Questions and Answers

Sustainable Agriculture Programme for Northern Ireland

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Background

1. Why is farm support changing?

- Farming today is facing real pressures - from tighter budgets, fluctuating prices, rising input costs, rapid development in technology to threats posed by climate change and environmental challenges.

- That is why farm support is changing - to make sure that financial support and environmental responsibility work hand in hand, supporting farm businesses to stay productive and profitable, while looking after the land for the next generation.

2. How are changes to farm support being implemented?

- Changes to farm support are being implemented through DAERA's Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP).

- SAP is transitioning to a more sustainable farming sector by implementing policies and strategies that benefit our climate and environment, while supporting our economically and socially significant agriculture sector.

- The SAP is providing options for all farm businesses in Northern Ireland to secure and improve their viability and environmental sustainability.

3. What is SAP aiming to achieve?

- SAP's four long term outcomes include improved environmental sustainability, enhanced productivity, stronger resilience and an effective functioning supply chain.

- The Schemes being introduced as part of the SAP are essential levers in contributing to Northern Ireland's statutory obligations under the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 and achieving a genuinely Just Transition. Their implementation and delivery will be key to meeting the targets set out in the draft Climate Action Plan 2023-2027.

- Delivery of the SAP will contribute to addressing phosphorus and ammonia related issues and incentivising and enabling actions to ensure environmental sustainability in Northern Ireland by contributing to water and air quality, soil health and biodiversity.

- SAP is also delivering on securing enhanced productivity within Northern Ireland agriculture and assisting the development of effective functioning supply chains ensuring food security and high standards of disease control, public and animal health.

4. Will participation in SAP be mandatory for farm businesses, can farm businesses opt out?

- All schemes are voluntary. However, if farmers wish to avail of any support funding, they will be required to meet the eligibility conditions of the relevant schemes.

5. How has SAP been developed?

- SAP is being developed in consultation with the Northern Ireland agricultural industry and other key food and environmental stakeholders to target farm support to provide appropriate tailored support and meet the bespoke needs of Northern Ireland more effectively.

- This process engages stakeholders to assist DAERA in understanding the immediate and future needs of the industry in the development of policy. The approach provides a forum for dialogue between DAERA and stakeholders at each key stage of the development process.

- This approach is the key tool being employed by DAERA to ensure that SAP meets industry needs, ensuring buy-in, scale of uptake and scheme success.

6. What stakeholder groups are included in the development of the SAP?

- The Agricultural Policy Stakeholder Group (APSG) brings together representatives across food, farming and the environment to ensure that stakeholder views are understood and properly considered during the development of SAP.

- The Carbon Farming Partnership Group ensures that stakeholder views are understood and properly considered during the development and delivery of the Carbon Footprinting Project.

- The Farming with Nature Working Group ensures that stakeholder views are understood and properly considered in designing and developing a Farming with Nature Package that will deliver environmental improvement.

- The Farming for the Generations Co-Design Group is developing the details of the future scheme considering the findings of the evaluation of the pilot Farming for the Generations scheme and the Young Farmers' Payment Scheme.

- The Sheep Sector Support Working Group has been established to understand the immediate and future needs of the sector and what can be realistically achieved by DAERA against these needs.

- DAERA continues to engage with a broader range of interested parties through its normal communication and co-design processes.

7. What is the timeframe for the introduction of SAP?

- Since 2024, the Programme has been introduced in a phased manner. Follow link for further detail on the rollout of schemes - Sustainable Agriculture Programme Overview Timeline | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

8. Is the timeline for delivery of SAP subject to change?

- Yes, the published timeline is subject to business case and legislative cover being in place and will be updated as necessary at the above link. Please ensure you check back regularly for updates.

9. What is the budget for SAP?

- SAP provides support in excess of £330 million per year funded from both Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (CDEL) and Resource DEL funding (RDEL).

- For 2025-26 the NI Executive formally agreed to treat the £329.4 million Resource DEL that has been baselined in the NI block grant as 'Executive Earmarked' for 2025-26 and future years as part of its Final Budget announced on 3 April. This is the main source of funding for SAP.

10. How will the budget be allocated across SAP?

- In 2025 the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) was replaced by the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment (FSTP) with minimal changes, retaining the minimum claim size at 3 ha.

- The majority of the Executive Earmarked funding was allocated to the FSTP in 2025.

- FSTP was replaced with the Farm Sustainability Payment from 2026. Funding allocated to the Farm Sustainability Payment will reduce over time to enable funding to be diverted to other schemes within the Sustainable Agriculture Programme.

- Other schemes will be phased and timed to match the capacity to absorb and spend monies released.

11. Will there be additional funding to support the move towards climate neutrality?

- Yes, we need to ensure that the work that we carry out to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reach net zero will be fair and that we support people on that journey.

- As set out in the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022, the Department is required to establish a scheme for the administration of a fund to be known as the "Just Transition Fund for Agriculture".

- Its purpose is to provide information, knowledge and financial assistance to the agriculture sector to help deliver its contribution to meeting carbon budgets and emissions reduction targets by developing and implementing proposals and policies to be included in Climate Action Plans.

- The Executive agreed a £12.3 million Capital DEL Earmarked allocation for a Just Transition Fund for Agriculture as part of its Budget for 2025/26. This supported Farming for Carbon projects, the Bovine Genetics Project and the Sustainable Utilisation of Slurry Scheme. The Executive hasn't agreed the budget for the four-year period from 2026/27 to 2029/30.

- Policy development is being undertaken to support the delivery of the requirements in the Climate Change Act for a Just Transition Fund for Agriculture and there has been early engagement with key stakeholders in the agriculture sector to hear their views. Subject to necessary agreements it is hoped that a public consultation will take place on a Just Transition Fund for Agriculture policy framework in autumn 2026. This will be aided by the work to establish a Just Transition Commission.

12. What funding is used to administer SAP?

- The administration costs for SAP will come almost entirely from DAERA's existing operating budget from the Northern Ireland Executive.

- DAERA aims to use new technology and the information it currently holds as much as it reasonably can to minimise administrative time and cost.

13. Will DAERA have legal power to introduce SAP?

- Primary powers to implement future schemes in Northern Ireland are in UK assimilated law or provided by existing legislation. The operation of some of the new SAP schemes require affirmative and negative statutory rules to be taken forward through the Northern Ireland Assembly. The new legislation introduced to date has included:
  - The Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2023
  - The Farming for the Generations Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024
  - The Farming for the Generations Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024
  - The Farm Sustainability (Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
  - The Suckler Cow Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
  - The Farming for Sustainability Knowledge Transfer Payments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
  - The Farming with Nature Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

- The Farming with Nature Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
- The Horticulture Pilot Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
- The Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme (Eligibility etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
- The Farm Sustainability Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
- The Farm Sustainability Standards (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
- The Farming for Sustainability Innovation Payments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
- The Agricultural Schemes (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025
- The Bovine Genetics Genotyping Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026
- The Farming with Nature Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

14. Can land managers, that do not have a farm business account registered with DAERA, apply for support under SAP?

- In order for a land manager to avail of support, they must be registered with DAERA and have a unique business identification number (business ID) and comply with scheme requirements.

15. Given the impact of externalities, for example severe weather and market disturbances, what contingencies within SAP will be in place for the unexpected?

- In striving to achieve stronger resilience SAP will encourage farm businesses to better manage risk within their own businesses, becoming more resilient and better prepared to cope with the unexpected.

- The Farm Sustainability Payment provides a balance between providing a safety net which will help a farm business withstand 'shocks' that are beyond its ability to manage effectively and encouraging farms to be efficient, competitive and to manage risk proactively.

- A Crisis Framework is also being developed within the SAP that will enable DAERA to assess the potential industry impacts of extreme events such as weather or market failure. It will determine the most appropriate timing and form of intervention necessary for a specific crisis.

16. How will the Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP) support farmers in adopting more sustainable farming practices?

- The Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP) will support farmers through a combination of information, knowledge, data, and financial support. SAP's information and knowledge schemes will help farmers implement the on-farm management changes needed to meet current and future challenges. Its data

platforms will provide valuable insights to improve productivity, resilience, and animal health and welfare, while also helping farmers contribute to environmental objectives and identify opportunities to reduce carbon emissions. In addition, SAP Payment Schemes will provide financial support to assist farmers in transitioning to more sustainable farming practices.

Communication of Changes

17. How are these changes being communicated to farm businesses?

- Normal methods of communicating will be used such as the DAERA website, DAERA Direct offices, DAERA hosted Awareness Events, Farming press, social media and via representative organisations.

- DAERA will communicate as early as possible with farm businesses so they can consider any steps they may need to take in advance of new schemes commencing.

18. How do I find out more about SAP?

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

Inheritance Tax

19. Following the Government's new ruling on inheritance tax, does DAERA plan to bring in any new measures to help farm businesses plan for succession?

- The SAP contains a Farming for the Generations Scheme which has been rolled out as a pilot. The pilot scheme aimed to raise awareness of the need for succession planning on farms.

- The scheme aimed to support farm families through a three phased approach: planning for succession, developing the successor, and supporting the lead generation within the farm family. It also linked farmers without a family successor to new entrants to provide access to land and other resources.

- The future full Farming of the Generations Scheme is being developed with support from industry stakeholders.

SAP Information and Knowledge Schemes

SAP's information and knowledge schemes will be essential in supporting changes to on-farm management practices needed to address the changes required now and in the future.

Farming for Sustainability - Knowledge Transfer

20. What is included within the Farming for Sustainability – Knowledge Transfer?

- A range of training, knowledge transfer and innovation schemes are being provided by CAFRE. These include:
    - Supporting Agri-professionals;
    - Knowledge Transfer – Information;
    - Knowledge Transfer – Training;
    - Peer Learning Groups – Business Sustainability Groups / Themed Groups;
    - A network of Innovation Farms; and
    - Innovation Visits to see innovations outside of Northern Ireland.

- Focused training is linked to the other SAP Schemes such as the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme, the Beef Sustainability Package, the Bovine Genetics Project and the Carbon Footprinting Project.

21. What support is available to professionals supporting farm businesses?

- Farm businesses receive advice and guidance from many different people, for example, processors, vets, nutritionists. These individuals are vital to the success of our industry and play an important role in providing knowledge and impacting change on farms.

- DAERA requires all sectors of industry to join together to drive the changes needed to achieve the future vision for the agricultural and food sectors.

- A programme has been delivered by CAFRE to provide continuous professional development (CPD) for professionals interacting with farmers and links to the various elements of the SAP.

- The CAFRE 'Supporting Agri-Professionals' Programme launched in January 2025 and focuses on professional development, technical expertise, and practical support aimed at equipping advisers, consultants, and other industry professionals to support farm businesses.

22. Will DAERA be providing training for female farmers?

- We want to encourage the participation of women and other underrepresented groups in training programmes. We are engaging with female Business

Sustainability Group members to explore options to support women only BSGs or meetings, where there is sufficient demand.

23. Will farmers be required to have a Level 3 qualification in agriculture?

- As set out in DAERA's Knowledge Framework an ambition is that anyone taking over as head of a commercial farm or horticulture business should hold at least a Level 3 relevant qualification. Decisions have not yet been taken as to how this will operate in practice.

- Further information on DAERA's Knowledge Framework is available to view at: DAERA Knowledge Framework Document | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

24. When did the Business Sustainability Groups (BSG) open for applications?

- The first application period to recruit farmers into Business Sustainability Groups (BSGs) opened in March 2025. A second application window opened on 19 May 2026 until the 30 September 2026 . Further application tranches will be launched to accommodate farmers wishing to participate in BSGs. Information on these forthcoming tranches will be published on the CAFRE website.

25. How long will Business Sustainability Groups (BSG) last?

- BSGs will last at least four years.

26. What are Themed Groups and how will these operate?

- Themed Groups are Peer Learning Groups that will focus on particular topics for example water quality or Suckler Cow fertility. The duration of the group will be tailored to the needs of the group and the topic.

27. If I join a BSG or Themed Group can I leave at any time?

- Yes, but you should discuss this with your Group facilitator / CAFRE Adviser first.

28. If I join a BSG, what will I be required to do?

- For BSGs to be successful, members are asked to share their knowledge and experience within the group and be willing to host a farm visit. To aid group discussion members are asked to complete financial benchmarking to at least gross margin each year as this provides details of their farm's physical and financial performance. Members are asked to attend a minimum of 3 meetings per year.

29. What support will be in place to facilitate data collection for benchmarking?

- The BSG scheme will provide a learner support payment of £445 to encourage participants to complete financial benchmarking and attend a minimum of three meetings per year.

30. Will there be support assistants to collect benchmarking data?

- No, the BSG scheme will have a learner support payment of £445 to encourage participants to complete benchmarking and attend a minimum of three meetings per year. However, farmers can employ a data collector privately to submit benchmarking data to CAFRE on their behalf.

31. As a BSG member will I have to share all the benchmarking data collected if I host a group meeting?

- You will be expected to collect benchmarking data so a group average can be established. At a meeting hosted by you the level of detail provided by you will be agreed with the CAFRE Adviser in advance.

