

An introduction to the Sustainable Farming Scheme



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



For the full Scheme Description, Frequently Asked Questions and to use our 'Ready Reckoner' to calculate your indicative payments for 2026 see gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme-guide or scan the QR Code:



USEFUL NUMBERS

Addington Fund

01926 620 135

Animal and Plant Health

Agency (APHA)

03000 200 301

Badger Found Dead Survey

0808 169 5110

British Cattle Movement

Service (BCMS)

0345 050 3456

Control of Agriculture Pollution Regulation Helpline operated by ADAS

01974 847 000

DPJ Foundation

0800 587 4262

EID Cymru

01970 636 959

Farming Connect

03456 000 813

Farming Community Network (FCN)

03000 111 999

Lantra Wales

01982 552 646

Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

0300 065 3000

Quality Welsh Food Certification Body

01970 636 688

Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI)

0800 188 4444

RPW Customer Contact Centre

0300 062 5004

Samaritans

116 123

TB Helpline

0800 496 1439

Tir Dewi

0800 121 4722

KEY DATES

31 OCT
2025

Sustainable Farming
Scheme Data Confirmation
Exercise ends

1 JAN
2026

Sustainable Farming
Scheme year starts

2 MAR
2026

Single Application Form
2026 opening date

15 MAY
2026

Single Application Form
2026 closing date

Please note dates for the SFS
Roadshows can be found on page **16**
and other scheme application periods
can be found on page **17**.

You can now follow us for regular news
and updates on topics relating to
rural affairs on our brand-new
Facebook page.

Search for **Cymru Wledig/Rural Wales**
on Facebook or visit:
facebook.com/cymruwledig.



The information in this booklet was accurate as
of its publication date (22 September 2025).
For the most current dates, news,
and information, please visit the Welsh
Government website: [GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales)

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CONTENTS



04

SUSTAINABLE FARMING SCHEME
INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION

05

SCHEME ELIGIBILITY

06

THE UNIVERSAL ACTIONS

13

COMMON LAND

14

OPTIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE
ACTIONS

15

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE SFS

16

SFS ROADSHOWS

17

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT SCHEMES

18

RURAL PAYMENTS WALES AND
FARMING CONNECT CONTACT DETAILS

19

FARM LIAISON SERVICE

20

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E-NEWSLETTER

SUSTAINABLE FARMING SCHEME

The Sustainable Farming Scheme year starts on 1 January 2026.

This booklet contains a summary of the Scheme, and how you can prepare for it.

The Sustainable Farming Scheme 2026: scheme description is available at gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme-2026-scheme-description or scan the QR Code



From 2026 you will have the choice to enter the SFS which will be the main support available to farmers or claim the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS). BPS payments will be reduced by 40% in 2026 and phased out by 2029.

The SFS has been revised to make it accessible to all. There are three layers: Universal, Optional and Collaborative.

The Universal Layer will operate across a calendar year and includes 12 Universal Actions (UAs). You will be required to meet all UAs that are relevant to your farm.

You will also need to meet the SFS Regulatory Baseline and a Universal Code.

The SFS Regulatory Baseline is made up of existing regulations you will be familiar with from Cross Compliance, plus standards on public access and invasive species.

The Universal Code is a set of non-regulatory requirements designed to protect soils, trees, habitats and landscape features. An additional requirement has been included to reduce the loss of topsoil when growing maize. For farms in the SFS, maize cannot be grown on slopes of over 12 degrees, and if grown on fields liable to flooding, the maize should be undersown.

Detailed scheme guidance will be published later in 2025, including the definitive technical notes setting out all the Scheme Requirements and Universal Actions.





SCHEME ELIGIBILITY

The Scheme is designed to support active farmers who;

- ✓ are undertaking agricultural or ancillary activities on agricultural land,
- ✓ have at least three hectares of eligible agricultural land in Wales or are able to demonstrate more than 550 standard labour hours, and
- ✓ have management control of the land for at least 10 months of the calendar year

Detailed guidance on the impact of tenancy agreements and grazing licences will be provided before the Scheme starts.

THE UNIVERSAL ACTIONS

UA1 Soil health

Testing soil over a five-year period to help inform your soil health planning decisions and benefit your crops and pasture.

All our ambitions for food production, nature recovery and locking up carbon depend on healthy soil. This UA is designed to support regular soil testing to help you target future management decisions such as the quantity of inputs required.

We are asking you to test at least 20% of your agriculturally improved land which receives inputs or lime. The minimum range of testing required includes Potassium (K), Phosphorous (P), Magnesium (Mg), pH, and Soil Organic Matter.

