scheme Guide. Please note that any emails sent to the scheme email inbox or phone calls will not be responded to after 5:00pm or at weekends.

20. Can I apply and submit my claim using my portable device?

Ans: Yes, the online Scheme Portal can be accessed by any device with internet access, using an internet browser. However, for usability it is recommended you use a suitable sized screen with a stable and secure internet connection such as WIFI.

21. How will my application be scored?

Ans: The application score is primarily based on the score of the items chosen by you. The score is shown in the item description (in the Eligible Item List and in the online scheme portal). The non-LESSE application score will be based on the average score of the items selected.

LESSE applications will be scored separately to non-LESSE items. In addition to the item score, the application score for LESSE will take into account the relevant livestock numbers of your farm business. See the 'Scoring' section in the Guide for more details.

22. Will there be ranking of applications or prioritisation if oversubscribed?

Ans: Applications will be ranked based on the application score. If the scheme is oversubscribed a cut-off score will be determined by the budget available for each round of the scheme.

In the unlikely event of a tie-break situation (i.e. where two or more applications have the same score at the cut-off for receiving funding) a random number generator will be used to determine the order of the tied applications.

23. Are there separate Letters of Offer for Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment (LESSE) and non-LESSE items?

Ans: There will be separate Letters of Offer for successful LESSE and non-LESSE applications. The score for a LESSE application will not affect the score for a non-LESSE application and vice versa. It is possible that you may receive a Letter of Offer for either LESSE, non-LESSE, or both if you are successful.

24. Will early applications be scored higher?

Ans**:** No, applications will all be ranked at the same time when the application window closes.

25. Will the answers to questions at the application stage affect my application score?

Ans: The answers to the questions in the application do not affect your score (apart from pig numbers in a LESSE application). Your answers will help DAERA develop further support schemes, so it is important that all information provided is accurate and relates to your individual farm business.

You can find more information on the questions in the ‘Application Questions’ section in the Guide.

26. If I am unsuccessful will my application be carried forward to the next round?

Ans: No, applications will not be carried forward into future rounds. New applications must be created for each new round of the scheme.

27. Can I appoint an agent to act on my behalf?

You do not need an agent to complete an application or claim. The application system will be very easy to use, much like an online grocery or shopping “basket”.

However, if you wish, you can nominate an online agent to make an application on your behalf, or to make a claim if you are successful. This can be done at any stage (during the application window for an application, or before the final deadline for a claim if successful) via the DAERA Customer Portal.

Further information regarding online agent nomination can be found here: [Online Agent Nomination | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs]

28. Will I have to participate in evaluation of the scheme through surveys, or case studies?

Ans: Yes. It is a condition of the scheme that if selected to do so you will assist with evaluation of the scheme post application. Most businesses will be asked to complete one or more surveys, and some businesses will also be selected for case studies.

29. Can I appeal an unsuccessful application decision?

Ans: No. The Scheme is competitive. If your application is unsuccessful, you cannot appeal the decision.

30. If my pig business is deemed ineligible for LESSE, can I appeal that decision?

Ans: If your LESSE application is rejected because the business exceeds the total annual livestock manure nitrogen production of 20,000kg or more you may request a review of the rejection decision.

See the 'Review of Decisions' section in the Guide for more detail.

31. If I am successful in one round but due to unforeseen circumstances cannot go ahead and I withdraw, can I reapply in a later round without any reduction in total funding available?

Ans: Yes, you can reapply and provided you have not been paid under that round your total funding available will not be affected.

32. Can I view the details of my application after I submit it?

Ans: Yes, the system allows you to review a summary and details of your application.

33. If I know I have made an error or want to change something in the application, do I get a chance to withdraw it and reapply before the closing date?

Ans: You can withdraw your submitted application and start a new application, but you must submit it by 11.59pm on **3 September 2026**.

34. Will anyone from DAERA visit my farm before the LoO is sent out?

Ans: No, any item inspections by way of an arranged visit, will be at claim and post payment stages.

ITEMS

35. What is on the scheme eligible items list?

Ans: The list of eligible items is available on: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/sustainable-farming-investment-scheme-item-list

The items are listed under categories which cover:

- Crop Establishment and Management
- Horticulture, Fruit and Vegetable Management
- Livestock Management – includes cattle, sheep, pig, and poultry, including aspects such as weighing and monitoring.
- Low Emission Slurry Spreading and Slurry Management
- Resource Management – energy and water

36. What type of items will not be included within the scheme?

Ans: Basic farm equipment or replacement / maintenance items will not be included within the scheme. This ensures that the scheme will deliver value for money for the public purse and additionality (i.e. benefits which otherwise would not occur without grant support).

37. Who is not eligible to apply for LESSE?

Ans: You are not eligible for LESSE items if:

you are already required to use LESSE under the existing Nutrient Action Programme 2019-22. Grant support cannot be used to meet existing statutory obligations;

you have already been funded for LESSE through the Farm Business Improvement Scheme Capital.