32. Will the data collected be shared with other DAERA organisations or externally?

- All benchmarking data is treated as commercial in confidence. Only CAFRE Advisers and the CAFRE Business Technologists (who ensure quality of data), will have access to individuals' data. It will not be shared / disclosed to any other DAERA organisation or externally. This has been the case for the past 20+ years of CAFRE benchmarking. Some overall benchmarking trends are used to highlight the potential for increasing efficiency as part of annual reports that are shared with all benchmarking businesses.

33. Will I have to benchmark to be a part of a Themed Group?

- No, financial benchmarking will not be required to be a part of a Themed Group, but you will be asked to provide farm data relevant to the theme of the group.

34. If farmers are being encouraged to put their own financial benchmark on the CAFRE Benchmarking system will training be provided?

- Advice and training on the benchmarking process will be available from the CAFRE Business Technologists.

35. Is there a hosting payment available for those in BSGs and Themed Groups?

- Yes, a hosting payment of £786 is available to group members who host meetings. To receive this payment, you must ensure that biosecurity measures and public liability insurance are in place. You along with your CAFRE Adviser will complete a health and safety risk assessment for the

meeting which will be shared with all attendees. You must also be willing to present your own data. The payment is made to the farm business registered.

36. In the previous BDG scheme there was funding towards analytical testing – will this be available to those within BSG or Themed Groups?

- Yes, funding towards analytical testing will be available from BSG members. The information from the analytical testing will be available to help farmers make decisions on their own farms.

37. What topics will Themed Groups focus on?

- Examples of topics for Themed Groups include Suckler Cow fertility, water quality and efficient beef finishing. However, the range of topics to be covered under Themed Groups is yet to be fully decided. Further updates will be available on the CAFRE website in due course.

38. How does CAFRE intend to incentivise young farmers to join a BSG/Themed Group?

- BSGs and Themed Groups open for applications in tranches and all farmers are encouraged to join. There are a wide range of benefits to being part of BSGs and Themed Groups, e.g. access to a CAFRE Adviser, analytical testing, etc. Details of when BSGs and Themed groups are open for applications will be posted on the CAFRE website.

39. Will Themed Groups be open to a group of farmers or individual farm businesses?

- Farmers will apply to Themed Groups as individuals and groups will be established dependant on the number of applicants and their locations.

Farming for Sustainability - Innovation

40. Which elements of the Farming for Sustainability - Innovation Scheme are currently open?

- The Innovation Visits element will be open for applications for specific visits on a regular basis throughout the year – check the CAFRE website for availability.

- Applications to become an Innovation Farm host are currently closed for the Dairy and Beef sectors. Recruitment for Innovation Farms for other sectors will open later in 2026.

- The Innovation Partnerships element application window is currently closed for application. Further application windows will be announced in due course.

41. How do I find out about Innovation Visits?

- Visit the CAFRE website for more information - Innovation Visits - CAFRE

42. How do I apply for an Innovation Visit?

- Applications are made online from the CAFRE website. Check regularly for new visits becoming available.

43. How much does it cost to go on an Innovation Visit?

- The main costs of the Innovation Visit are met through DAERA. The cost of all travel outside Northern Ireland is covered, as is accommodation and meals. The scheme will also cover the cost of technical experts and translators in the country being visited.

- Participants are expected to cover the cost of any farm relief while they are away, their travel within Northern Ireland, and also their travel insurance.

44. How do I find out more about Innovation Farms?

- Visit the CAFRE website for more information - Innovation Farms | Farm Business Support - CAFRE

45. How do I apply to become an Innovation Farm host?

- Visit the CAFRE website for more information - Innovation Farms | Farm Business Support - CAFRE

46. When will it be possible to visit an Innovation Farm?

- It is anticipated that visits to Innovation Farms will commence in autumn 2026.

47. How do I apply to visit an Innovation Farm?

- Details of how to apply to visit an Innovation Farm will be available on the CAFRE website when farms have been selected, this is likely to commence in autumn 2026.

48. How much funding is available to an Innovation Partnership?

- Each group can claim up to £150,000 of resource spending and if it is strictly necessary for the project, up to £40,000 of capital.

49. Where can I find out more information and apply to Innovation Partnerships?

- The application period for Innovation Partnerships is now closed for 2026. It is planned to open for applications on an annual basis.

Farming for Carbon

50. What is Farming for Carbon?

- Farming for Carbon focuses on actions to reduce carbon emissions on farms through Low Carbon Farming Practices and offset carbon emissions through carbon sequestration, which is the process of capturing, securing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere in trees, hedges and soils.

51. How will reductions in carbon emissions be encouraged?

- Reductions in carbon emissions will be encouraged through:

  i. Reduction in older livestock numbers through the Beef Sustainability Package. Options to reduce the age at first calving and replacement rates within the dairy sector through knowledge and applied research.

  ii. Breeding of more environmentally efficient cattle through the Bovine Genetics Project.

  iii. The use of protected urea fertilisers, the optimal timing of fertiliser and slurry applications and the establishment of grassland swards with Legumes and Herbs to reduce fertiliser nitrogen use will be promoted through applied research and knowledge transfer initiatives.

  iv. Biomethane production from agricultural waste.

  v. The use of methane supressing feed products to reduce rumen methane emissions, nitrogen, and phosphorus outputs by collaborative industry research through the AFBI led, UK Dairy Carbon Network project.

  vi. Exploration of novel slurry additives to reduce emissions.

52. How will food production be balanced with carbon reduction?

- The SAP is seeking to balance food production with carbon reduction through achieving its four outcomes of improved environmental sustainability, enhanced productivity, stronger resilience and an effective functioning supply chain.

- The SAP is not following the Climate Change Committee advice to cut livestock numbers.

- Instead, the SAP schemes aim to maintain milk and meat production while at the same time reducing carbon emissions.

- Carbon emissions are being reduced through improved livestock productivity, reduced nitrogen fertiliser use through better utilization of livestock slurry and

incorporation of legumes in grassland swards, alternative fertilisers such as protected urea, improved cattle genetics through the Bovine Genetics Project and Knowledge Transfer programmes being delivered by CAFRE assisting farmers to adopt Low Carbon Farming Practices.

53. What is the UK Dairy Carbon Network?

- The UK Dairy Carbon Network is a Defra funded project which is being delivered by a UK wide consortium, led by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI).

- The project will assess the collective impact of a wide range of emission reduction mitigations including animal breeding, feeding, fertiliser, forage and slurry management on 56 commercial dairy farms across the UK, with 20 of the dairy farms located in Northern Ireland.

- It will inform policy decisions around best routes to achieving net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions using the UK Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (CBDP) measures, investigating which combinations of actions will be most effective in situ across different commercial dairy and dairy-beef management systems.

- Knowledge Transfer events are currently taking place on local dairy farms participating in the UK Dairy Carbon Network.

Data Platforms

The Sustainable Agriculture Programme's data platforms will provide information to help you drive productivity, resilience and animal health and welfare, contribute to environmental goals and identify opportunities to reduce carbon emissions.

Soil Nutrient Health Scheme

54. What is the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS)?

- The Soil Nutrient Health Scheme is a soil sampling, analysis and carbon baselining scheme developed by DAERA for farm businesses. It helps farmers plan farm carbon and nutrient management more effectively and will help facilitate improvements to the water environment. This is one of the key actions in the Lough Neagh Action Plan.

- It provides a baseline for soil pH, major nutrients and an estimation of carbon stored in above ground biomass and soils.

- Farm businesses in operation on or before 8 September 2025 will be required to register for the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme and complete the training as a conditionality for the Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme.

- The Scheme also includes a full LiDAR scan of NI providing important information on runoff risk areas and the quantity of carbon stored above ground on participating farms.

55. Is it compulsory to register for the SNHS?

- No. Registering for the SNHS is voluntary. However, for farm businesses in operation on or before 8 September 2025, registering for the SNHS and completing the associated training is a conditionality of the Farm Sustainability Payment scheme. To avoid FSP penalties in 2027, farm businesses invited to register for the scheme, should do so.

56. If I have not previously registered for the SNHS, will I still have the opportunity to do so in order to meet the conditionality for the Farm Sustainability Payment?

- The final mop-up registration phase of the SNHS ran from Wednesday 5 August until midnight on Monday 7 September 2026 for farm businesses in operation on or before 8 September 2025 that had not previously registered for the Scheme. The registration phase is now closed. To meet the Farm Sustainability Payment conditionality, eligible farm businesses must have registered for the Scheme and completed the associated training by 15 May 2027.

57. I have not participated in the SNHS but have already had soil samples taken on my land. Can I use these to meet the conditionality for the Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme?

- No. Only participation in the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme will meet the conditionality for the Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme.

58. How will the SNHS benefit me?

- CAFRE is currently providing training on how to interpret soil analysis results and help farm businesses to prepare a nutrient management plan.

- The information provided by the Scheme will allow you to target the application of crop nutrients to your soil, reduce nutrient waste and help increase farm profitability.

- The SNHS provides accurate information on soil pH, the nutrients Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K), Magnesium (Mg), Sulphur (S) and Loss on Ignition (LOI, which is organic matter), and estimates of carbon stored for each field on your farm.

- The LiDAR is used to assist in estimating the carbon stored in your farm hedgerows and trees and to provide a nutrient run off risk map. This information will help you make better use of manures, reduce the risk of nutrients entering waterways and help you to manage carbon on your farm.

59. Will participation in the SNHS help me to comply with the Nutrient Action Programme (NAP) Regulations?

- Yes, the soil analysis provided under the SNHS can be used to prepare a fertilisation plan, which is required under the Nutrient Action Programme (NAP) Regulations if applying chemical phosphate fertiliser to grassland, or high phosphorus manure or anaerobic digestate to any land.

60. Who will be carrying out the soil analysis and when will I get my results?

- Analysis of soil samples will be carried out by NRM / Cawoods - the soil analysis contractor working under the direction of AFBI and you should receive your soil sample results normally within four to six weeks after your samples have been collected.

61. Will all my fields be soil sampled?

- Yes, where practically possible, all the fields 0.1 ha or above on your farm will be sampled free-of charge. This will provide you with a reliable baseline of soil nutrients and carbon estimates for all fields you farm.

62. I have already sampled some of my fields, will you test these again?

- Yes, we will sample all registered fields you farm.

63. What time of year will my soil samples be collected?

- Soil samples will primarily be collected during the period running from November through to February. Where fields are identified as requiring early sampling (e.g. winter crops) or not yet having received nutrient input or receiving no nutrient input, sampling may take place outside of this period. Farm businesses should complete a short survey from the soil collection contractor Tetra tech when received via email or SMS message. This survey helps plan the best time to sample their fields. The survey is normally issued in October.

64. What bio-security measures will be in place to protect my farm during soil sample collection?

- Sampling contractors and AFBI staff will be required to adhere to a Bio-Security Protocol during soil sample collection on your farm, including Cleansing & Disinfection of personnel and equipment.

65. How will my soil analysis data be used?

- The soil analysis results collected may be used for further AFBI research. It may also be used for administration of new support schemes.

66. Will my individual farm data, collected through the SNHS, be used for enforcement or regulation purposes against me?

- No. Your individual farm data collected through the SNHS will not be used by DAERA for enforcement of regulations. Data will be protected under the SNHS Privacy notice and GDPR regulations.

67. Will I receive training?

- Yes. CAFRE is providing Nutrient Management Awareness and Nutrient Management Planning training. This also includes training on the role of carbon on farms. Training will primarily be delivered on-line with mentoring support and group training provided for those participants who require additional help accessing the on-line learning.

68. What does the training involve?

- Training is designed to increase your level of understanding and knowledge of the principles of nutrient management, the role of carbon in soil and the interpretation of Phosphorus (P) run-off maps. The training provides the skills you require to prepare a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) which you may need for entry to future DAERA schemes.

69. Is there a contact if I have further questions?

- If you have any further questions not covered in the Q&A, please contact the AFBI SNHS Admin team on 02890 255212 or email SNHS@afbini.gov.uk

Bovine Genetics Project

70. What is the Bovine Genetics Project?

- The Bovine Genetics Project is one of the key components of the Sustainable Agriculture Programme.

- This Project is of significant interest to industry as it will provide cattle breeders with the data and evidence necessary to breed more efficient, healthier, and more productive animals. It is also of significant interest to government due to the public good benefits of breeding animals with lower pollution potential, lower carbon footprints and improved health and welfare.

- Genetic improvement will contribute significantly to achieving the target reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, through increased animal productivity and through genetic selection for reduced enteric methane production.

- The Bovine Genetics Project will provide genetic merit information for dairy and beef cattle on a much wider scale than at present. It will collect and collate animal performance data, from various sources, for example, meat and milk processors, and livestock markets, and produce genetic merit indexes from which producers can make informed breeding decisions to improve the genetic merit of their livestock.

- The Project will also provide farmers with access to physical benchmarking reports, which will incorporate genetic merit information, to inform producers on how their business is performing relative to their peers and identify areas for further investigation and improvement.

71. What is genetic improvement?

- Genetic improvement is achieved as a result of breeding from the best performing animals within a population. This requires the identification of those animals with the most desirable traits. Accurate and up-to-date individual animal performance data (e.g. milk yield and liveweight gain), linked to both dam and sire identification, is essential to identify the best animals from which to breed.