You can test more than 20% per year, provided all relevant land is tested in a five-year period. Any testing undertaken up to four years prior to entering the Scheme will count towards this UA, even if Soil Organic Matter was not included.

Soil testing results for each relevant land parcel should be entered into your RPW Online accounts. The test results will be used for national monitoring and not to identify individual farms.

UA2 Integrated Pest Management

Complete an annual assessment of Plant Protection Products (PPPs) used, and alternative methods to reduce chemical use – which can save money and reduce waste.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) focuses on the growth of a healthy crop, with minimum environmental disruption. This approach encourages the most appropriate form of disease, pest or weed control including the use of non-chemical methods.

Targeting and reducing PPPs can save money and reduce risks to human health.

If you or your contractors use insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, molluscicides or plant growth regulators, we are asking you to complete an annual IPM Plan. This includes identifying where alternative approaches such as diverse rotations, companion crops, pest-resistant varieties, and wildlife habitats to encourage pest predators could be used.

If targeted use of PPPs is required, you should record the name of the product, quantity used, crop type, and date, time, location, and weather conditions at time of application.

UA3 Benchmarking

Complete an annual measuring and monitoring assessment to help you identify savings or improvements.

Our aim is to support you to benefit from basic benchmarking using simple Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor and improve farm performance. This allows you to use data to better understand which management practices are successful, and help you to adapt to change, enhance profitability and benefit the environment. This UA links to other actions, particularly UA12: Animal health and welfare.

We are asking you to complete two KPIs per sector (e.g. calving interval, crop yields or ewe scanning) plus one "Whole Farm" KPI (e.g. grass production, fertiliser use, earthworm numbers).

You can use the Farming Connect Benchmarking tool (FarmData+), or you can declare you are undertaking an equivalent Benchmarking exercise with another provider.

The KPIs are for your own use. We will not be monitoring your data, and they will have no impact on your Universal Payment.



UA4 Continuous Professional Development

Build on your existing skills and knowledge through learning on a range of subjects, including farm health and safety.

We are asking you to complete six hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) learning per year, plus an additional mandatory health and safety element.

Learning should support the four objectives of; producing food sustainably, mitigating and adapting to climate change, maintaining and enhancing ecosystems, and conserving and enhancing the countryside and cultural resources.

You can choose from a wide range of learning styles such as discussion groups, master-classes, accredited training, e-learning or mentoring. Learning can be undertaken through Farming Connect or you can choose other learning providers.

You can get a head start – if you choose to undertake any of the SFS e-learning modules provided by Farming Connect in 2025 they will count towards your six hours for 2026. These modules include a range of topics from benchmarking and business planning, animal health and management of soils, habitats and woodlands. businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/accredited-e-learning-suites

UA5 Habitat maintenance

Maintain the habitats on your farm to benefit livestock and wildlife.

This includes semi-natural habitats including heathlands, wetlands and species rich grasslands, as well as newly created habitat areas such as streamside corridors.

You will maintain all your habitats on the farm as part of the Scheme. The total area of habitat will generate a habitat maintenance payment.

We have included a description and long-term 'vision' for each habitat type, and management requirements which you are asked to follow. Where possible we have moved away from the prescriptive management requirements used in previous agri-environment schemes, and instead you will be able to make more of the management decisions yourself to meet the overall requirements.

We encourage you to complete the SFS Data Confirmation exercise available on RPW Online so you know how much habitat you have, and what habitat types you will need to maintain under the Scheme.

UA6 Temporary habitat creation on improved land

Create additional temporary habitat to meet the Scheme Requirement for 10% habitat on each farm.

This UA only applies if you do not have sufficient existing habitat area to meet the 10% requirement.

You can choose from a range of habitat creation types to suit your farm, such as mixed herbal leys, or fallow crop margins and unsprayed spring sown cereals/protein mixes on arable fields. We continue to work with stakeholders to expand this list to ensure there is sufficient choice for all areas.

You do not need to have 10% habitat to enter the Scheme at the start of the year. However, you should create your chosen habitats at the earliest appropriate time in the season to ensure you meet the 10% by the end of the scheme year.

As we are only asking you to create temporary habitats, this is not a loss of agriculturally improved land.

10% Habitat Requirement

We have a Scheme Requirement to have a minimum of 10% habitat on each farm to benefit biodiversity alongside food production. The following existing areas count towards your 10%:

- ✓ All existing semi natural habitat as defined under UA5: Habitat maintenance.
- ✓ Established and newly planted broadleaved woodland.
- ✓ Hedges in good condition that provide significant value for biodiversity (see hedgerow description in Annex 2 of the SFS 2026: scheme description document).
- ✓ Habitats established since 2022 such as streamside corridors, ponds and hedges.

