Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Sustainable Farming Scheme – Universal Layer: Guidance 2026

Important Notice: It is essential that you read and understand this booklet if you intend to apply for the Sustainable Farming Scheme – Universal Layer in 2026

December 2025

This booklet explains the rules for the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) – Universal Layer.

The scheme rules are based on the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023 and the Agriculture Support Schemes (Eligibility, Enforcement and Appeals) (Wales) Regulations 2025

As the rules change from time to time the Welsh Government cannot guarantee that this booklet provides a definitive statement of the law nor can the booklet substitute for specific advice on individual legal problems.

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Contents

Section A: Introduction

This guidance booklet explains the SFS - Universal Layer. It explains:

- Scheme requirements,
- Universal Actions,
- Single Application Form (SAF) and SFS Universal Dashboard,
- Evidence and on-farm records requirements.

Additional technical guidance to help support you meet the scheme requirements, together with an updated ‘When the inspector calls – a helpful guide for farmers’ will be published on the Welsh Government website.

The SFS – Universal Layer will operate on a calendar basis from 1 January 2026 to 31 December annually. It is essential you read and understand this booklet if you intend to claim.

The 2026 scheme year will start on 1 January 2026. An SFS map, which will detail the broad habitat classification, woodland and tree canopy cover, designated sites and historic features on your farm, will be available on your Rural Payments Wales (RPW) Online account from 31 December 2025.

However, to apply for the Universal Layer, you will need to submit a claim on the SAF by 15 May 2026. The SAF 2026, together with a ‘How to complete guide’ will be available to complete via your RPW Online account from 2 March 2026.

We understand that you may be undecided about entering the scheme until you complete the SAF. To make things as straightforward as possible, from 1 January until the SAF deadline on 15 May, you will be considered as meeting the Universal Layer requirements. This gives everyone a clear starting point and ensures fairness during transition.

Why this approach?

The scheme launch is the start of our transition from Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) to SFS over the next 3 years. We recognise this may be a significant change for some farmers, whilst others still need to decide whether to enter and apply.

The start of the scheme year should therefore be a time to carefully consider your options without pressure. This trust-based approach reduces unnecessary burden and supports a fair and practical way of working, and moving forward, together.

If you have any questions or need help at any stage, please contact the RPW Customer Contact Centre or Farm Liaison Service (FLS). We are here to support farmers every step of the way.

Section B: Scheme Structure

The SFS is a whole farm scheme. It includes a Universal Layer, containing a set of Universal Actions (UAs) which generate a Universal Payment.

Additional SFS payments will be available in the Optional and Collaborative Layers for those farmers who choose to go above and beyond the Universal Layer.

This three-layered structure is built upon a set of scheme requirements, as follows:

- The SFS Regulatory Baseline, a set of legal requirements that underpin the SFS. These requirements are based on existing domestic legislation that apply to all farmers in Wales (see Section G).

- The Universal Code, a set of non-regulatory requirements which you must follow, made up for four parts; soil protection, biodiversity and habitats, trees and landscape features (see Section H)

- The Universal Code also includes the scheme requirement to have 10% of the eligible area of your holding managed as habitat (see Section I).

Section C: Consents and Legal Requirements

This booklet outlines the requirements of the SFS – Universal Layer and provides guidance to help you meet the scheme requirements and deliver the Universal Actions.

Farmers play a vital role in food production, caring for the environment, supporting our rural communities, and we value your continued commitment.

Together, we can ensure the success of the scheme and deliver lasting benefits and outcomes for Welsh agriculture and the environment.

Every farm is different, and it is essential you ensure all consents, licences and permissions have been granted, where required, for your farming business.

You must also ensure you comply with all your legal requirements regarding the environment, hygiene, animal welfare and all relevant health and safety standards.

We are here to support you. Should you need further clarification or assistance, please contact the RPW Customer Contact Centre, FLS, or visit the websites for more information:

Environment Standards

- Land management | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES

Farm Hygiene

- Food Hygiene – Food Standards Agency
- Disease Prevention for Livestock Keepers – GOV.UK

Animal Welfare

- Animal welfare | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES

Health and Safety

- Agriculture - HSE

Section D: Eligibility

D1 Who is Eligible

The SFS – Universal Layer operates on a scheme year from 1 January to 31 December.