- Very few farm businesses with breeding herds have access to genetic information on their animals. Only 30% of dairy cows and 2% of suckler cows have genetic merit information available. Therefore, the vast majority of breeding decisions are made in the absence of robust information to identify an animal's genetic potential. Most breeding decisions are based on the visual appearance of the animals, and the breeder's intuition. Without genetic information feeding into breeding decisions, the majority of dairy and suckler beef farmers are not utilising the opportunity to breed more efficient, healthier, productive animals with lower carbon footprints.

- The Bovine Genetics Project will provide farmers with the data and evidence to identify animals with the most desirable traits at a younger age, to therefore make better informed breeding decisions to accelerate the rate of genetic gain, particularly in traits which are difficult to identify visually, for example feed efficiency.

72. What is genotyping?

- Genotyping is a laboratory procedure which analyses DNA to identify genetic differences between individuals or populations. Genotyping the dairy and suckler cattle population is a critical component to deliver the Bovine Genetics Project.

- Genotyping enables the accurate identification of animal parentage, which is critical to ensure the genetic merit information provided to farmers is accurate. Genotyping also enables genetic merit information to be provided for traits which are currently impossible to identify at farm level, such as feed efficiency and genes which directly impact on animal health and welfare.

- Genotyping of animals for the Bovine Genetics Project will involve the analysis of an ear tissue sample which is collected using an ear tag, i.e. the same process which is used for the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) Eradication Programme.

- The Bovine Genetics Genotyping Scheme has been developed to provide support to herd owners to encourage them to genotype their animals. The Scheme opened on 1 September 2026 and will run until 15 May 2028. The Scheme duration will provide producers with a sufficient time period to genotype their current and future breeding animals, and an initial calf crop.

73. How is the Bovine Genetics Project being delivered?

- The Bovine Genetics Project is being delivered by DAERA, in partnership with the agri-food industry, which has established a not-for-profit company, Sustainable Ruminant Genetics Ltd (SRG).

- SRG sponsoring organisations are the Ulster Farmers Union, the Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association and the Dairy Council for Northern Ireland.

- SRG is working collectively with DAERA to deliver several key functions, including the supply of industry data and the promotion and marketing of the Project to producers and other stakeholders.

74. When did the Bovine Genetics Project commence?

- The Project commenced with the appointment of a Service Provider, the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF), in January 2025. The first phase of the Project was the design and development of a data platform, to collect and

analyse data from various sources, e.g. government bovine databases, meat and milk processors, and livestock markets.

- ICBF have considerable experience and expertise in the delivery of genetic improvement in the Republic of Ireland. ICBF has also engaged the services of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) to provide genetic evaluations bespoke to the Northern Ireland dairy sector.

- The project is currently developing to agreed timelines with the first benchmarking reports available to all farm businesses since May 2026.

75. What information will farm businesses be required to provide to the Bovine Genetics Project?

- Every effort is being made to limit the amount of data required directly from farm businesses.

- Data available from the Northern Ireland Food Animal Information System (NIFAIS), dairy and beef processors, and livestock markets provides most of the data required.

- As the Project evolves, examples of data which farm businesses may be required to provide include calving ease score, cow temperament, mothering ability and reason for culling.

76. How will farm businesses be assisted to participate in the Bovine Genetics Project?

- Registration functionality is available on a dedicated bovine genetics user portal, hosted on the SRG website (www.srgni.com) and accessible through the normal government gateway process. Training is provided by CAFRE, through a combination of online and face-to-face delivery, further details are available at www.cafre.ac.uk/bgp-training.

- CAFRE is also providing training to industry professionals, including farm consultants and agents, who in turn can assist their farm business clients to register for the Bovine Genetics Project and gain full advantage of participation.

- SRG will also be delivering a series of awareness events across Northern Ireland on the Bovine Genetics Project, throughout 2026, to ensure farm businesses are fully aware of the Project and what they need to do to register for the Project and the Genotyping Scheme.

- CAFRE is also developing a suite of Knowledge and Innovation Programmes to ensure farmers will have the required knowledge and understanding of the available benchmarking and genetic evaluation services to make more informed future breeding decisions.

77. What are the Bovine Genetics Project conditionality requirements for the Farm Sustainability Payment?

- Given the investment, by both government and industry, to develop the genetics platform, it is critical that an effective policy instrument is in place to drive access to and uptake of the data being provided for farmers, allowing them to assess enterprise performance and make better informed breeding decisions. Participation in the Bovine Genetics Project is a conditionality for the Farm Sustainability Payment from 2026.

- From 1 September 2026 onwards, farm businesses with bovine animals must have registered for the Bovine Genetics Project, and completed any training provided, by the closing of the Single Application Form window on 15 May 2028 to be compliant.

- A 10% penalty will be applied to the FSP of non-compliant businesses in 2028. The penalty will be increased to 15% for continued non-compliance in 2029 and will continue to be applied at 15% until the conditionality has been met.

- Registration functionality is provided on a dedicated bovine genetics user portal, hosted on the SRG website (www.srgni.com) and accessible through the normal government gateway process. Training is provided by CAFRE through a combination of online and face-to-face delivery, further details are available at www.cafre.ac.uk/bgp-training.

Carbon Footprinting Project

78. What is Carbon Footprinting?

- Carbon Footprinting is an important action that farm businesses can undertake to measure the Greenhouse Gas emissions from their farm and identify where improvements can be made at farm level.

79. Will farm carbon footprints for Northern Ireland be provided through SAP?

- Yes, DAERA is progressing the development of an industry-led farm Carbon Footprinting Project for Northern Ireland which will provide all farm businesses with a whole farm baseline carbon footprint.

80. What will the Carbon Footprinting Project aim to achieve?

- The Project will be an important management tool to help farm businesses drive better environmental performance and sustainable practices. It will be supported by knowledge transfer to help farm businesses reduce emissions.

81. Will participation in the Carbon Footprinting Project be a requirement for future support payments?

- Yes, it is planned that participation in the Carbon Footprinting Project will become a conditionality for receipt of the FSP. The date of introduction of this conditionality is still to be agreed.

Payment Schemes

Payment Schemes will provide you with the support necessary to transition to more sustainable farming practices.

Farm Sustainability Payment (FSP) Scheme

82. What is the Farm Sustainability Payment (FSP) Scheme?

- The FSP Scheme provides a balance between providing a safety net which will help a farm business withstand 'shocks' that are beyond its ability to manage effectively and encouraging farm businesses to become more environmentally sustainable, efficient and resilient.

83. When will the Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme be introduced?

- From 1 January 2026 the FSP Scheme replaced the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment (FSTP) Scheme.

84. What changes have been introduced for the Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme in 2026?

- The FSP Scheme introduced the following elements in 2026:

a. The implementation of the Historic Years Exercise (HYE). The FSP Scheme is directed to those farm businesses that are actively engaged in agricultural activity. Therefore, in order to be eligible for the FSP Scheme, your farm business must meet the requirements of the Historic Years Exercise (HYE) i.e. in scheme years 2020 or 2021 had:

- Kept cattle or sheep or reared goats registered on APHIS; or
- Reared deer for meat and sold that meat commercially; or
- Kept poultry registered with the Department as a commercial flock, or pigs registered on APHIS, combined with selling grass (not including the sale of agistment grazing rights); or
- Farmed at least three hectares of a determined area with an arable or horticultural crop and declared in an application to the Department for either of those years; or
- Been a contract rearer with a contract in place which demonstrated that they managed the livestock and associated grassland, bore the risks in relation to the agricultural activity being carried out and obtained benefits from it.
- Grazing horses will not fulfil the eligibility requirements.

b. New land eligibility rules also came into effect from 1 January 2026.

c. New Farm Sustainability Standards (FSS) came into effect from 1 January 2026. These replaced the system of Cross-Compliance which has existed in Northern Ireland since 2005. A revised Penalty Matrix has

been introduced in tandem with FSS from January 2026. The objective is to make the new penalty system effective but fair, with greater emphasis on securing compliance through education.

d. Mandatory training will be required when a business breaches any of the Underpinning Requirements for the first time in a three year period.

e. DAERA has also introduced progressive capping, and the requirement for the farm business to comply with conditionalities such as participation in the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS and the Bovine Genetics Project.

85. Why did approximately 1,900 farm businesses not qualify for the FSP Scheme in 2026?

- Under World Trade Organisation rules relating to non or minimally trade distorting payments, it is permissible to set production requirements in a historic reference period to ensure that payments are directed towards farm businesses that are actively engaged in agricultural activity.

- Given that the purpose of the FSP Scheme is to enable otherwise viable farm businesses to withstand market and other shocks, the inclusion of businesses that do not undertake agricultural production or produce only grass silage cannot be justified.

- Similarly, those farm businesses that leased out all of their Basic Payment Scheme entitlements during the historic years period of 2020 and 2021 and did not carry out any of the eligible HYE activities during this period, will not be eligible to claim the FSP.

- To have been eligible to claim FSP in 2026, applicants to the FSP Scheme must, for the year 2020 or 2021, have met the requirements as specified in The Farm Sustainability (Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

86. What is the definition of active farmer?

- The person enjoying the decision-making power, the benefits and the financial risks in relation to agricultural activity being carried out on the land.

87. What is the definition of agricultural activity?

- Agricultural activity is defined as:

    - The production, rearing or growing of agricultural products, including harvesting, milking, breeding animals, and keeping animals for farming purposes;

- Maintaining an agricultural area in a state which makes it suitable for grazing or cultivation without preparatory action going beyond usual agricultural methods and machineries.

88. What is the minimum claim size for FSP?

- Applicants must activate at least 3 payment entitlements on a minimum of 3 hectares of eligible land.

89. How many hectares of land must agricultural activity take place on?

- Applicants for the FSP scheme must carry out agricultural activity on at least 3 hectares of land used to activate entitlements. However, where an applicant submits a claim of less than 5 hectares, they must carry out agricultural activity on at least 2 hectares of land used to activate entitlements.

90. For the Historic Years Exercise what was the difference between growing a crop of grass for hay and growing an arable crop?

- Growing an arable crop requires more focus / risk taking.

91. Could a farmer have kept a few livestock or have grown 3 hectares of eligible cereals but grown/sold grass on the rest of its land meet the Historic Years requirements?

- From 1 January 2026, applicants for the FSP Scheme in operation before 1 January 2022 must have in 2020 or 2021 met the Historic Years requirements as specified in The Farm Sustainability (Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025. The level of activity set out above is likely to satisfy these requirements.

92. Would rye be counted as a cereal if it is cut and goes to an AD plant?

- From 1 January 2026, applicants to the FSP Scheme must for the year 2020 or 2021 meet the requirements as specified in The Farm Sustainability (Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025. The growing of rye alone is unlikely to meet these requirements.

93. When will the conditionalities for the FSP Scheme, such as participating in Soil Nutrient Health Scheme apply?

- Participation in the Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS) and the Bovine Genetics Project became conditionalities for receipt of the FSP with effect from 1 January 2026.

- It is further planned that participation in the Carbon Footprinting Project will become a conditionality for receipt of the FSP. The date of introduction of this conditionality is still to be agreed.

94. Is the SNHS conditionality associated with the business ID or field number?

- All payments are made to farm business IDs. To be compliant with the SNHS conditionality a business must have registered for the scheme and completed training offered to them by the closing date of the single application form window of 15 May 2027.

95. What is minimum Stocking Rate to claim the FSP?

- There is none.

96. How would I know if I did not meet the historic reference requirements in 2020 or 2021?

- DAERA corresponded directly with those farm businesses likely to be impacted by the HYE in June 2025, setting out the options open to them. However, the onus is on you to ensure that you meet all the eligibility requirements when claiming the FSP and seek advice if necessary.

97. What will happen to a farm business which was leasing out all its entitlements in 2020 and 2021?

- Businesses that leased out all their entitlements during 2020 and 2021 and did not meet the historic years criteria were not eligible to claim the FSP in 2026. DAERA wrote to those farm businesses impacted in June 2025 to explain the options open to them.

98. Is there an appeals process available for those deemed not to have met the historic years criteria?

- DAERA wrote to those farm businesses potentially impacted by this policy change to set out the options open to them to enable them to plan effectively. Appeals are only possible if a business believes that DAERA has incorrectly deemed that it does not meet the criteria and not against the policy itself.

99. Will those businesses excluded from claiming the FSP in 2026 because they did not meet the historic years criteria be able to claim the FSP in subsequent years?

- Ineligible farm businesses will only be unable to apply for the FSP in 2026. If a farm business meets the eligibility criteria for the FSP and buys/leases in entitlements in 2027, that business can apply for the FSP in 2027.

100. Will implementing historic years not incentivise breaking high nature value ground?

- No.

101. If a farm business met the eligibility criteria in 2020 and 2021 and claimed some of the entitlements itself but leased surplus entitlements to another farm business, did they lose the leased entitlements?

- Businesses which meet the FSP Scheme eligibility requirements including the historic years criteria and submitted a valid claim for the FSP in 2026 retained all of their entitlements.

102. If a farm business met the eligibility criteria in 2020 and 2021 but subsequently ceased farming and leased their entitlements out to another farm business, did they retain their entitlements and be permitted to continue to lease their FSP entitlements?