38. Can I make modifications to LESSE items?

Ans: No, any modification would make LESSE equipment ineligible for support under SFIS. For example, the addition of small splash plates to the end of pipes on dribble bars/trailing hose, or trailing shoe spreaders is not deemed to be a low emission spreading method. By adding these your claim would be deemed ineligible.

39. Can I apply to purchase a slurry tanker without a LESSE item?

Ans: No. A slurry tanker can only be purchased with a LESSE Item. But LESE items are available without tankers.

40. Can I choose to purchase a piece of equipment with a higher specification than that listed?

Ans: Yes, you may choose to purchase a piece of equipment with a higher specification. You must be sure the item meets or exceeds the minimum specification as detailed in the item description. However, the maximum grant support will be limited to 40% of the reference price in the eligible item list, or the invoice value if it is lower.

41. If I apply to purchase a cover for an existing above ground slurry store, do I also have to apply for strengthening rings?

Ans: No, only where the engineer or the company who supplied the above ground store state that the strengthening ring is required to support the new cover. A currently registered chartered engineer's certificate will also be required which states that the store is structurally suitable for a tensioned cover. This must be submitted with your claim.

42. If I have an above ground slurry store, which I have not yet notified to NIEA for approval, can I apply for a cover?

Ans: Yes, provided NIEA has been notified before you make a claim and only if the store was erected before 1st January 2000. For further information contact the Agricultural Regulations team by email agricultural.regulation@daera-ni.gov.uk

43. I have applied for an item, but the supplier has informed me they will not be able to supply the item before the final date for submission of claim outlined in my Letter of Offer. Can I apply for an extension?

Ans: An extension to the Letter of Offer 'Final Claim Submission date' will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, and you must contact DAERA as soon as possible with any issues. Evidence may be required to support the need for an extension. See the 'Extension Request' section in the Guide for more details.

There can be long lead times and potential delays in the supply of some equipment, particularly LESSE equipment. It is recommended that you contact suppliers to advance your project as soon as possible after receiving a Letter of Offer. It is recommended that you retain an acknowledgement letter of your order/ receipt for deposit showing the expected delivery date.

44. If I cannot fit an item or have it operational immediately, can I claim for it and send in a photograph when it is operational? For example, it may not be possible to fit poultry or cattle items until the building is empty, or the slurry store cover cannot be fitted until all the slurry is removed from the store.

Ans: Items should be present at your farm business location and ready for operational use at claim stage. Items which have not been fitted may be have a follow-up inspection to confirm that the item is in operation.

45. If the operation of the funded item requires an annual subscription, can I get this funded?

Ans: The first year's subscription is funded for a small number of items. The item description will state if the cost of the first year's subscription is included.

OFFERS AND CLAIMS

46. How long after the closing date for applications will I hear about my application?

Ans: Notifications of successful and unsuccessful applications will be issued by secure messaging on the DAERA Customer Portal. Scheme outcomes will be available on the online Scheme Portal to you, and your agent (if you appointed one), once all applications have been ranked. There is no timeframe set at present for these notifications.

47. How long do I have to purchase my approved items and make a claim after I have received a LoO?

Ans: For LESSE Letters of Offer you will have 270 days from the date of your offer to implement and submit your claim. For non-LESSE Letters of Offer you will have 180 days.

48. If I apply for a certain item and it cannot be delivered on time, but I can get a different size of item within the timeframe, can I do so?

Ans: Some items permit changes to the size of an item and should be selected at claim stage but they must meet the specification in the item description. Refer to the 'Variations at Claim' section in the Guide for more detail.

The grant payable for each item is 40% of the eligible claim value, which is based on the original item reference price, specified in the Letter of Offer, the updated item cost (due to Variation), or the amount paid, whichever is lowest.

49. The item I purchase is invoiced in Euros, what exchange rate is used?

Ans: The rate used will be determined from the EU exchange rate website: Pound sterling (GBP.) on the date of payment as shown on your payment evidence.

50. If the total item costs include a delivery and / or an installation cost, can I get funding for these costs?

Ans: Delivery and installation costs are not eligible unless otherwise stated in the item description (e.g. tension covers) and should be excluded or itemised separately on invoices and payment evidence. Refer to the full item description for details of what is covered.

51. Can I pay for items from a different bank account than the one linked to my Category 1 Farm Business ID?

Ans: Yes, however, you must use an account for a person named in the farm business to pay for items. You cannot use cash, part exchange, lease or hire purchase to pay for items.

When submitting your online claim, you will be required to upload unaltered digital copies of cleared funds from your bank, building society or credit card statements and highlight the relevant transactions. This will enable DAERA to check that invoices have been paid in full by the business or a person named in the business.

52. If I have applied for a number of items but my invoice is over £62,500, am I still eligible for funding?

Ans: Yes. If the actual price you pay for the items in your Letter of Offer exceeds £62,500 you can still make a claim for all of the items, but you will only be paid the grant amount set out in your Letter of Offer.

The maximum grant payable for each item is 40% of the eligible claim value, which is based on the original item reference price, specified in the Letter of Offer, the updated item cost (due to Variation), or the amount paid, whichever is lowest.