The land you claim must remain eligible for the entire scheme year.

You are responsible for meeting the SFS Regulatory Baseline, Universal Code and applicable Universal Actions for your holding, for the entire scheme year and for allowing for the land to be inspected, if required.

Failure to meet either of these commitments may lead to sanctions, or exclusion from the scheme.

A Holding means all the land units used for agricultural or ancillary activities, managed by an applicant to the SFS - Universal Layer and situated within Wales.

To be eligible to apply and claim for the SFS – Universal Layer you will need to demonstrate the following criteria:

- have at least 3 hectares of eligible agricultural land in Wales (including common land apportionment) registered with RPW,
  or
- be able to demonstrate you undertake over 550 standard labour hours on agricultural or ancillary activities in the scheme year and have a minimum of 0.10 hectares of eligible agricultural land. The eligible land must be within individual parcels of at least 0.1ha in size.

- have management control of the land for at least 10 months of the calendar year, which must include 15 May 2026.

- undertake agricultural or ancillary activities during the scheme year.

Agricultural or ancillary activities are defined in the Agriculture (Wales) Act.

Agricultural activities includes;

- Keeping and breeding livestock. Using land for horticulture, farming arable crops and dairy farming.
- Using land as grazing land and as farm woodland or for agroforestry. Includes controlled environment agriculture, growing plants for sale or for sale of part of the plant such as producing seeds.
- Maintaining land in a state that makes it suitable for the activities above.

Ancillary activities includes;

- Taking action, on land used for agriculture to create and manage habitat, or for other purposes related to nature conservation, to mitigate and adapt to climate change, or to maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems.

- Selling, marketing, preparing, packaging, processing or distributing products deriving from agriculture.

We will check whether you meet the eligibility criteria. If we are unable to verify via the SAF, you may have to submit supporting documentation to confirm your eligibility.

Supporting documentation will be required to confirm the 550 standard labour hours. (see Section L11)

The evidence provided must clearly demonstrate you meet the eligibility criteria and must be submitted by 15 May 2026.

D2 Land Eligibility

The SFS – Universal Layer is a 'Whole Farm' scheme. You must declare all available Welsh agricultural land on the SAF, where you have management control for 10 months of the calendar year, including all landscape features, man-made features and any other features not eligible for payment.

Management Control

You will have management control if you are;

- the owner occupier of the land
- a tenant who has 'exclusive occupation' under either the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 with a Farm Business Tenancy, or a full Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 tenancy
- a tenant with an unwritten tenancy arrangement with the same level of control as the above.
- you have allowed a licensee on to your land under a license arrangement that is specifically for grazing, cropping or taking hay/silage over a specified and limited period of time within the year, but you have retained Management Control of the land

You do not need to have management control of the land for a continuous 10-month period. For example, if you have a tenancy agreement on land which runs from 1 September to 30 June annually. The land is eligible as you have management control from 1 January to 30 June and again from 1 September to 31 December. You must be able to demonstrate you have legal occupation of the land claimed. For example, in the case of land you do not own, make sure you have a tenancy from the landlord enabling you to farm the land as you see fit and it allows for you to take responsibility for meeting all the scheme requirements.

If you use the land under the terms of a grazing licence, or similar agreement, that is specifically for grazing, cropping or taking hay/silage over a specified and limited period of time within the year, you are not considered to have management control, and the land will not be eligible.

It is the actions on the ground that dictate the arrangement. If you are doing all the farming and maintenance of the land as well as grazing or taking hay/silage over an undefined or continuing period of time, it is likely that, regardless of how it is described by the parties involved, in legal terms there is a tenancy in place.

Landowners should be cautious to clearly define the specific period and permitted activities of the arrangement to avoid confusion over who actually has management control. As a claimant you should also ensure you are able to provide evidence of your activity on the land in question (e.g. animal movement records, invoices for hedge cutting, fencing or silage contractors).