- Applicants for the FSP Scheme in 2026 needed to have submitted an eligible FSP application and have activated three entitlements on three hectares of eligible land to have met the requirements of the FSP Scheme. Entitlements held by businesses not meeting these requirements have expire.

103. Will farm businesses formed after 2021 that currently hold payment entitlements be eligible to claim the FSP?

- Farm businesses formed after 2021 who currently hold payment entitlements are not subject to the historic years requirements and will therefore be able to claim the FSP if they meet all of the FSP Scheme eligibility requirements.

104. If I am not eligible to claim FSP or if I decide to opt out, will I be able to claim any other funding under the Sustainable Agriculture Programme?

- You may be able to claim under other schemes within the SAP if you meet the individual scheme's eligibility requirements and these do not require an eligible FSP Scheme claim.

105. Are existing plantations planted under forestry grant aid, eligible for payment, and are older non grant aided plantations eligible?

- Land planted under a forestry or agri-environment scheme administered by the Department on or after 1 January 2009 remain eligible to claim support under the FSP Scheme subject to the applicant meeting the other FSP scheme conditions. Older, non-granted aided discrete areas of woodland which are less than 5ha are also eligible.

106. Will farm businesses who in the reference years 2020 and 2021 did not have any livestock or an arable crop (or carried out any qualifying horticultural activity) but owned BPS entitlements and claimed BPS on an energy crop in the form of short rotation coppice Willow during those years be able to retain their entitlements?

- Yes, Schedule 1 of the Farm Sustainability (Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 defines "short rotation coppice. Alder, Birch, Hazel, Ash, Lime, Sweet Chestnut, Sycamore, Willow and Poplar

(permanent crop) Maximum harvest cycle is 5 years" as one of the eligible crop types to satisfy the FSP Scheme historic reference years requirements. It will also continue to be an eligible agricultural activity for the FSP Scheme purposes.

Historic Years Exercise and Entitlement trading

107. What will happen to a business that currently leases in entitlements from a business that did not meet the historic years criteria?

- Farm businesses that meet the FSP Scheme eligibility requirements and have leased in entitlements from a business not meeting the FSP Scheme eligibility requirements will retain the leased in entitlements for the FSP Scheme purposes until the lease period ends at which stage the entitlements will expire.

108. Why were entitlement leases in 2026 restricted to 1 year?

- Entitlement leases agreed during the 2026 entitlement trading periods are limited to one year. This is to prevent businesses not eligible to claim the FSP leasing out their entitlements prior to expiry for extended periods of time therefore indirectly continuing to benefit from the payment.

109. What action should businesses not eligible to claim in 2026 because they did not meet the historic years criteria take?

- Farm businesses not eligible to claim the FSP in 2026 had up to 15 May 2026 to sell their entitlements or their entitlements will have expired on 16 May 2026.

110. What will happen to entitlements owned by an ineligible farm business that have been leased to an eligible farm business on a long-term lease basis?

- Entitlements leased by an ineligible farm business to an eligible farm business before 2025 for a period ending after the 2026 scheme year, will expire at the end of the lease if the ineligible farm business did not to act in 2026 to terminate the lease and transfer them permanently.

FSP and Progressive Capping of Payments

111. Will FSP be capped?

- Yes, progressive capping of FSP will apply above £60,000.

112. Why was Progressive Capping introduced?

- The policy intent of the FSP Scheme is to provide agricultural support to act as a balance between providing a safety net which will help a farm business withstand 'shocks' that are beyond its ability to manage effectively and

encouraging farm businesses to become more environmentally sustainable, efficient and resilient.

- High support payments can encourage unwarranted risk taking and reduce the incentive to manage risk within the farm business. Therefore, Progressive Capping aims to strike a balance between providing a safety net which helps a farm business withstand those shocks that are beyond the ability of that business to manage risk effectively, and dampening the incentive to be efficient, competitive and to manage risk proactively.

113. Is capping only for 2026 and 2027? Will the capping rates in 2027 apply to subsequent years? If a client is impacted by progressive capping can they lease or sell some of their entitlements?

- Progressive capping of the FSP will apply above £60,000 and will be phased in over 2026 and 2027 and then remain in place for subsequent years at the 2027 level. Progressive capping will not impact the number or unit value of entitlements held by a farm business and normal trading arrangements will apply.

114. How is progressive capping being introduced?

- Progressive capping of the FSP will be phased in over a two-year period from the introduction of the FSP Scheme. **Table 1** below sets out how progressive capping of payments will operate.

Table 1. Example of how Progressive capping of payments will operate

Payment Band	Capping reduction in first year of FSP (%)	Capping reduction in second year onwards of FSP (%)
£190,000.01 +	100	100
£150,000.01-£190,000	40	80
£100,000.01-£150,000	30	60
£80,000.01-£100,000	20	40
£60,000.01-£80,000	10	20
£0-£60,000	0	0

Progressive Capping of FSP Payments.
This will begin in 2026 and be phased in over a two-year period.

Examples
Farm Business A - Payment Due before capping percentages are applied is **£190,000.**

In **Year 1** – the following percentage capping reductions are applied, **Table 2**.

Table 2. Progressive Capping applied (Year 1)

Payment Band	Capping reduction in first year of FSP (%)	Business A Payment falling into band	Payment following capping percentages applied
£190,000.01 +	100	£0	£0
£150,000.01-£190,000	40	£40,000	£24,000
£100,000.01-£150,000	30	£50,000	£35,000
£80,000.01-£100,000	20	£20,000	£16,000
£60,000.01-£80,000	10	£20,000	£18,000
£0-£60,000	0	£60,000	£60,000
Final Payment			**£153,000**

The final payment to business A in Year 1 following % reductions = £153,000

Year 2 - Payment Due to Business A before capping percentages are applied is £190,000.

In Year 2 – the following percentage capping reductions are applied, **Table 3**.

Table 3. Progressive Capping applied (Year 2)

Payment Band	Capping reduction in second year onwards of FSP (%)	Business A Payment falling into band	Payment following capping percentages applied
£190,000.01 +	100	£0	£0
£150,000.01-£190,000	80	£40,000	£8,000
£100,000.01-£150,000	60	£50,000	£20,000
£80,000.01-£100,000	40	£20,000	£12,000
£60,000.01-£80,000	20	£20,000	£16,000
£0-£60,000	0	£60,000	£60,000
Final Payment			**£116,000**

The final payment to Business A in Year 2 following % reductions = £116,000

Farm Business B - Payment Due before capping percentages are applied is £120,000.

In **Year 1** – the following percentage capping reductions are applied, **Table 4**.

Table 4. Progressive Capping applied Year 1

Payment Band	Capping reduction in first year of FSP (%)	Business A Payment falling into band	Payment following capping percentages applied
£190,000.01 +	100	£0	£0
£150,000.01-£190,000	40	£0	£0
£100,000.01-£150,000	30	£20,000	£14,000
£80,000.01-£100,000	20	£20,000	£16,000
£60,000.01-£80,000	10	£20,000	£18,000
£0-£60,000	0	£60,000	£60,000
Final Payment			**£108,000**

The final payment to Business B in Year 1 following % reductions = £108,000

Year 2 - Payment Due to Business B before capping percentages are applied is £120,000.

In Year 2 – the following percentage capping reductions are applied, **Table 5.**

Table 5. Progressive Capping applied (Year 2)

Payment Band	Capping reduction in second year of FSP (%)	Business A Payment falling into band	Payment following capping percentages applied
£190,000.01 +	100	£0	£0
£150,000.01-£190,000	80	£0	£0
£100,000.01-£150,000	60	£20,000	£8,000
£80,000.01-£100,000	40	£20,000	£12,000
£60,000.01-£80,000	20	£20,000	£16,000
£0-£60,000	0	£60,000	£60,000
Final Payment			**£96,000**

The final payment to Business B in Year 2 following % reductions = £96,000

FSP Conditionalities

115. Why are businesses required to meet certain conditionalities in order to receive their full FSP Scheme payment?

- Businesses are required to meet conditionalities to receive their full FSP Scheme payment in order to drive uptake of schemes critical for soil health, carbon management, and genetic improvement.

116. What are the implications of not meeting the FSP Scheme conditionalities?

- For participation in SNHS, farm businesses that are not compliant by 15 May 2027 will have a 10% reduction applied to their FSP in 2027. The reduction will be increased to 15% for continued non-compliance in 2028 and will continue to be applied at 15% until the conditionality has been met.

- For the Bovine Genetics Project, farm businesses that are not compliant by 15 May 2028 will have a 10% reduction applied to their FSP in 2028. The reduction will be increased to 15% for continued non-compliance in 2029 and will continue to be applied at 15% until the conditionality has been met.

117. Who can complete the conditionality training?

- Registration and training must be completed by a named individual registered to the farm business ID.

118. Do businesses that have not yet registered for the SNHS still have an opportunity to do so?

- The final mop-up registration phase of the SNHS ran from Wednesday 5 August until midnight on Monday 7 September 2026 for eligible farm businesses that had not previously registered for the Scheme. The registration phase is now closed.

119. How is SNHS training being provided and how long does the course last?

- Training for SNHS comprises of completing two training courses either face to face or online. The total time to complete both courses is 2 hours 30 minutes.

120. What benefits will participation in the Bovine Genetics Project deliver?

- The Bovine Genetics Project will provide farmers with the data and evidence to make more informed breeding decisions which in turn will deliver more efficient, healthier and productive animals with lower carbon footprints.

121. How will Bovine Genetics Project training be provided and how long does the course last?

- Training for the Bovine Genetics Project can be completed either face to face or online. The total time to complete the training is approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

122. When will Carbon Footprinting become a conditionality for receipt of FSP?

- The proposed timeline for the introduction of the Carbon Footprinting Project as a conditionality is yet to be determined.

FSP Scheme Land Eligibility Changes

123. What are the changes to land eligibility rules?

- From 1 January 2026 all land in DAERA's mapping system (Land Parcel Identification System) which is a field parcel at least 0.1 ha in size and has a boundary recognised by the Department, is eligible for FSP.

  This includes:
  - soft features (rush, scrub, bracken, blanket bog, lowland raised bog, etc);
  - discrete areas of woodland which are less than 5ha;
  - woodland that is or has been part of a forestry or agri-environment scheme administered by the Department on or after 1 January 2009 (regardless of the 5ha threshold): and

- areas with up to and including 70% stones, scree, rock or scattered rock.

- The following are not eligible:
    - Hard features;
    - Discrete areas of woodland 5ha or more;
    - A woodland parcel which is less than 5 hectares and is contained in a woodland block;
    - Christmas trees and land on which Christmas trees are grown;
    - State-owned woodland or woodland on state-owned land; and
    - Areas of stone, scree, rock or scattered rock greater than 70%.

- The eligible land must be under a farmer's control from 1 January to 31 December; used for agricultural activity on a significant and consistent basis during the year; and at your disposal on 15 May.

124. Are the new land eligibility rules separate from eligibility for area-based schemes?

- Land eligibility rules determine the land which is eligible for the FSP. Each scheme has individual scheme entry requirements which must also be taken into account.

125. Will the changes to land eligibility rules affect entitlements?

- No. The land eligibility changes do not increase or decrease the number of entitlements a farm business holds.

126. Why have the land eligibility rules been changed?

- The revised land eligibility rules reflect a move away from a production view of eligible land under the EU Common Agricultural Policy towards a view to include previously ineligible features for environmental benefit, including climate change mitigation, soil and water quality issues and biodiversity.

- This removes the push to control certain vegetation, in particular rush, heather, or bracken through burning, spraying or by mechanical means which is having unintended consequences through a detrimental effect on biodiversity and water quality.

- A public consultation was launched in December 2021 seeking views on the Future Agricultural Policy for Northern Ireland. This consultation included the proposal to make all agricultural land eligible for payment except for hard features (e.g. buildings, yards etc.) under future area-based schemes.

- Eighty-eight percent of respondents agreed with the proposal.

- The previous DAERA Minister announced the decision to change the land eligibility rules in March 2022. Minister Muir upheld that policy decision.

127. Who has inputted into the changes to the land eligibility rules?

- DAERA has held extensive internal and external consultation with stakeholders and gathered a broad range of views on the changes to land eligibility

128. Will inspections be carried out to check on land eligibility?

- Checks on land eligibility will be carried out using remote sensing technologies and limited On the Spot Checks.

- Details are available to view in The Guide to Land Eligibility 2026 on the DAERA website https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/guide-land-eligibility-2025.

Farm Sustainability Standards

129. What are the Farm Sustainability Standards?

- Seven new Farm Sustainability Standards (FSS) have replaced the previous 20 Cross-Compliance requirements.

- Four of the Farm Sustainability Standards focus on protection of the environment and three of the Standards focus on the protection of animal health and welfare, biosecurity and traceability.