If you have insufficient existing habitat area, you can create additional temporary habitat. (See UA6)

UA7 Designated Site Management Plan

Improve the management of designated sites by agreeing a Management Plan with Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

This UA only applies if your farm includes a designated site such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These sites are important areas of your farm and crucial for nature recovery.

We are asking you to work in partnership with NRW to develop a Designated Site Management Plan which may contain targeted activity needed to enhance these sites.

The deadline for completing this action is the end of 2030. Once your Management Plan has been agreed, we will support you to implement any agreed activities through Optional and Collaborative Actions.

UA8 Hedgerow management

Manage bigger and denser hedgerows to provide shelter for your livestock, crops and wildlife.

This UA is designed to create thick, dense hedgerows which provide shelter for livestock and are allowed to produce flowers, fruit and seeds as a food source for wildlife.

This UA is aimed specifically at those hedges which are trimmed or cut every year, and where you have management control (or at least management control on your side of a shared boundary).

We are asking you:

- ✓ To allow the hedges to grow thicker and taller by trimming them to a slightly higher and wider point each time.
- ✓ To maintain or establish at least one hedgerow tree on average every 50m per parcel.
- ✓ Not trim or cut the same hedgerow in successive years (two years in a row) – other than for health and safety reasons such as roadside hedges.

Hedges in good condition can count towards the Scheme Requirement for 10% habitat on each farm. We will support the planting of new hedgerows as an Optional Action.

UA9 Woodland maintenance

Maintain existing woodlands to increase the benefits for livestock, nature and business diversification.

This UA only applies if you have existing broadleaf or conifer woodlands over 0.1 hectares.

We are asking you to maintain your woodland by:

- ✓ Limiting any felling to between 1 September and 28 February, and no more than 5m³ per quarter.
- ✓ Protect native ground flora, trees and their roots from direct or indirect damage due to cultivation, compaction, use of machinery or chemical use.
- ✓ Monitor grazing and keep livestock impact levels low. Woodland grazing in the spring and early summer and supplementary feeding of livestock should be avoided if possible.

All woodlands you have management control of will generate a woodland maintenance payment, except areas already in receipt of a Welsh Government woodland creation maintenance payment.

Established and newly planted broadleaf woodland can count towards the Scheme Requirement to have 10% habitat on each farm.

UA10 Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan

Complete an opportunity plan for additional trees and hedgerows to identify where they can benefit your farm.

This UA is designed to incentivise tree and hedgerow planting. It involves you creating a planting opportunity map on RPW Online to identify areas you think would benefit from new planting.

Any new broadleaved woodland or hedgerow planting can count towards the Scheme Requirement to have 10% habitat on each farm.

We encourage you to undertake planting at the earliest opportunity making use of the generous and flexible tree and hedgerow offers available as Optional Actions.

We are asking you to plant at least 0.1 ha of trees by the end of 2028. Any tree planting undertaken now (or since 1 April 2022) will be considered as progress to meeting this 0.1 ha.

Tenant farmers may be restricted from planting due to their tenancy agreement and should discuss any opportunities for mutual benefit with the landowner.

Land classed as existing habitat or land important to priority species such as curlew may be unsuitable for planting.

UA11 Historic environment

Protect and enhance important heritage features to conserve our distinctive cultural character.

This UA only applies if you have any of the following on your farm:

- ✔ Scheduled monuments
- ✔ Historic Environment Features
- ✔ Registered parks and gardens
- ✔ Traditional farm buildings.

This UA does not prevent you adapting or converting farm buildings, however it is your responsibility to ensure you have all consents and licences from the relevant authorities.

You are asked to apply the approach of 'do no damage', and undertake basic monitoring, maintenance and protection – dependent upon the individual feature.

For example, where scrub is present and could risk damaging underground historic features, you will need to carry out basic scrub removal to prevent it spreading while you are in the Scheme. We do not expect you to reinstate the features to their original condition or to undertake significant or costly management and up-keep.

UA12 Animal health and welfare

Work with your vet to support continuous improvement in health and welfare of your livestock through a 'prevention is better than cure' approach.

This UA only applies to livestock owners and keepers.