The table below shows examples of land tenure arrangements and who should be eligible for the SFS - Universal Layer;

Scenario describing occupation of the land	**Who can claim**
You graze your sheep or take hay/silage at the time(s) specified in a licence (oral or written). You have no autonomy to carry out other agricultural activity on the land without the permission of the licensor. **You cannot claim.**	Owner
You farm the land and are responsible for its maintenance, but do not have a written tenancy. Your agreement with the landowner is such that you do not need to seek permission to maintain and farm the land as you wish or consider necessary. The licensor does not undertake or contract any agricultural activity on the land. **You should claim as a tenant.**	Tenant
You carry out (or pay a contractor for) maintenance of the land and retain responsibility for its condition, but you let land you own to another farmer under a licence. The licence includes a specific period for the licensee's use of the land and specifies/limits the use that can be made of the land by the licensee. **You claim as the owner.**	Owner
You carry out (or pay a contractor for) maintenance of the land and retain responsibility for its condition. You have a formal tenancy over land you sub-let to another under a licence. The licence includes a specific period for the licensee's use of the land and specifies/limits the use that can be made of the land by the licensee. **You should claim as a tenant.**	Tenant

Derogation from the 10-month management control requirement for 2026

Please note: An initial derogation from the 10-month rule is available where you have taken on land under the terms of a **new tenancy of three years or longer**, which began after 28 February 2026 but before 15 May 2026. In these circumstances you will be considered to have met the eligibility criteria for 2026 and you should confirm you have met the 10-month rule on the SAF 2026.

Land Used in Common / Shared Grazing

In cases where two or more claimants share-graze portions of **non-common land** (and no share farming agreement exists) each can claim for the specific portion of the grazeable area they have at their disposal (i.e. have the right of use for).

The total available eligible area of land, by each claimant must not exceed the total area of the parcel. The details of the ineligible areas will not be shown for the parcel on the SAF.

It is therefore important for claimants grazing portions of shared land to ensure they do not submit incorrect and conflicting data, which could lead to an over-declaration of the total area of the parcel.

Land used in common or shared grazing will be treated in the same way as common land. The area will be apportioned between all claimants in accordance with the area declared, however, the land will be eligible for the Whole Farm and Social Value payments only.

The land will not be eligible for the Habitat Maintenance Payment or Woodland Maintenance Payment and will not be used to calculate the 10% habitat requirement. In addition, the land cannot be used towards the requirements of UA10: Tree and Hedgerow planting opportunity plan.

Share Farmers

In cases where two or more parties have a share farming agreement, only one can claim SFS - Universal Layer. They will be responsible for meeting the scheme requirements and applicable Universal Actions for the scheme year. All the land within the agreement must be included on the designated claimant's SAF.

Responsibility for distributing the payment (or repayments should this apply) rests with the claimant. Should other parties of the share farming agreement hold additional land outside of the agreement, they may claim the SFS - Universal Layer separately on their own SAF.

All parties should consider carefully how the businesses are structured to ensure they comply with the scheme rules. You may wish to seek professional advice.

Dual Use of Land - Land claimed by two or more farmers under different schemes

To meet the requirement of the SFS - Universal Layer you must have management control of the land for at least 10 months, including on 15 May. Where one farmer declares the land for the SFS - Universal Layer another farmer cannot enter the land into another scheme, for example BPS. This is referred to as dual use.

If the same area is claimed by two different claimants in the same scheme year, neither will be paid until it is determined who has management control. The claimant

who does not have the right to claim may face over-declared penalties. Further details are available at Section Q3

D3 Ineligible Land

Ineligible land:

- Will not be included in your Whole Farm Area used to calculate the Universal Baseline Payment.
- Will not be used to calculate the annual requirements for soil testing of improved land for UA1: Soil Health.
- Will not be used to calculate the 10% habitat requirements for your farm.
- Cannot be considered or used to meet the requirements of UA10: Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan.

The following land is ineligible:

- Land located outside Wales.
- Land parcels where you do not have management control or where you have management control for less than 10-months of the calendar year (unless under derogation).
- Land parcels less than 0.1ha
- Ineligible features
- Non-agricultural land

Further details are set out below.