The standards are:

CODE	Sustainability Standard	High Level Requirements
FSS1	Protection of Waters from Pollution	Includes: • Protection of waters from pollution caused by nitrates and phosphates – nutrients: • Protection of waters from pollution caused by Plant Protection Products;
FSS2	Protection of Habitats and Biodiversity	Includes: • Protection of designated sites; • Protection of habitats and biodiversity for nesting birds; • Protection of habitats and biodiversity from damage caused by Plant Protection Products; • Prevention of encroachment by invasive species.
FSS3	Protection of Landscape, Archaeological and Heritage Features	Includes: • Protection of landscape features; • Protection of archaeological features; and • Protection of heritage features.
FSS4	Protection of Soils	Includes: • Protection of soil as a resource by preventing soil erosion.
FSS5	Food and feed, herd and flock health and biosecurity	Includes: • Implementation of biosecurity measures on farm to minimise the risk of introduction and spread of disease; • Requirement to comply with disease detection, control and eradication measures; and • Requirement to comply with measures ensuring the production of food safe for human consumption.
FSS6	Welfare and Protection of Farmed Livestock (including Transport)	Includes: • Protection of the welfare of calves; • Protection of the welfare of pigs; • Protection of the welfare of farmed animals; and • Welfare of animals during transport.
FSS7	Livestock Identification and Traceability	Includes: • Identification and registration of cattle to facilitate their traceability; and • Identification and registration of sheep and goats to facilitate their traceability.

130. When did the Farm Sustainability Standards come into effect?

- The Standards came into effect on 1 January 2026.

131. What is the purpose of the Farm Sustainability Standards?

- The Standards underpin the new suite of schemes introduced from January 2026 under the SAP.

- The Standards are designed to promote good farm management practices, encourage responsible stewardship and complement the regulations that protect the environment, animal and human health and animal welfare.

- Most of the Underpinning Requirements to the Standards reinforce existing legislation or form part of existing codes of good practice and farmers should therefore already be meeting most, if not all, of these.

132. Why were the Farm Sustainability Standards developed?

- A public consultation, launched in December 2021, sought views on the Future Agricultural Policy for Northern Ireland. That consultation included the proposal to replace the Cross-Compliance Statutory Management Requirements/Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (SMR/GAECs) with a simplified system of Farm Sustainability Standards, with the current Verifiable Standards re-written as a set of Underpinning Requirements to better meet local needs.

- Eighty percent of respondents agreed with the proposal. However, it should be noted that respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current Cross-Compliance regime for quite different reasons.

133. What schemes do the Farm Sustainability Standards apply to?

- The Standards apply to all schemes and packages (in line with previous Cross-Compliance arrangements). This means that the Standards apply to the following payment schemes:

    - Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme
    - Environmental Farming Scheme
    - Pilot Protein Crops Scheme
    - Forestry Expansion Scheme
    - Forest Protection Scheme
    - Woodland Investment Grant
    - Small Woodland Grant Scheme
    - Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (agreements signed after 01/01/2007)
    - Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme
    - Young Farmers' Scheme (not open to new applicants)
    - Suckler Cow Scheme

- Farming with Nature Schemes

134. What will happen if I do not meet the requirements of the Farm Sustainability Standards?

- Where a farm business does not meet the Standards the amount of public money it receives may be reduced through a revised Penalty Matrix.

135. What is the revised Penalty Matrix?

- A revised Penalty Matrix has been introduced in tandem with the Farm Sustainability Standards from 1 January 2026.

- The Penalty Matrix has been devised to ensure the new penalty system is effective but fair, with greater emphasis on securing compliance through education, including the requirement for mandatory training.

136. What is mandatory training?

- The penalty matrix requires a farm business to undertake mandatory training where it has been found to be in breach of an Underpinning Requirement for the first time. Payments will not be issued until the training has been completed.

- Seven training courses are being developed, one for each of the Standards.

- Farm businesses that are in breach of the standards will be notified of the need to complete the mandatory training.

- A member of the farm business must complete the mandatory training.

137. Who developed the Farm Sustainability Standards and Penalty Matrix?

- DAERA held extensive internal and external consultation with stakeholders and throughout this process gathering a broad range of views on the Standards themselves and the penalty matrix.

- FSS1 and FSS2 were developed by officials from Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group together with colleagues from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Officials from Agricultural and Environmental Schemes Division developed FSS3 and FSS4. FSS5, FSS6 and FSS7 were developed by officials from Veterinary Service and Animal Health Group.

138. Will inspections be carried out?

- Yes, inspections will be carried out.

- The FSS inspection regime mirrors Cross-Compliance in that a percentage of farms will be selected for inspection based on selection criteria.

- Some standards, such as Identification / Registration / Movement and TB testing will continue to be conducted administratively.

- Details of the new standards are available at https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/farm-sustainability-standards-underpinning-requirements.

139. What is DAERA's definition of a breach of Farm Sustainability Standards?

- A breach of the Standards is defined as a failure to meet any Underpinning Requirement of the Farm Sustainability Standards.

- Repetition is defined as a breach of the same Underpinning Requirement within a three calendar-year period. Where a breach is repeated the penalty will be based on the severity of the repeat breach. It should be noted that repetition can occur in the same year if a previous inspection has been finalised.

Pilot Protein Crop Scheme

140. What is the pilot Protein Crop Scheme?

- The pilot Protein Crop Scheme aims to create a domestically produced source of protein for animal feed to provide agronomic benefits within arable rotations and provide an alternative source of income for arable farmers.

141. Can farm businesses still apply to the pilot Protein Crop Scheme?

- The pilot Protein Crop Scheme has been extended to the end of the 2027 scheme year to allow a full assessment of the environmental and sustainability benefits which protein crops can deliver.

142. What crops are eligible under the pilot Protein Crop Scheme?

- Eligible Crops include Spring Peas, Spring Field Beans, Winter Field Beans, Spring Sweet Lupins and Winter Sweet Lupins.

143. What is the payment rate for the pilot Protein Crop Scheme?

- The payment rate for the scheme is £330/Ha.

144. Is there a maximum area which will be supported through the pilot Protein Crop Scheme?

- This scheme will support a maximum area of 1,300 ha per scheme year.

145. What is the minimum area that can be claimed by a farm business for protein crops?

- The area claimed must be at least 0.3ha and applicants may only claim on land planted in protein crops.

146. What has the impact of the pilot Protein Crop Scheme been to date?

- Since the introduction of the pilot Protein Crop Scheme in 2021 the total hectarage of protein crops grown increased from 153ha in 2020 to 802ha in 2024, decreasing to 397ha in 2026. The main protein crop grown over this period is spring field beans followed by spring peas.

Beef Sustainability Package

147. What is the Beef Sustainability Package?

- The Beef Sustainability Package aims to help ensure the future viability of the beef sector, by helping the sector to keep pace with competitors, improve profitability, resilience and importantly reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. The Package is made up of two measures; a Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme and a Suckler Cow Scheme which together will aim to improve productivity and reduce emissions from beef animals.

- The Beef Sustainability Package will contribute to Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions reduction from agriculture.

148. How is the Beef Sustainability Package funded?

- The Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme and the Suckler Cow Scheme are funded from a redirection of payment entitlements.

149. What happens to any unspent Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme / Suckler Scheme funds?

- These are returned to the earmarked budget for redistribution across other schemes.

Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme

150. What is the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme?

- The Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme aims to incentivise the beef sector to adopt more effective practices to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and improve the productivity of the beef sector. This will be achieved by encouraging farm businesses to reduce the slaughter ages of beef cattle. Payment will be limited to clean beef cattle born in NI, registered on NIFAIS and subsequently slaughtered in NI or sent for direct slaughter from NI.

151. How is the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme being funded?

- The Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme is being funded from a redirection of funds from the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment in 2025 and the Farm Sustainability Payment entitlement unit values from 2026 onwards.

152. Am I eligible for the Scheme?

- To be eligible for participation in the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme, farm businesses must have claimed for, and be eligible for payment of, the Basic Payment Scheme in 2024, the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment in 2025 and the Farm Sustainability Payment from 2026 onwards.

153. How do I Apply for the Scheme?

- Farm Businesses must "opt" into the scheme through the Beef Sustainability Package Government Gateway - Login. This only needs to be done once during the lifetime of the scheme. The farm business once opted in will remain in the scheme unless they notify the Department that they want to "opt" out.

- An agent can apply on behalf of a farm business.

154. Is there an application window?

- The scheme will run for each calendar year from 2024-2027, a farm business can opt in during any year of the scheme. E.g. to receive payment for the 2026 year a business must opt in before 31 December 2026.

155. Could I be penalised if I opt into the scheme, but do not present any eligible animals for slaughter?

- No, there are no penalties for opting into the scheme and subsequently not presenting any eligible animals for slaughter.

156. How will the Department decide which animals will receive payment?

- The Scheme is limited to clean beef animals, born in Northern Ireland and registered on NIFAIS. A clean beef animal is one that has not been used for breeding, therefore, any heifers that have calved and are later slaughtered are not eligible to receive payment.

- To be eligible for payment the animal will need to be slaughtered wholly or mainly for human consumption in an abattoir in Northern Ireland or exported for direct slaughter from Northern Ireland. It must also be slaughtered at or below the maximum age of slaughter target set for each Scheme year.

157. What are the maximum age slaughter targets?

- The maximum age at slaughter targets are set out in the table below-

Scheme Year	Max age at slaughter
Year 1 - 2024	30 months
Year 2 - 2025	28 months
Year 3 - 2026	27 months
Year 4 – 2027	26 months

- There are no different target ages for bulls, steers or heifers at this stage.

- There is no minimum slaughter age.

158. When will each new maximum age at slaughter target come into effect?

- From 1 January of each Scheme year the maximum age at slaughter will adjust. For example, on 1 January 2026 the maximum age at slaughter to be eligible for a payment will be 27 months.

159. How is the maximum age at slaughter calculated?

- An animal must be at or below the maximum age for the relevant Scheme year when slaughtered. In 2026 an animal will be eligible if it is slaughtered on or before the day it turns 27 months old, for example, an animal born on 1 April 2024 will have to be slaughtered on or before 1 July 2026 to be eligible for the BCR payment in 2026. On 2 July 2026, it is 27 months and 1 day of age and outside of the Scheme.

160. Will eligibility criteria remain the same each new scheme year?

- With the exception of the new maximum age at slaughter target, all other Scheme eligibility criteria are currently planned to remain the same for all scheme years.

161. How will the Department decide which farm business receives the payment for an eligible animal?

- To be eligible for payment an animal must have been kept within a herd associated to that farm business (on NIFAIS) for at least 60 days (continuously) within the last 100 days before the slaughter date – this criterion is known as the “retention period”.

- A farm business that has opted into the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme will be eligible for payment as long as the animal has met the retention period (and all other eligibility criteria).

162. What information do I need to provide the Department with for the animals that I have slaughtered?

- You do not need to provide the Department with any additional information about animals slaughtered as information to determine the eligibility of animals will be drawn from NIFAIS.

163. Will there be any on-farm inspections associated with the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme?

- There will not be any on-farm inspections specifically for the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme.

164. Do I have to send my animal directly to slaughter to be eligible for payment?

- No, animals can still be sold at market prior to slaughter. You will be eligible for payment as long as the animal has met the required retention period.

165. Will animals that move to a mart but are not sold and subsequently return to the farm business be eligible?

- Yes, movement to a mart and return on the same, or next day will not be considered a break in the retention period.

166. Does my animal have to reside in Northern Ireland for the whole of its life?

- No, as long as all eligibility criteria and conditions of the retention period are met, the animal may be moved to the UK mainland or ROI for part of its lifetime and then return for slaughter or to be sent for direct slaughter from NI. It must, however, have been born in Northern Ireland to satisfy eligibility criteria.

167. Are dairy-bred beef cattle eligible for the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme?

- Yes, as long as all eligibility criteria are met.

168. Are there any animal statuses which will disqualify an animal from payment?

- An animal will be ineligible if it has either of the following statuses:
  DOBQ – date of birth query; or
  IDU – Identity unknown.

169. What payment will I receive for each eligible animal?

- The payment rate per eligible animal is £75.

170. When will payments be made?

- Payments will be made on eligible animals the following year after they are slaughtered, for example, eligible animals slaughtered in 2026, will generate a payment that will be made in spring 2027.

171. Is there an individual farm quantitative limit or a Northern Ireland quantitative limit for the number of animals that are eligible?

- There is a Northern Ireland quantitative limit of 352,000 eligible animals to ensure that the scheme is production limiting. This means that payments will be capped at 352,000 animals per year, in total, for all eligible businesses.

172. How did the Department calculate the quantitative limit?

- The quantitative limit was calculated by taking an average of historical data of all clean beef animals (heifers, steers & young bulls) slaughtered.

173. What happens if the quantitative limit is exceeded – the total number of eligible animals slaughtered exceeds 352,000 in any scheme year?

- If, in any scheme year, the quantitative limit is exceeded, a linear reduction will be applied at a farm level on the number of animals a farm business can receive payment for i.e. on a pro-rata basis.

174. If the number of eligible cattle slaughtered in any scheme year is below the quantitative limit, will the payment be increased?

- No, the payment of £75 per eligible animal slaughtered is set in legislation and will not be increased.

175. If there are not enough animals slaughtered to meet the quantitative limit – what happens to the left-over money?

- The quantitative limit is not a Northern Ireland target to meet. Any unspent funds are returned to the earmarked budget for redistribution across other schemes.

176. Are native breeds or late maturing breeds which take longer to mature disadvantaged?

- Age of slaughter is strongly influenced by management decisions and Beef Carbon Reduction does not confer any specific disadvantage on any particular breed or system of production.

