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Welsh Government

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Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

Sustainable Management Scheme - FAQs



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar
gyfer Datblygu Gwledig:
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European Agricultural Fund for
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Scope of Sustainable Management Scheme

What is the Sustainable Management Scheme?

The Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) is part of the **Co-operation and Supply Chain Development Scheme (C&SCDS)** delivering under Measure 16 (Article 35 of Regulation (EU) 1305/2013). The C&SCDS is an important element of the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The Sustainable Management Scheme delivers under sub Measure 16.5 of the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

The SMS is designed to support the delivery of the Welsh Government's commitment to sustainable development as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The Welsh Government recognises that by supporting joined-up, collaborative action at the right scale, we can maximise opportunities to improve the services our natural resources provide, reduce the very real risks of climate change to our rural businesses, infrastructure and communities, and meet our international responsibilities and obligations, while taking full advantage of the economic opportunities available to the agricultural sector and rural businesses.

What is being funded?

The purpose of the Sustainable Management Scheme is to support collaborative landscape scale projects taking action to improve the resilience of our natural resources and ecosystems in a way that also delivers benefits to farm businesses and rural communities. It will also support the reduction of greenhouse gases from the sector and the vital action needed to help farm businesses and rural communities adapt to the impacts of climate change.

There is often a time commitment needed to develop fully functioning collaborations and to undertake the planning required for some land management activities linked to seasonality. In recognition of this, the SMS will also support proposals seeking to facilitate, develop or establish new collaborations and activities; to facilitate agreements of local priorities and to help potential new collaborations develop project proposals. Projects of this type will need to provide clear evidence that this activity will include or is likely to result in the delivery of tangible action on the ground with environmental, social or economic benefits.

How does this address natural resource priorities?

The Sustainable Management Scheme supports projects taking action to help achieve the sustainable management of natural resources.

The aim of sustainable management of natural resources is to maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide and, in so doing, meet the

needs of present generations of people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

The Welsh Government's Natural Resources Policy sets out the opportunities provided by our natural resources, the challenges that need to be addressed and the national priorities to take both of these forward.

The Sustainable Management Scheme priorities for action have been developed to help deliver the Natural Resources Policy.

Eligibility

What are the eligible activities?

Development and co-ordination of collaborative groups and management of projects to take forward activities for the sustainable management of natural resources, improvement of ecosystem services and mitigation and adaptation of climate change.

Collaborative actions undertaken with a view to mitigating or adapting to climate change and/or co-ordinated, landscape-scale, land management work for the sustainable management of natural resources and delivery of ecosystem services and multiple benefits.

Communication and dissemination of project approaches, lessons and outcomes; dissemination and communication of information amongst communities and other interested parties.

Research, technical advice and feasibility studies – a good idea for co-ordinated action can need technical assessments of the area involved, or understanding of the new market being targeted. It is important to ensure that the right activity is located in the right place to have the best results. Modelling, technical advice and feasibility studies are eligible for funding.

Monitoring and Evaluation – activities to demonstrate the outcomes of the collaborative actions, by monitoring the impacts, ensuring a baseline assessment is taken before action is taken and measuring the subsequent changes. Activities related to the development of key lessons and recorded experiences of the participants that have been engaged in the collaboration to help to shape future programmes and projects. The cost of an independent, external evaluation of the collaborative activities.

What are the ineligible activities for funding?

There are a number of activities and investments that are not eligible for aid under this measure:

- Direct payments to landowners, farmers or foresters for capital works carried out on their own land.
- Direct payments to landowners, farmers or foresters for ongoing land management activities.
- Investment in the primary production of agricultural or timber products. Such as things that would be eligible for funding under the Sustainable Production Grant (SPG) or the Timber Business Investment Grant (TBIG).

Who can apply?

This scheme is open to applications from SME and large businesses, education or research establishments, farmers, foresters, community or voluntary groups (inclusive of all non government organisations) that operate principally in a rural area and are engaged in agriculture, forestry or land management. This includes associations of owners and community woodlands and local authorities.

If a direct payment for farmers is not allowed, can the activity be done through a contractor?

Yes in principle, contractors can undertake a variety of on farm activities. However the key tests for state aid must be applied to ensure they are not offsetting the costs of primary production of the farm business.

Is paying for a shepherd for a collaborative scheme eligible?

An independent shepherd could be fairly procured to provide the service for the duration of the project – provided that the primary purpose was to utilise grazing management to undertake environmental improvement on the landscape more effectively thus optimising the return in ecosystem services.

How does the SMS complement other RC-RDP Schemes?

The SMS is designed to complement and work alongside other RC-RDP Schemes For example, Glastir and SPG funding opportunities. Whilst Glastir targets a variety of outcomes on a farm holding basis, SMS can be used to co-ordinate local efforts by enabling co-ordination with Glastir participation and engaging with other landowners not participating or ineligible for Glastir so that the combined schemes are able to deliver a large scale and landscape impact.

Application Process

How can I apply?

The Application process for the Sustainable Management Scheme will be in two stages. The first stage will be an Expression of Interest (EOI). Applicants that are

successful at EOI stage will be invited to the second stage which is to submit a full application.

EOI applications will be submitted in direct competition with one another and it is expected that there will be significant demand for the grant available. Proposals will be assessed against criteria set out in the EOI selection criteria and guidance documentation.

How will my EOI be assessed?

The EOI applications will be scored and ranked in order of merit according to the published selection criteria. Project proposals will be selected in ranked order until either the funds available have been allocated or the maximum number of applications has been reached. There is no guarantee that all of the funds will be allocated or that the maximum number of projects will be invited to proceed to full application

How do I submit my full application?

Full applications must be submitted through the WEFO Online portal. Guidance will be provided to all applicants.

How will my full application be assessed?

The full application will be appraised in accordance with the Scheme Guidance and eligibility rules. They will be subject to full due diligence appraisal and eligibility checks and only at that point will a final decision be taken to offer a grant. There is no guarantee that a project proposal will be approved for a grant. The appraisal process for full applications will normally take a maximum of three months from receipt of a fully completed application and all relevant information.

What the minimum and maximum grant thresholds?

Grants can range from a minimum of £10,000 to a maximum of £700,000
The maximum grant rate is 100%.

What funds are available for the SMS?

The indicative funding available for each 'window' will be published in advance on the Welsh Government website.

What are the terms and conditions for grant?

Successful proposals will be offered the condition of grant award letter which will set out clear terms and conditions of grant. These terms will be negotiable between Welsh Government and the proposer.

Timescales

How long is the period for submitting EOIs?

Windows for expressions of interest (EOI) are expected to be opened approximately every 9 months. Each window is expected to be open for two - three calendar months. Dates will be published on the Welsh Government website (see link above) on a rolling two year basis, and are subject to review. This will enable applicants to forward plan their application to meet their business needs in terms of timescales, project seasonality and the phasing of activities.

Information

Can we access expert information on species as part of the project?

There are potential partners who want to work with groups and collaborators to offer advice. NRW can also offer expert advice on your projects.

Stakeholder engagement

What support will there be for projects that are under development or have been unsuccessful?

We will continue to work with projects under development and with unsuccessful projects to offer advice on next steps and potential sources of funding so the work that has been put in to date is not lost.

Ways to keep updated

If you have any questions or if you want to join the mailing list, please email us at sustainablemanagementscheme@gov.wales