Land located outside of Wales

Land located outside Wales is ineligible. If you are a cross-border farmer, you do not need to declare any land located outside of Wales.

No Management Control or Management Control for less than 10 months

Land is not eligible if you do not have management control of the land for a minimum of 10 months in the calendar year (unless under derogation).

Land parcels less than 0.1ha

The minimum field parcel size mapped by RPW in the main is 0.1ha. Field parcels less than 0.1ha should not be declared on the SAF.

Ineligible Features

The following features are ineligible but should still be declared on your SAF.

Description	SAF Crop Code
Ponds (Over 1 Ha in size)	ZZ30
Rivers and streams	ZZ31
Buildings/yards	ZZ89
Hardstanding	ZZ92
Roads	ZZ94
Tracks (ungrazed)	ZZ97
Temporary Unusable Areas	TT99
Non-agricultural activities/land	NO1

Non-Agricultural Activities/Land

Not all Non-agricultural activities will make your land ineligible.

If you undertake non-agricultural activities, you should also take account of the number of days the land is reserved or is being prepared for the activity, not just the number of days on which the activity takes place. If the limits are exceeded, the affected area or the whole field will be regarded as ineligible.

Activities, and the associated land eligibility, are considered under 3 separate categories. The lists of activities below are not exhaustive and if you wish to undertake non-agricultural activities on your land you should contact the RPW Customer Contact Centre for guidance.

Category 1 – Activities permitted without restrictions, and where land is still eligible, include:

- fishing
- hedge laying competitions, local ploughing competitions or other cultivation demonstrations; only within applicable requirements of the scheme. Events where trade stands are present would fall under Category 2.
- school, university or other educational nature or farm visit
- horse riding along bridle-ways*

- bicycle riding along defined paths or bridle-ways*
- walking*
- bird watching
- shooting (game)
- deer stalking
- drag hunting
- paragliding
- hang-gliding.

*Metalled or surfaced paths or bridle-ways would in any event be considered ineligible land.

Category 2 – Activities permitted up to a 28-day limit, and where land is still eligible. The limits apply to the number of days on which a non-agricultural use occurs, part of a day counts as one full day. Activities include:

- shooting (clay)
- car boot sales
- festivals and events
- country fairs and shows
- farm auctions and sales
- equestrian activities (except of the type described under Category 1)
- ballooning
- car parking (whether or not associated with any of the activities listed)
- Scout or Guide camps or similar
- caravan and camp sites (This need not affect a whole field parcel).
- TV and film locations
- motor sports

Category 3 - Activities that are not consistent with the land being in agricultural use, and therefore land is not eligible, include locations where the principal purpose of the land is for recreational activities or other non-agricultural activities, such as permanent camp sites, sports facilities, gallops, solar panels or airports.

In all cases the restrictions apply for the calendar year.

This guidance is for scheme purposes only. Other legal restrictions may apply, e.g. planning restrictions. You must be aware that in all cases the scheme requirements, including the SFS Regulatory Baseline will apply on the agricultural area for the whole calendar year.

Land with Solar Panels

Land with solar panels is regarded as non-agricultural land. This includes the land between, underneath or around the panels, even if it can be grazed or is accessible for grazing.

If the solar panels are concentrated in a single area within the land parcel (e.g. a corner or one end) and you want to include the rest of the land; you must fence off the land with the solar panels creating 2 separate land parcels.

D4 Land taken out of Production due to utility works

If it is compulsory for you to take land out of production under statutory powers, for example a utility company laying a pipeline, it may be difficult for you to meet the scheme requirements.

If you have land temporarily taken out of production and you cannot meet the requirements, you may be eligible under the Exceptional Circumstances provision. Contact the RPW Customer Contact Centre and provide details so your situation can be considered.

If you have land permanently taken out of production and cannot meet the scheme requirements, including maintaining your land in line with the SFS Regulatory Baseline requirements for the required scheme year, you should seek a compensation payment from the utility company or statutory agency responsible.