- Many traditional native breeds are early maturing cattle, which means that under a given management regime they can achieve the desired levels of finish at lighter weights and at a younger age.

- “Traditional" beef producers may choose not to avail of the Beef Carbon Reduction, but they may be better placed to avail of other aspects of the SAP.

177. Is there any training available to help meet the targets set for the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme?

- CAFRE is providing training through its Knowledge Transfer Scheme including Business Sustainability Groups and BEEF Themed Groups to help farm businesses meet the targets set for the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme. To find out more information on the training available visit the CAFRE website: https://www.cafre.ac.uk/business-support/knowledge-transfer-programmes/.

178. How do I find out about the regulations of the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme?

- The regulations for the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme can be found at: The Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2023 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/id/nisr/2023/212

179. Is there anywhere I can view information relevant to my farm business and the animals that I have slaughtered?

- Yes, farm businesses and Authorised Persons who have opted in to the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme can check the BCR portal Home page - Beef Sustainability Package, to view the status of their cattle to confirm if a slaughtered animal will be eligible for payment.

- It also allows farm businesses to check if live cattle are approaching the maximum age of slaughter in that scheme year.

180. Can I join the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme at a later date as I do not currently qualify but may do in a year or so?

- Farm businesses can join Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme at any time whilst the Scheme is open and once opted in will remain in the Scheme unless they notify the Department that they wish to opt out.

- You will only be eligible from 1 January of the year you have opted in (i.e. if you opt-in in February 2026, you are eligible from 1 January 2026, but you are not eligible for calendar year 2024 or 2025).

181. Will it be necessary to use increased levels of concentrate feeding to meet the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme targets?

- For the changes in slaughter age that the Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme is seeking to deliver, resorting to feeding additional concentrates as the only management response across the sector is inadvisable and probably unprofitable.

- Additional purchased feedstuffs can be avoided through better grassland management within a grass-based production system, as well as better attention to animal health and better genetics (regardless of breed).

- Training to support farmers to adjust their farming practices to achieve Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme targets is being delivered by CAFRE in the form of Business Sustainability Groups and BEEF Themed Groups. To find out more information on the training available visit the CAFRE website: https://www.cafre.ac.uk/business-support/knowledge-transfer-programmes/.

- DAERA will monitor and evaluate the impact of the Scheme against policy objectives to ensure no unintended consequences occur and, if they do, there will be flexibility to adapt and modify our approach quickly.

Suckler Cow Scheme

182. What is the Suckler Cow Scheme?

- The Suckler Cow Scheme is a payment support scheme for beef farmers in Northern Ireland. It aims to encourage improvements in environmental performance and productivity, increased profitability and reduced greenhouse gas emissions within the Northern Ireland suckler cow herd.

- The Scheme encourages farm businesses to improve breeding management practices in suckler cow production, to increase the percentage of eligible calving events of replacement heifers that achieve a younger age at first calving (AFC) and suckler cows that have a shorter calving interval (CI) over a four-year phased implementation period.

183. What are the elements of the Suckler Cow Scheme?

- The Scheme is made up of two parts: age at first calving and calving interval.

- Conditions are independent of each other, and payment will be made if either is met.

- The Scheme adopts annual calving event maximums for AFC and CI which decrease gradually over the four-year phased implementation period.

184. How will the Suckler Cow Scheme be funded?

- Funding for the Suckler Cow Scheme in 2025/26 will be from redirection of funding from the FSTP Scheme. Future Scheme Years will be funded from a redirection of funding from the FSP Scheme.

185. How do farm business apply to the Suckler Cow Scheme?

- Farm businesses must opt in to the Scheme through the Beef Sustainability Package Government Gateway - Home page- Beef Sustainability Package. A farm business only needs to opt in once to the Scheme from 2025.

186. Is there an application window?

- The application window to opt in to the Suckler Cow Scheme first opened on 1 April 2025. Farm businesses can opt in at any time. However, a business must have opted in before 31 March 2026 to receive payment for Scheme year 1. If farm businesses opt in and do not have any eligible calving events in that Scheme year, no penalties will apply. A farm business only needs to opt in once for the Scheme from 2025. If a business has opted in, it will receive payment for eligible calving events each year thereafter, provided all eligibility criteria have been met in that Scheme year.

187. Who is eligible for the Suckler Cow Scheme?

- To be eligible for the Suckler Cow Scheme, farm businesses must claim and be eligible for the FSTP Scheme in 2025 and the FSP Scheme from 2026 onwards.

188. If farm businesses are ineligible for the FSTP Scheme and/or the FSP Scheme, can they still apply for the Suckler Cow Scheme?

- Sucker Cow Scheme eligibility is dependent on eligibility for FSTP and FSP.

189. Will dairy breed heifers and cows within a suckler herd be eligible for the Scheme?

- No. Only calving events of beef breed heifers and cows will be eligible. A list of eligible beef breeds is available to view at the following link: Eligible Beef breeds | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

190. Will the calving event of a heifer imported from GB/ROI be eligible for payment?

- Yes, provided the heifer is registered on NIFAIS at the time of the calving event, the calving event is registered on NIFAIS, and all other Scheme eligibility criteria are met.

191. Will the calving event of a suckler cow imported from GB/ROI that has not previously calved in NI be eligible for payment?

- The first calving event in NI will not be eligible for payment as the calving interval cannot be calculated. However, the first calving event in NI will be used for the purposes of calculating the next calving interval provided the suckler cow is registered on NIFAIS. Second and subsequent calving events that are registered on NIFAIS will be eligible for payment provided all other Scheme eligibility criteria are met.

192. Will the calving event of a suckler cow imported from GB/ROI that has previously had a calving event in NI, be eligible for payment?

- Yes, provided the suckler cow is registered on NIFAIS, the previous and current calving events are registered on NIFAIS, and all other Scheme eligibility criteria are met.

193. Is there a maximum eligible age for heifers first calving event?

- Yes. The maximum eligible age at first calving will reduce over a four-year phased implementation period as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Calving Events Maximum AFC

Year of Scheme	Duration	Calving Event Maximum AFC
1	1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026	34 months
2	1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027	32 months
3	1 April 2027 – 31 March 2028	30 months
4	1 April 2028 – 31 March 2029	29 months

194. Is there a minimum eligible age for a heifers first calving event?

- Yes. A calving event where the heifer is less than 21 months old will not be eligible for payment.

195. Is there a maximum eligible calving interval for suckler cows?

- Yes. The maximum eligible calving interval will reduce over a four-year phased implementation as outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Calving Events Maximum CI

Year of Scheme	Duration	Calving Event Maximum CI
1	1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026	415 days
2	1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027	405 days
3	1 April 2027 – 31 March 2028	395 days
4	1 April 2028 – 31 March 2029	385 days

196. Is there a minimum eligible calving interval for suckler cows?

- Yes. A calving event where the interval between births is 270 days or less will not be eligible for payment.

197. If an applicant's first year in the Scheme is Year 3, will they only be expected to meet the first year's targets?

- No. Applicants joining the Scheme after Year 1 will be required to meet the age at first calving and calving interval targets at the year of entry.

198. Are there any identification, registration and movement statuses or disease statuses that will mean a calving event will be ineligible?

- Yes. Calving events of animals with the NIFAIS statuses outlined in Table 3 below will not be eligible.

Table 3. Ineligible Statuses

Status	Age at First Calving	Calving Interval
DOBQ – Date of birth Query	Heifers and/or calves	Calves
VDF – Valid Dam Failure	Calves	Calves
IDU – Identity Unknown	Heifers and/or calves	Cows and/or calves
BVDU – BVD Unknown	Calves	Calves

199. If a calving event is not eligible for payment, will it be used to calculate the next calving interval?

- If the calving event is registered on NIFAIS it will be used to calculate the next calving interval.

200. If the calving event of a cow does not meet the 415 days calving interval in Year 1, is the calving event of the same cow eligible in Year 2 if it meets the 405 days?

- Yes, if the cow has a calving event in Scheme Year 2 that is at or below the maximum calving interval of 405 days, the calving event will be eligible provided all other eligibility criteria are met.

201. Will aborted and stillborn calving events be eligible?

- Aborted and stillborn calving events are eligible providing they are tagged, BVD tested and registered on NIFAIS. Aborted and stillborn calves must also be disposed of according to animal by-products regulations.

- Aborted or stillborn calving events that are notified to NIFAIS, but which are not tagged and/or BVD tested, will not be eligible for payment. However, the calving event will be used to calculate subsequent calving intervals.

202. Is there a limit on the number of aborted or stillborn calving events that will be eligible?

- Yes, a limit on the number of aborted and stillborn calving events per cow that can be paid is set at a maximum of two for the lifetime of the cow from commencement of the Scheme.

- A third or subsequent aborted/stillborn calving event will not be eligible for payment, but the calving event will be used for the purposes of CI calculation, provided the aborted/stillborn calf is notified on NIFAIS.

203. Does a calf have to live for a specified period of time after birth to be eligible?

- No. Live, aborted and stillborn calving events will be eligible. However, they must be tagged, BVD tested and registered on NIFAIS. Aborted and stillborn calves must also be disposed of according to animal by-products regulations.

204. Is there a quantitative limit on the number of calving events that receive payment?

- A Northern Ireland Quantitative Limit (NI QL) on the maximum number of eligible calving events per annum that can receive payment has been set at 222,000 animals.

205. What happens if the quantitative limit is exceeded?

- If, in any scheme year, the total number of calving events eligible for payment exceeds the NI quantitative limit, a linear reduction will be applied at a farm level on the number of calving events a farm business can receive payment for, i.e. on a pro-rata basis.

206. Is there a risk of incentivising increased livestock numbers?

- The Northern Ireland quantitative limit has been set at 222,000 calving events. If in any scheme year, the total number of calving events eligible to receive payment exceeds 222,000, a linear reduction will be applied at a farm level on the number of calving events for which a farm business can receive payment.

- The Scheme will be monitored for unintended consequences, particularly in relation to any significant increase in overall suckler cow numbers. Should that happen, swift action will be taken, to pause or stop the Scheme, introduce negative payments or introduce individual farm level limits.

207. What is the payment rate per calving event?

- The payment rate per eligible calving event is £100.

208. Will the payment rate increase if the number of eligible calving events is below the quantitative limit?

- No, the payment of £100 per eligible calving event will not increase.

209. Will two payments be made if a calving event results in twins?

- No. Payment will be made in respect of each eligible calving event irrespective of the number of calves produced.

210. When will payments issue?

- Payments will issue from the following Scheme year after all eligibility checks have been completed.

211. Is there a retention period for heifers calving for the first time?

- No, a retention period is not being introduced at this stage.

212. Will a stocking density be introduced?

- A stocking density is not being introduced at this stage; however, the impact of this decision will be kept under careful review to ensure that there are no emerging negative environmental consequences.

213. Are there any issues regarding animal welfare with the reduction in calving age and calving interval time?

- Minimum eligible criteria have been set for age at first calving and calving interval to safeguard for animal welfare. A calving event where the heifer is less than 21 months old will be ineligible for payment. A calving event where the interval between suckler cow calvings is 270 days or less will be ineligible.

214. Will a farm business that lost a lot of breeding cows in 2021 to TB be eligible for the scheme?

- Loss of suckler cows to TB in 2021 or any year prior to the commencement of the Scheme will have no impact on Suckler Cow Scheme eligibility.

215. If a cow (3-year-old) had previously calved at 21 months old would this affect its status in the Suckler Cow Scheme?

- No - If a cow (3-year-old) had previously calved at the minimum eligible age of 21 months old this would not affect the potential Suckler Cow Scheme eligibility of her future calving events.

216. If a calving event is properly recorded and compliant at birth, does selling the calf after birth affect the eligibility for payment?

- No, selling a calf after birth will not affect eligibility of the calving event for payment.

217. Is there any training available to help meet the targets set for the Suckler Cow Scheme?

- CAFRE is providing training through its Knowledge Transfer Scheme including Business Sustainability Groups and Suckler Cow Fertility Themed Groups to help farm businesses meet the targets set for the Suckler Cow Scheme. To

find out more information on the training available visit the CAFRE website: https://www.cafre.ac.uk/business-support/knowledge-transfer-programmes/.

Farming with Nature

218. What is the Farming with Nature Package?

- The Farming with Nature (FwN) Package aims to scale up nature friendly farming with all farmers rewarded for delivering environmental public goods, alongside food production.

- A range of support for environmental actions are planned to be available under the Farming with Nature Package which will replace previous agri-environment schemes.

219. When will the Farming with Nature Package roll out?

- The Package is being introduced in strands. Strand one, the Farming with Nature (FwN) Transition Scheme, launched in June 2025. Strand two, the FwN Higher Scheme, launched in June 2026.

- Further strands of the Farming with Nature Package are planned to offer support for environment actions on agricultural land within designated sites and other priority areas and to support farmers and other stakeholders to work together on landscape scale environmental projects in Northern Ireland.

220. Will a new entrant be able to apply for schemes within the FwN Package, and how do they ensure they are eligible?

- All farm businesses, including new entrants, that meet the scheme eligibility requirements and can take the actions needed to provide the environmental outcomes of the scheme, will be able to apply.