We are asking you to undertake three complementary elements:

- ✔ Animal Health Improvement Cycle (AHIC) – carry out a four-step process (measure > plan > act > review) to address livestock health and production aspects which you and your vet agree could be improved.
- ✔ Biosecurity assessment for incoming animals – complete a biosecurity assessment with your vet to reduce any biosecurity risks from incoming animals. We are also asking you to ensure your enclosed farm boundaries, for which you have sole responsibility are stock proof.
- ✔ Animal welfare – complete training in body condition scoring and mobility scoring for the livestock you keep. Complete and record the scoring noting any actions required. This should be undertaken at least annually.

Body condition scoring and mobility scoring training can be undertaken through Farming Connect.

COMMON LAND



Ensuring ongoing support for common land is vital. Support for commons within the SFS will include:

- ✓ A Universal Payment for individual holders of grazing rights who have common land grazing rights and can turn out suitable livestock.
- ✓ Collaborative payments to a Grazing Association for coordinated grazing management – this will be a continuation of Habitat Wales Scheme (Commons) for 2026.
- ✓ Collaborative payments to a Grazing Association or other collaborative groups where the owner of the common permits enhanced management activity to be undertaken. This will be supported in 2026 through a continuation of our existing landscape scale collaborative schemes such as the Integrated Natural Resources Scheme.

OPTIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS

The Universal Layer is designed to act as a foundation and entry into the Scheme.

The Optional and Collaborative Layers are designed to provide you with choice and flexibility to undertake more targeted and specific actions.

The Optional and Collaborative Actions available in 2026 have been grouped into themes.



Optional themes:

- ✓ Improved soil health and multi species crop cover
- ✓ Sustainable production
- ✓ Enhanced habitat management
- ✓ Creation of permanent and temporary habitats
- ✓ Implementation of Designated Site Schedule of Works
- ✓ Enhanced woodland management
- ✓ Woodland and agroforestry creation (available now)
- ✓ Hedgerow creation and restoration
- ✓ Improved public access to the countryside
- ✓ Advanced Continuous Professional Development
- ✓ Improved water quality, water usage and flood mitigation

- ✓ Improved air quality and lowering ammonia emissions
- ✓ Organic farming (support and conversion)
- ✓ Enhanced biosecurity




Collaborative themes:

- ✓ Innovation, research and development
- ✓ Collaborative market and supply chain
- ✓ Collaborative landscape scale activity

Payments for undertaking Optional and Collaborative Actions could include a mixture of one-off capital payments, or multi-annual area-based payments. More detail on applications and payment rates will be published when available.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE SFS

There are steps you can take now to make your transition into the Scheme easier.

- ✓ Complete the SFS Data Confirmation exercise available on RPW Online until 31 October 2025, so you know how much habitat and tree canopy cover you have. This is important so you know which habitats you will be required to maintain.
- ✓ The details from the Data Confirmation form can also be used in the Ready Reckoner to give you an indicative SFS Universal Payment value for 2026. This is available at **Sustainable Farming Scheme: ready reckoner guide | GOV.WALES** 
- ✓ Access RPW Online and migrate to GOV.UK One Login. Everyone who is registered on your CRN and needs future access to your RPW Online account will require their own email address. More details at **RPW Online: migrating from Government Gateway to Gov.UK One Login [HTML] | GOV.WALES** 
- ✓ Ensure your business and land details are up to date. If you have acquired additional land this could have an impact on your habitat and woodland cover. Please complete the RPW Manage My Land form. More details on **RPW Online: using 'manage my land' | GOV. WALES** 

- ✓ Register with Farming Connect to access information, help and guidance. More details on this will follow in the autumn as we integrate the RPW and Farming Connect systems to support the delivery of the SFS from 1 January 2026.

You can get a head start on some of the individual Universal Actions. For example:

- ✓ UA1 Soil health – Soil testing undertaken up to four years before you enter the Scheme, will count towards this UA.
- ✓ UA4 Continuous Professional Development – SFS e-learning modules available from Farming Connect and completed in 2025 will count towards this UA for 2026.
- ✓ UA10 Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan – consider where additional tree and hedgerow planting would be beneficial to your farm and consider planting now through existing woodland and hedgerow creation schemes.
- ✓ Start to familiarise yourself with the templates available to make certain UAs easier such as UA2 Integrated Pest Management and UA12 Animal health and welfare. We will be updating our 'When an Inspector Calls' guidance in the autumn, to cover all the farm record requirements of the Scheme.
- ✓ Other support schemes are available throughout 2025 – [see page 17].

SUSTAINABLE FARMING SCHEME ROADSHOWS

We will be running a series of information events, where you will be able to talk directly to Welsh Government staff, the Farm Liaison Service and Farming Connect to find out more about how to prepare for the start of the Scheme. Roadshows will run from 13:00 – 20:00.