D5 Special provisions for land used for military training

In some cases, eligible agricultural land will be subject to use by the Ministry of Defence for military training. This is regarded as being in the national interest and will be permitted without affecting your ability to claim the SFS Universal Layer. The requirements of the SFS Regulatory Baseline will still apply to the land.

D6 Land use and support under other Schemes

Details of the relationship between SFS Universal Layer and land supported under other schemes are set out below:

Organic Farming

Land included in an Organic Conversion Scheme grant award or a claim for the Organic Payment is also eligible under the SFS – Universal Layer.

Woodland Schemes

Land previously or currently supported for woodland planting is eligible under the SFS – Universal Layer.

However, any areas of land still being supported for woodland premium and/or maintenance will not be eligible for the Universal Baseline - Woodland Maintenance Payment.

Designated Sites

On land in designated sites, subject to NRW management agreements (e.g. section 15/16 agreements) is eligible under the SFS-Universal Layer and you will be expected to continue to meet the requirements of these agreements until they expire.

If an existing Land Management Agreement with NRW requires the same action as a Universal Action for the same area of land, then the Habitat Maintenance payment and/or Woodland Maintenance payment will be adjusted accordingly to avoid double funding on that area.

D7 Double Funding

With the exception of the examples provided above, you must not claim on land where you are receiving payments for the same purpose from any other source or organisation. This would be considered double funding for the same land. Examples include Integrated Natural Resources Scheme, Ffermio Bro and any other landscape support schemes.

If it is established you are receiving separate payments for the same actions or activities, this may result in financial penalties and the recovery of Universal Payments.

D8 Land Ownership and Occupation Disputes

The Welsh Government cannot adjudicate land ownership or occupation, in particular where both parties provide evidence to support their claim. In these circumstances no payments will be made on the disputed parcel/s to either party, until the dispute is settled.

Section E: Common Land

E1 Common Land Rights

You can use common land grazing rights to form part of your Universal Payment, provided you:

- have the legal right to use that common land for grazing stock.
- have the ability to turn out the relevant stock on the common for which you have registered grazing rights.
- keep a stocking diary of stock turned onto the common.
- follow the SFS Regulatory Baseline requirements on the common.
- have due regard for relevant management which is in place on the common.

Where you have common land grazing rights, and meet the requirements above, Welsh Government will:

  - apportion and allocate an area of the common land to you.
  - include the apportioned common land area within the Universal Payment detailed below.

Use of common land grazing rights

You can declare and apply for an apportionment of common land area if you hold (either owned, leased or licenced) rights to graze on that common for the scheme year, and are the registered keeper of at least one livestock type which is the same as the livestock you can graze on the common.

For example, if you hold common land grazing rights for 200 sheep and 10 cattle, you must keep and be able turn out at least one of these livestock types, either sheep, cattle or both, onto the common.

You are not required to keep the same number of animals as you hold grazing rights for, and there is no requirement for you to turn the animals onto the common should you choose not to. However, you are required to keep a stocking diary, detailing any turning out of livestock or removing them from the common when this occurs, including confirming details such as dates and number of livestock.

You will be asked to declare your livestock animal numbers on the SAF. If you do not keep at least one livestock type for the common land grazing rights you hold, you will not be allocated any common land area for the SFS - Universal Layer.

SFS Regulatory Baseline

The SFS Regulatory Baseline applies to any common land allocated under the Universal Layer.

This does not alter legal rights of common, or the exercise of those rights. However, if there is a breach of the SFS Regulatory Baseline anywhere on the common, the

farmer or farmers responsible for the breach may have a sanction applied which may result in a financial penalty. Further details available at Section Q

Existing management agreements on the common

You must have due regard for relevant management which is in place on the common, such as for animal health benefits or habitat management. This is in relation to any grazing management plan or historic site management plan on the common.

You must not knowingly carry out any activities that compromise existing management agreements in place on the common. If you carry out any such activities, and actions can be proven, sanctions may apply.

Common land area allocation

The total eligible area of a common will be determined on the same basis as the land eligibility criteria set out in Section D.