221. Will a farmer that is deemed ineligible for Farm Sustainability Payment based on farming activities in 2020 or 2021 be eligible to apply to FwN?

- Applicants do not need to be in receipt of the Farm Sustainability Payment to access the Farming with Nature Package.

Farming with Nature Transition Scheme

222. What is the FwN Transition Scheme?

- The FwN Transition Scheme aims to support farmers to deliver environmental improvements through actions that create habitats and green infrastructure and protect water quality. Application windows were open in 2025 and 2026, and a further application period window is planned for October 2027. Further information is available at https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/farming-nature-package

223. What legislation supports the FwN Transition Scheme?

- The Farming with Nature Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 as amended by The Farming with Nature Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

224. What are the eligibility criteria for the FwN Transition Scheme?

- To be eligible for the FwN Transition Scheme, a farm business must be in possession of a DAERA Category 1 or Category 2 Farm Business Identification Number.

- Farm businesses participating in the FwN Transition Scheme must have management control of the fields in which actions are implemented.

- Participants must be able to meet the scheme requirements and take the actions needed to provide the environmental outcomes of the scheme.

- Environmental actions cannot be implemented on agricultural land within designated sites and other priority habitat areas.

225. What actions were available in 2026/27?

- The following actions were available in 2026/27:

Action	Payment rate	Unit
Planting New Hedgerow	£6.49	Metre
Creation of a 2 m Riparian Buffer Strip + Protective Fencing	£1.41 + £6.52 / m	Metre
Creation of a 7 m Riparian Buffer Strip + Protective Fencing	£4.93 + £6.52	Metre
Farmland Tree Planting – 1600 trees/ha	£6,756	Hectare
Multi-species Winter Cover Crop	£225	Hectare
Retention of Winter Stubble	£99	Hectare
Arable - Unharvested Cereal Margin (3 m-12 m)	£1,170	Hectare
Arable - Grass Margin (3 m-12 m)	£1,308	Hectare
Arable - Flower-rich Grass Margin (3 m-12 m)	£1,422	Hectare
Herbal Ley	£467	Hectare

Herbal Ley – Enhanced	£521	Hectare
Management of 7 m Riparian Buffer Strips (created in FwN in a previous scheme year)	£0.04	Metre
Management of Farmland Tree Planting -1600 trees/ha (created in FwN in a previous scheme year)	£112	Hectare
Management of Hedgerows (created in FwN in previous scheme year)	£0.96	Metre

226. What level of funding per farm business was available through the FwN Transition Scheme in 2026

- Up to £20,000 was available per farm business to undertake environmental actions.

227. Where can I get further information on the environmental actions and supporting items available in the FwN Transition Scheme?

- Further information is available at Farming with Nature Transition Scheme | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

228. Will payments be given for existing habitats?

- The FwN Transition Scheme focuses on incentivising the creation and maintenance of new habitats on farmland. Management payments are available for certain habitats established under the FwN Transition Scheme actions: Planting New Hedgerow, Creation of a 7m Riparian Buffer Strip, and Farmland Tree Planting (1,600 trees/ha). Work is ongoing to determine if incentives could be introduced in the future which take existing habitats into account.

229. Can a farm business just participate in one year of the FwN Transition Scheme?

- Yes, farm businesses are under no requirement to apply into any other years of Farming with Nature.

230. If I participated in the FwN Transition Scheme in 2025 or 2026, will I be able to apply again in future years of the Scheme?

- Yes, farm businesses that meet the eligibility and scheme requirements may apply again in future years of the Scheme.

231. Will support be available to manage habitat created in the scheme?

- In 2026, management actions were introduced to support habitats established under the FwN Transition Scheme. Management payments are available for:
    - Hedgerows
    - Farmland tree planting
    - 7m riparian buffer strips

232. Do 2m buffer strips along rivers affect a farm business' FSP?

- No, the 2m will still be eligible for the FSP.

233. Can the riparian buffer strip be more than 7m wide?

- Yes, the riparian buffer strip can be more than 7m wide, however the FwN Transition Scheme will only pay for 7m of the riparian buffer strip.

234. In terms of the payment, are claims for the work done made retrospectively?

- Yes, farm businesses are required to implement actions on the farm and then make a claim for the work completed. It is important that farm businesses only claim for the work that they have completed.

235. When can I claim for payment for the work I have completed for Year 2 FwN Transition?

- The FwN Transition claim window for Year 2 will open on 01 February 2027. All claims for work completed in Year 2 must be submitted by 28 February 2027. Late claims will not be accepted.

236. What happens if I was unable to complete all the work I had applied for?

- You should only claim for work completed by the end of February 2027. No penalties will be apply for work not completed provided it is not included in a claim.

237. Is there scope within the FwN Transition Scheme to ensure that trees are not planted near power lines?

- All applications for Farmland Tree Planting are subject to pre-approval checks. These include an assessment of the proximity of the proposal to electricity infrastructure.

- Guidance videos and guidance sheets are also available as part of the online application process which advise on what is safe for the environment and in terms of power lines. If you require advice, please contact Northern Ireland Electricity on 03457 643 643.

238. In terms of tree planting, there are other schemes out there e.g. Small Woodland Grant Scheme, how does a farm business decide which Scheme to go for?

- The Farmland Tree Planting action in the FwN Transition Scheme aims to give farmers the flexibility to establish smaller areas of trees across the farm. The minimum area funded under the Small Woodland Grant Scheme is 0.2 hectare, whereas the minimum area funded under the FwN Transition Scheme is 0.05 hectare.

239. Is there a designated group of support organisations approved by DAERA who can advise farmers on what type of hedges, trees etc to choose for planting?

- Advice is available online through the FwN Transition Scheme guidance material and videos.

240. Do I need to have applied for Year 1 of FwN Transition Scheme to become eligible for subsequent years of same scheme?

- No, the FwN Transition Scheme has been designed so that applications are made, work completed and claims made within each Scheme year.

241. How many years do you foresee a FwN agreement lasting for?

- Annual agreements will be in place for the FwN Transition Scheme, but this may change as the Package is developed.

242. How many applications have been made to the FwN Transition Scheme?

- The Scheme received 878 applications in Year 1 and 1,705 applications in Year 2.

243. Do I have to retain any actions?

- To ensure that maximum environmental benefits are achieved, a number of actions must be retained beyond the scheme year in which they are created. The table below shows which actions must be retained and for how long.

Environmental Action	Retention Period
Creation of a Riparian Buffer Strip (2m or 7m)	15 years
Farmland Tree Planting (1,600 trees / ha)	20 years
Arable – Grass Margin (3-12 m)	5 years
Arable – Flower-rich Grass Margin (3-12 m)	5 years
Herbal Ley	3 years
Herbal Ley – Enhanced	3 years

Farming with Nature Higher Scheme

244. What is the Farming with Nature Higher Scheme?

- The Farming with Nature Higher Scheme, is an interim scheme aimed at those farmers who have previously participated in the Environmental Farming Scheme (Higher). This interim scheme is intended to maintain favourable management of high-value farmland within designated sites and priority habitats.

245. Who can apply?

- Applications for the 2027 scheme were open to:

- Existing FwN Higher agreement holders.

- EFS Higher Tranche 5 agreement holders whose agreements end in December 2026.

- The application window has now closed.

246. Where can I find out more information?

- DAERA will write to all eligible farmer businesses to invite them to apply for the scheme when the next tranche is open.

247. What happens if I am eligible but don't apply?

- The application window for the 2027 Scheme closed at **5.00pm on Friday 30 October 2026**.

- Participation in the Farming with Nature Higher Scheme was a time-limited opportunity for eligible FwN Higher and EFS Higher Tranche 5 agreement holders.

- Eligible businesses that did not submit an application during the application window, will not be able to access support through this scheme.

248. How many years do you foresee an agreement FwN Higher Scheme lasting for?

- Following the application window in October 2026, initial agreements will be offered for the period 1 January 2027 to 31 December 2027.

- Any further agreements will be for a 12-month period.

- Previous FwN Higher and EFS T5 Agreement holders should note that the application window was a time-limited opportunity. If a previous FwN Higher or T5 EFS Higher Agreement holder did not join during this application window (19 October – 30 October 2026), they will not have the opportunity to participate in the FwN Higher Scheme in the future.

Farming with Nature Landscape Projects

249. What is the Farming with Nature Landscape Projects Scheme?

- The Farming with Nature Landscape Projects (FwNLP) Scheme is designed to support farmers and stakeholders working collaboratively to undertake landscape-scale projects aimed at enhancing biodiversity recovery and habitat connectivity at a landscape or regional level that cannot be delivered on a single farm.

250. Who can apply?

- Applications may be submitted by constituted groups/organisations including farmer led groups (a single legal entity) or public bodies which will deliver measurable key environmental outcomes. Non-government organisations, agents or other third parties, can apply or run a Landscape Project on behalf of participants. All applications must be from a single legal entity. Applicants may not make a profit from this grant. Funding is provided on a costs incurred basis, project coordinators and farm businesses should not profit from participation in the scheme.

- Farm businesses participating in the project must either have management control of the land or obtain consent from those with such control for the period covered by the project development and delivery agreements. As such, land held in conacre agreement will not normally be eligible unless specific consent is obtained.

- All participating farm businesses participants must have either a Category 1 or Category 2 DAERA Farm Business ID.

251. How will projects be selected for funding?

- Landscape Projects will be selected based on a Competitive Call, administered by DAERA. Applicants will submit a project proposal that identifies the location, need, objectives, and proposed landscape actions to improve biodiversity and habitat connectivity on a landscape scale.

252. What will funding be available for?

- It is proposed that the scheme will provide funding for:

I. The development of the proposed project including administration, habitat assessment and mapping, facilitation, monitoring & evaluation and the delivery of training to farmers.

II. A capital grant to support the co-design, delivery and management of bespoke landscape actions tailored to improve biodiversity and habitat connectivity.

III. A yearly participation payment to farmers for attendance at training and other events with an additional payment for taking part in the monitoring of the effects of the bespoke actions on their land.

253. How can an application be made?

- Application is though the online portal. Home - Farming with Nature Landscape Projects

254. How long will the scheme be open for applications?

- Applications for Landscape Projects are open between 9 November 2026 and 5.00pm 4 December 2026.

255. What are the eligibility criteria for project proposals?

- The project must be located in Northern Ireland and on land recorded on DAERA's Land Parcel Identification System.
- The proposed area must be capable of delivering the scheme priorities of improving biodiversity and strengthening habitat connectivity.
- Projects should cover a broadly connected area of at least 500 hectares, or at least 250 hectares where designated sites are included. This is based on the total LPIS field area of the DAERA farm businesses registered with the project.
- Smaller projects may be considered where applicants can demonstrate that the proposal follows a clear environmental boundary, such as clusters of woods, meadows, marshes or sub-catchments.

- The project area must include at least five separate land holdings, each managed by different people. Where common land is included, the applicant must secure consent from all landowners with an interest in the common.

256. Where can I find out more information?

- Farming with Nature Landscape Projects | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Farming with Nature Protected Habitats and Species Scheme

257. What is the Farming with Nature Protected Habitats and Species Scheme?

- The **Farming with Nature (FwN) Protected Habitats and Species Scheme** is a targeted scheme aimed at supporting farmers to undertake actions that maintain, enhance and restore protected habitats and species of conservation importance within designated sites and other priority areas.

- The scheme will support the delivery of tailored management actions designed to address site-specific environmental needs and contribute to improved biodiversity outcomes.

- The scheme will seek to move beyond simply supporting the completion of actions and will aim to demonstrate measurable improvements in habitat condition, species populations and wider environmental outcomes.

258. Who can apply?

- The scheme is expected to be open to farm businesses with land containing protected habitats and species, including land within designated sites and other priority areas identified by DAERA. Applicants must hold a valid DAERA Category 1 or Category 2 Farm Business Identification Number. Eligibility criteria, priority habitats and species, and application requirements will be detailed in the scheme guidance when applications open.

259. Where can I find out more information?

- DAERA will publish guidance, eligibility criteria, payment information and application information in advance of the scheme opening. Information will be made available through DAERA communications channels and on the DAERA website. Farmers may also be invited to information events and advisory support sessions to help them understand scheme requirements and opportunities.

260. How long will a FwN Protected Habitats and Species Scheme agreement last?

- Agreements are expected to commence in 2027. Initial agreements are anticipated to be offered for a fixed period, subject to scheme design and approval. Agreement holders will be required to carry out and maintain the agreed management actions for the duration of the agreement. Further details on agreement length, management requirements, monitoring arrangements and payment schedules will be confirmed when the scheme opens for applications.

261. What will participants be expected to do?

Work with DAERA and, where appropriate, ecological specialists to identify the protected habitats and species on their land. Implement agreed habitat management, restoration and species conservation actions. Maintain records and, where required, facilitate monitoring activities to demonstrate environmental improvements. Contribute towards achieving measurable outcomes, including improvements in habitat quality, habitat extent, species condition and biodiversity indicators.

Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme

262. What is the Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme?

- 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.

- The scheme will focus on capital support for technology and equipment to help farm businesses reduce ammonia emissions, carbon emissions and nutrient losses.