Please visit wales.business-events.org.uk/en/events/sioeau-gwybodaeth-teithiol-y-cynllun-ffermio-cynaliadwy-sustainable-farming-scheme-2026-information-roadshows/ to register in advance. Registration is not mandatory, but we ask you to register where possible so we can ensure we have sufficient staff available to assist everyone attending.

The details of the events are as follows and more information will also be available in our Gwlad e-newsletter (details of how to subscribe to Gwlad can be found on page 20).



| Location | Date |
|--|--------------|
| Llangollen (International Pavilion, Abbey Road, LL20 8SW) | 30 September |
| Builth Wells (Hafod y Hendre, Royal Welsh Showground, LD2 3SY) | 1 October |
| Welshpool (Livestock market, Buttington Cross SY21 8SR) | 2 October |
| Bangor (Reichel Hall, Bangor University, LL57 2TW) | 7 October |
| Builth Wells (Hafod y Hendre, Royal Welsh Showground, LD2 3SY) | 8 October |
| Aberaeron (Moody Cow, Bargoed Farm, Llwyncelyn SA46 0HL) | 13 October |
| Porthmadog (Football Club, Y Traith, LL49 9PP) | 14 October |
| Llandovery (Llandovery RFC, Church Bank, SA20 0BA) | 22 October |
| Haverfordwest (Showground Pavilion, Withbush Road, SA62 4BW) | 23 October |
| Raglan (Llanarth Village Hall, Groesonen Road, NP15 2AU) | 3 November |
| Bridgend (Heronston Hotel, Ewenny Road, CF35 5AW) | 4 November |

Please note the format for these roadshows will differ from previous events you may have attended, for example there will be no central presentation, and we will not be able to support the Data Confirmation exercise on RPW Online to confirm your farm habitat details. For support on completing the Data Confirmation exercise including digital assistance appointments please contact the RPW Customer Contact Centre (see p18) or a member of the Farm Liaison Service team (see p19).

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT SCHEMES

Grant funding is available, some of which will help you prepare for the SFS.

Full details on the schemes listed below can be found at gov.wales/rural-grants-payments.



| Scheme title | Application opening date | Application closing date |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| Small Grants – Woodland Creation | Open now | 30 September 2025 |
| Growing for the Environment (Spring and Summer Crops) | 6 October 2025 | 14 November 2025 |
| Woodland Creation Grant | Open now | 21 November 2025 |
| Small Grants – Yard Coverings | 13 October 2025 | 21 November 2025 |
| Agricultural Diversification and Horticulture | 29 September 2025 | 5 December 2025 |
| Small Grants – Environment (Carbon) | 3 November 2025 | 12 December 2025 |
| Small Grants – Horticulture Start Up | 3 November 2025 | 16 January 2026 |
| Small Grants – Environment (Landscape and Pollinators) | 12 January 2026 | 27 February 2026 |
| Small Grants – Efficiency | 12 January 2026 | 27 February 2026 |
| Woodland Creation Planning Scheme | Available for applications at any time | |

Note: the application dates can be subject to change. Current details can be found at gov.wales/rural-schemes-application-dates or by scanning the QR code.



CONTACT RURAL PAYMENTS WALES (RPW) ONLINE

RPW

Telldau Gofeddi Cymru
Ar-Lein
Online
Rural Payments Wales

We are here to help and treat you with respect.

In turn, we expect you to be courteous and **not behave unacceptably**.

Rydym yn croesawu galwadau'n Gymraeg / We welcome calls in Welsh.

Enquiries can be submitted via RPW Online at any time.

Customer Contact Centre opening times:

Monday to Friday: 09:00 to 16:00

0300 062 5004

Postal address

Rural Payments Wales

PO Box 251

Caernarfon

LL55 9DA

Online

All messaging with RPW must be sent through your RPW Online account.

If you have not registered with RPW Online then please visit the how to register section of the website: gov.wales/rpw-online-how-register



FARMING CONNECT

Farming Connect is providing support which is transforming the business prospects of thousands of farmers.

Many services are fully funded, others are subsidised by up to 80%.

To benefit from all that's on offer, you will need to register for the programme.

To access Farming Connect support please contact the Service Centre on **03456 000 813** or visit businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/



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We welcome calls in Welsh

gov.wales/farmingconnect



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Farm Liaison Service

A fully funded support service



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

We provide customers with guidance in respect of all farming and Rural schemes and policy areas administered by Welsh Government.



We are here to help so please get in touch.

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Gwlad e-newsletter



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4. Scroll to the bottom and click '**Submit**'.

Success – You should now be subscribed to the Gwlad e-newsletter!