53. If I purchase other non-funded items from the same supplier at the same time can these be included on the same invoice as the funded item(s)?

Ans: They can but it is best to have the funded items only on an invoice. This will reduce delays in receiving your funding should further clarification be needed.

54. If my Letter of Offer has multiple items, can I claim for the items separately?

Ans: No. You can only make one claim for each Letter of Offer (i.e. a claim for LESSE and a claim for all non-LESSE items).

55. What documents do I need to submit when making a claim?

Ans: The following uploads are required with your claim:

- Invoices – the original digital PDF from the supplier is preferred or a scan / photograph of the invoice.
- Payment Evidence – the original digital transaction statement from your bank / building society or credit card statement showing the full payment amount and payment date covering all transactions relating to each item. If a credit card statement is provided you must also provide a bank / building society statement to prove payment.
- Item Photographs:
    - showing full item(s) on your premises ready for operational use
    - manufacturer's identifier plate if accessible and applicable (see item specification)
    - displayed health and safety warning for a Tensioned Cover,
- Making it Safer Risk Assessment – dated anytime after 1 July 2026
- Certificate of competence if applicable.
- Engineer's certificate if applicable.
- Tanker Manufacturer's letter if applicable.
- Ammonia emission reduction certification if applicable.

See the 'Supporting Documentation' section in the Guide for more details.

56. What details do you require within the photographs of the items?

Ans: Photographs must (see Annex O in the Guide for more details):

- clearly show the whole item out of the packaging, in focus, colour and on site
- show all the component parts within an item that is specifically listed in the specification. For example, for the squeeze crush show various components – adjustable head yoke, head scoop, sliding rear gate, anti-slip flooring, sides that can be opened, weigh scale, load bars.
- show all the 'system' if possible, e.g. Umbilical Hose Reeler System', need to photograph hose and reeler.
- show each part of the 'package' if multiple parts e.g. for 'Soil Health and Weather Package', need to photograph digital weather station and penetrometer
- show item installed / ready for operational use
- not identify individuals

57. If the serial number of the items is not accessible to get a photograph, what type of photograph is required?

Ans: More photographs may be requested to show an item meets the specifications, matches what has been invoiced and paid for, and is on site. If necessary, an inspection may be required.

58. Why have I been paid a lower amount than I claimed for?

Ans: The amount paid may be less than your claim amount if scheme penalties apply for ineligible or inaccurate claims, or if the business has an outstanding debt to the Department.

59. Can I appeal a decision to apply a penalty to my claim?

Ans: DAERA will notify you before applying a penalty and where possible will give you an opportunity to resolve the breach that may incur a penalty.

See the 'Penalties' section in the Guide for more detail.

60. How long after submitting my claim will I receive the funding?

Ans: This will vary depending on the complexity of the claim and if there is a pre-payment inspection required. Claims that are accurate and complete will be easier to process for payment.

61. After I have completed my project and my claim has been paid, what further requirements or conditions do I need to consider?
Ans:

General

You must act in accordance with the scheme legislation, Letter of Offer and Terms and Conditions. Failure to adhere to the Terms and Conditions could result in cancellation of your Letter of Offer and / or recovery of monies paid.

Health and Safety

You are also responsible for considering the health and safety implications of the item(s) and ensure each item is installed and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

5-year retention period

Funded equipment or technology must be maintained in agricultural use for the purpose it was intended for and not disposed of, modified, transferred or sold for five years from the date of the claim submission, otherwise penalties will apply.

You must retain original hardcopy / digital records and on-line documentation for 5 years from the date the claim is submitted. This includes relevant records, receipts, invoices and proof of payments and access to computer data relevant to the application. This will enable future scrutiny and copying by DAERA or its agent if required.

Evaluation

You must participate in evaluation of the scheme outcomes, through simple surveys or case study interviews, if selected. These requirements will be kept to a minimum.

FURTHER HELP

62. How can I get assistance with completing my application

Ans: The application process is straightforward. You can view short guides on the DAERA website at Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme where you can also find the Scheme Guide, and the Eligible Item List.

63. Do I need a computer to apply?
Ans: No, you can apply using the internet browser on a tablet or mobile device such as a phone.

64. How can I complete an online application form if I have no internet?

Ans: Internet access is required to complete an application.

Each DAERA Direct office has a standalone computer which can be used if you do not have a personal computer or mobile device with internet access. Staff will be available to help you log on but they will not be able to assist with the completion of the online application. Please note that it is advisable to make an appointment for use of a computer at a DAERA Direct Office.

You can also use computers at libraries across Northern Ireland. It should be noted that you will need to be a member of the library to use their services and to become a member you will need to bring proof of your address.

65. Who do I contact to get assistance?

Ans: If there are issues with the IT system or you have queries not addressed in either the Guide or these Questions & Answers then please email DAERA using SFIS@daera-ni.gov.uk.

If you need to speak to a member of the Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme Delivery Team, then telephone 028 9052 4882.

DAERA cannot assist with entering information to support your application or claim.