- The scheme aims to encourage investment across farm sectors and sizes, seeking to ensure that smaller farmers can be supported.

263. When will the new Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme be available?

- The Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme closed on Thursday 3 September 2026.

264. What are the proposed scheme outcomes?

- A primary target for the new scheme is ammonia reduction, through incentivising measures such as extended grazing and frequent slurry scraping, along with further support for Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment.

- In addition, the scheme will provide support for investments in livestock management and performance monitoring, which in turn enable carbon / GHG reductions.

- The scheme will also support equipment to reduce nutrient losses, with precision use of fertiliser and chemicals seeking to improve water quality, soil health and biodiversity.

- Overall, the range of equipment offered under the scheme will help farmers to target inputs better, save money, and improve performance.

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

- The scheme will seek to deliver up to £40 million in grant support over a number of rounds, subject to scheme uptake and available budget.

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

266. What will be the minimum grant or project cost?

- 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.

267. What is on the scheme eligible item list?

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

- Items must have an environmental or carbon benefit for inclusion in the scheme, and will fall under categories which cover:
    - Crop Establishment and Management
    - Horticulture, Fruit and Vegetable Management
    - Livestock Management – includes cattle, sheep, pig, and poultry, and includes aspects such as weighing and monitoring.
    - Low Emission Slurry Spreading and Slurry Management
    - Resource Management – energy and water

- Basic farming 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).

268. Why is the scheme based on a list of items?

- 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.

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

- 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.

- However, the sector faces challenges in terms of environmental impact, performance and market volatility.

270. Why is Category 1 Farm Business ID required for the scheme?

- It is important that valid commercial food producers across livestock, arable and horticulture sectors are supported by the scheme.

- A small number of farm businesses may not already have a Category 1 Farm Business ID. Further information on Farm Business IDs is available at: New Farm Business | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

271. How will my application be scored?

- 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.

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

- 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.

273. Is "Value for Money" scoring going to be used?

- Under FBIS Capital, applicants could "underbid" the reference price of items, in order to gain additional Value for Money (VFM) application points.

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

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

274. How will a new Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme be funded?

- The funding for any new capital scheme will be determined in line with scheme development, and as part of the Department's budget process in due course.

275. Will a new Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme support farmers to reduce emissions and manage nutrients?

- The Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme is focused on capital support for technology and equipment to help farm businesses reduce ammonia emissions, carbon emissions and nutrient losses.

- It should be noted that grant support cannot be used to meet existing statutory obligations.

Farming for the Generations

276. What is the Farming for the Generations Pilot Scheme?

- The Farming for the Generation pilot scheme raised awareness of the need for succession planning on farms and provided support to help ensure their long-term sustainability and to bring the next generation into the business.

- The evaluation of the pilot scheme helped inform the development of a full Generational Renewal Programme that is planned to be rolled out early 2027.

277. What does the Farming for the Generations Pilot Scheme consist of?

- The core elements of the pilot scheme ended in March 2026 but the Farming in Partnership element continues to be delivered by Rural Support, which aims to link farmers without a family successor with new entrants to provide access to land and other resources.

- **Farming in Partnerships** is a facilitation service which aims to link farmers without an identified successor to consider opportunities to partner with new entrants and other farm businesses to provide access to land and other resources, developing sustainable farm partnerships. If you are interested in finding out more, further information can be obtained by contacting Rural Support.

278. How do I find out more about the pilot scheme?

- The pilot scheme is being delivered by Rural Support. Further information can be obtained by contacting Rural Support by Telephone: 028 8676 0040 or email: farmgenerations@ruralsupport.org.uk.

279. Are any elements of the pilot scheme still open for application?

- Those interested in finding out more about the opportunities through Farming in Partnerships can contact Rural Support for further details.

280. What will be in the full scheme?

- The full scheme for Farming for the Generations is being developed through co-design with stakeholders. The details of the full scheme will be provided in the autumn.

281. When will the new scheme be open?

- The full scheme will be launched early in 2027 .

Horticulture Pilot Scheme

282. What is the aim of the Horticulture Pilot Scheme?

- The overarching aim of the Horticulture Pilot Scheme is to determine the feasibility of a full horticulture scheme to increase the output of the Northern Ireland commercial horticulture industry.

283. Is the Horticulture Pilot Scheme open to all horticulture businesses?

- The Horticulture Pilot Scheme is open to the following sectors of production horticulture: Soft fruit; Top fruit; Edible crops; Mushrooms; Protected crops; Ornamental crops; Cut flowers and foliage.

284. How long will the Horticulture Pilot Scheme last?

- The Horticulture Pilot Scheme will run for a period of four years.

285. What schemes can growers apply to under the Horticulture Pilot Scheme?

- The Horticulture Pilot Scheme comprises of three individual pilot schemes as follows:

1. Sustainable Sector Growth Group Pilot Scheme
2. Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme
3. Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme

N.B The Sustainable Sector Growth Group Pilot Scheme and the Growers' Training and Support Pilot Scheme are now closed to new applicants.

286. Will all applications receive approval to participate in the Horticulture Pilot Scheme if they meet the eligibility criteria?

- All three schemes will operate on a competitive basis, so not every application is guaranteed to be approved.

287. What will be available through the Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme?

- The Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme will provide funding to support investment in systems, technologies, and crops that are new to Northern Ireland, with the aim of promoting innovation and improving productivity and sustainability.

- No fixed list of eligible items will be provided, and growers will put forward their proposals through a competitive application process.

- Financial support up to £250,000, or 40% of the eligible project costs, will be available to growers. This allows for a maximum eligible purchase value of £625,000 and a minimum of £10,000.

288. Can more than one applicant receive funding for the same innovation item/project?

- No. The Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme is competitive, with only one proposal funded per innovation. An independent panel will select one successful project, and multiple identical projects will not be funded. Applicants must propose and demonstrate how their project introduces a crop, technology or system which is new to the Northern Ireland Horticulture Industry.

289. What are the eligibility requirements to make an application to the Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme?

- Applicants to the **Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme** must:

  a) hold a DAERA category 1 or 2 farm business ID number; and
  b) operate a commercial horticulture business.
  c) be at least 18 years of age.

290. How do I register for a DAERA Business Identity Number?

- Information on how to register your business with DAERA is available via the following link: New Farm Business | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

291. When will the Innovation Driver and Support Pilot Scheme open for applications?

- The Innovation Driver and Support Horticulture Pilot Scheme opened for applications on 21 October and will close for applications on 16 December 2026 at 4pm.

Supply Chain Schemes

292. What support will be available to develop and enhance an effective functioning Agri-Food Supply Chain?

- A three-tier model of financial and facilitatory support for Supply Chains is currently being developed as part of the Sustainable Agriculture Programme. Under this model, different levels of support would be provided for businesses that are in the early stage of collaboration ('start-up schemes'), those that require further collaborative measures to develop their sector ('scale-up schemes') and those that require innovative, collaborative measures to address longer term strategic supply chain challenges and opportunities.

- This model may be subject to change due to budget and business case approval.

- The strategic collaborative measure will commence first with the introduction of the Supply Chain Transformation Fund.

293. What is the Supply Chain Transformation Fund?

- The Supply Chain Transformation Fund is a new, innovative initiative designed to encourage pre and post-farmgate to work together to enhance collaboration and address strategic challenges/opportunities in the Northern Ireland agri-food supply chain.

294. What support will the scheme provide?

- As this is a collaborative measure, it's not a direct payment to farm businesses. Financial assistance will cover the project costs incurred by successful consortia to deliver collaborative action plans against one or more supply chain priorities and themes.

295. Will the Scheme provide Capital Funding?

- No, the Scheme will not provide Capital Funding. Capital Funding may be provided as part of other support schemes of the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, for example through the Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme.

296. Who can apply?

- Applications must include at least:
    - one pre-farmgate business/organisation[1], and
    - one post-farmgate business/organisation[2]
- Projects must be able to demonstrate strategic benefit to NI's agri-food supply chain, particularly for farmers and growers in Northern Ireland.
- Applicants will be required to nominate a lead partner, operating primarily within the Northern Ireland agri-food sector. Farm businesses /growers must also be operating in Northern Ireland.
- Applications from the equine, fishing and forestry sectors will not be eligible.

297. Will the Scheme be open to non-food agriculture sectors?

- The Scheme is aimed at the agri-food sector, however, there may also be scope for the Scheme to include non-food organisations. For example, fertiliser, feed, nutraceuticals, etc.

298. When will the Scheme launch?

- The Scheme will launch in January 2027. Further information on the scheme, including detailed guidance and workshop dates, will be communicated via email to stakeholder organisations in the coming weeks.

[1] Pre-farmgate businesses/organisations are those who represent or are involved in primary agri-food production. **To ensure strategic impact, individual famers applying to the SCTF must also include another pre-farmgate partner in their application.**

[2] Post-farmgate businesses/organisations are those who represent or are involved in activities beyond the primary production stage.

Other Areas

Sheep Sector

299. Will support for the sheep sector be considered in Sustainable Agriculture Programme?

- The main financial support currently available within the Sustainable Agriculture Programme for sheep only farmers is the Farm Sustainability Payment from 2026 onwards.

- The Farming with Nature Transitions Scheme, is available to all farmers. It is planned that this Scheme will open again in June 2026. Further strands of the Farming with Nature package are planned.

- The Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme offers farmers, including sheep farmers, support for equipment and technology to improve environmental performance and business efficiency.

- Work has commenced on exploring the need for sheep sector support, within the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, in conjunction with stakeholders.

Arable Sector and Potatoes

300. What actions will DAERA take to support the arable sector?

- SAP will promote more efficient and sustainable farming practices for the arable sector through a mix of incentivisation, innovation, and enhanced farmer knowledge and training with a firm focus on data to help with decision making.

- The Farming for Sustainability - Knowledge Transfer Programme will support changes in on-farm management practices for the arable sector and the Sustainable Farming Investment Scheme will assist this sector with the adoption of precision technology and equipment to reduce emissions, nutrient loss and improve business efficiency.

Lough Neagh

301. How will the Programme contribute to the Lough Neagh Action Plan?

- While agriculture has contributed to the nutrient loading in Lough Neagh over the past century and more, today's farmers should not be blamed for the actions of previous generations. Instead, we must recognise that our farmers will provide a significant part of the solution in the delivery of mitigating actions.

- SAP is comprised of a suite of schemes, many of which will contribute to achieving improved environmental sustainability.

- It will incentivise enabling actions which protect and enhance our natural and marine environment so that we can achieve better guardianship of water and air quality, soil health and biodiversity.

- An environmentally sustainable agri-food industry will also help to secure the recovery of Lough Neagh and improve water quality across Northern Ireland.

Young Farmers' Payment

302. What support is available for Young Farmers?

- The Young Farmers' Payment Scheme provided an annual top up to the BPS/FSTP scheme and provides an annual top up to the FSP scheme from 2026 to those farmers that meet the eligibility requirements.

- The last year to apply to the Young Farmers' Payment Scheme was 2025. Payments can be received for five years for 2025 applicants, subject to applicants continuing to meet the eligibility conditions.

- Within the SAP a Farming for the Generations scheme will encourage longer term planning for farm businesses.

- A Farming for the Generations Pilot Scheme commenced in autumn 2024 that supported farm businesses in planning for a timely and orderly transfer to a new generation. The core elements of the pilot scheme ended in March 2026 but the Farming in Partnership element continues to be delivered by Rural Support, which aims to link farmers without a family successor with new entrants to provide access to land and other resources.

- A full scheme for Farming for the Generations is being developed through co-design with stakeholders. The details of the future scheme will be provided at a later date.

- It is anticipated that the full scheme will be open early 2027.

Monitoring and Evaluation of SAP

303. How will the impact of SAP be evaluated?

- A range of Programme Indicators will be used to provide a strategic assessment of progress towards the main objectives of the SAP. These indicators are:

    - Total Factor Productivity for Northern Ireland Agriculture;
    - Net Greenhouse Gas emissions for Northern Ireland Agriculture and Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF);
    - Nitrogen and Phosphorus balances;
    - Ammonia emissions from farming;
    - Biodiversity as the condition of environmental features and wild bird populations;
    - Farm income derived from the market; and
    - Gross Value added from Agriculture and Food & Drinks processing.

Planning Permission

304. Will the new Sustainable Agriculture Programme impact on Planning permission for on-farm development?

- It is not envisaged that the new Sustainable Agriculture Programme will impact on planning permission for on-farm development. Questions on planning permission should be addressed to the planning authorities.

Agriculture Policy Reform Elsewhere

305. What is taking place in other parts of the UK and Ireland?

- Agricultural support policy is a fully devolved matter, with each of the UK regions free to adopt an approach in keeping with its individual needs and priorities.

- The Republic of Ireland, as part of the EU, remains part of the Common Agricultural Policy Framework.

- DAERA continues to meet regularly, to discuss agricultural policy and share best practice, with counterparts in the UK and Ireland through various forums such as the UK Policy Collaboration Group (PCG), Senior Officials Programme Board (SOPB), Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) and North South Ministerial Council (NSMC).

- Further information can be found at the following links:

- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs - GOV.UK
- www.gov.scot/farming-and-rural/
- Farming and countryside | Topic | GOV.WALES
- www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-agriculture-food-and-the-marine/