The Welsh Government's annual allocations of common land will take account of the eligible area of the common and all the livestock grazing rights registered by individual farmers, as declared on the SAF each year. During the Transition Period, grazing rights for the common can be declared by:

- Claimants entering the SFS - Universal Layer, and
- Claimants remaining in the BPS.

All common land grazing rights declared on the SAF under both schemes will be taken into consideration when allocating a notional area of the common to each individual farmer, based on the individual grazing rights declared.

Notional area allocations may decrease or increase annually due to changes in common grazing right declarations submitted on the SAF each year. Welsh Government's allocations of common land areas made in previous years cannot therefore be guaranteed.

Apportioned common land for the SFS – Universal Layer

Any common land area apportioned will be eligible for the following elements of the Universal Payment.

- Whole Farm Area Payment, within the Universal Baseline Payment and
- Social Value Payment.

The common land area allocated to you:

- Will not be eligible for the Habitat Maintenance Payment or Woodland Maintenance Payments under the Universal Baseline Payment.
- Will not be used to calculate the annual requirements for soil testing of improved land for UA1: Soil Health.

- Will not be used to calculate the 10% habitat requirements for your farm,
- Cannot be considered or used to meet the requirements of UA10: Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan.

E2 Sole Grazed Common Land

Sole grazed commons can be registered with RPW and given a unique field reference number. If you have applied for and been given a field reference number for sole grazed common this should be pre-populated in the Field Data section of your SAF 2026.

This common land should be treated as a field parcel for the purposes of the Universal Layer, and you must not declare sole grazed commons in the Common Land section of the SAF.

E3 Leased or Licenced Rights on Common Land

Under the Commons (Severance of Rights) (Wales) Order 2014, a right of common to graze animals can be leased or licenced (known as ‘temporary severance’) for a maximum of 5 years, and such severance is only legal if strict rules are adhered to.

These rules include notifying the following people or organisations of any new leasing or licensing arrangements (including borrowed rights) within 28 days:

- the local Commons Registration Authority in whose area the land is situated.
- the secretary of any relevant Commoners Associations, Commons Councils (when established) or any other local body responsible for the management of the common land to which the leased rights of common apply.
- Natural Resources Wales (NRW), if the common to which the rights apply includes a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Following the expiration of any lease or licence, the ‘temporary severance’ may be renewed for further periods of up to 5 years.

Section F: SFS Map

The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) Map is a key resource to help you understand your farm's eligibility and plan actions under the scheme. It provides a clear visual representation of your holding and important features relevant to SFS requirements.

F1 Availability

Your SFS Map will be available on RPW Online from 31 December 2025. You can view it by logging into your RPW Online account and navigating to the Land Tab. Further details relating to the SFS map will be available on the Welsh Government website.

F2 What the SFS Map Includes

- Total field Size: The total size of your registered land.
- Habitat and Woodland Areas: Details of existing habitats and woodland on your farm.
- Universal Action Indicators: Information relevant to actions that could apply to your holding, such as:
    - Designated Sites (e.g., SSSIs, SACs)
    - Historic Features (e.g., scheduled monuments)
- Other Key Features: Field boundaries permanent features, and environmental layers.

F3 How to Use the Map

- Review the map before submitting your claim on the SAF 2026.
- Use the habitat and woodland data to estimate your 10% habitat requirements
- Plan future actions for temporary habitat requirements, if applicable.
- Consider enhancing biodiversity:
- Check designated sites and historic features to ensure compliance with scheme requirements.
- Report any field boundary or man-made feature inaccuracies to RPW promptly on Manage my land
- Habitat and Woodland corrections must be completed on the SAF 2026
- Check the slope and flood risk of parcels prior to planting maize.

Section G: SFS Regulatory Baseline

G1 Details of the SFS Regulatory Baseline

The SFS Regulatory Baseline is a set of legal requirements that underpin the SFS – Universal Layer. These requirements are based on existing domestic legislation that apply to all farmers in Wales

The majority of these requirements were included in Cross Compliance which you should already be familiar with.

There are two elements of the SFS Regulatory Baseline:

- Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs), and
- Standards for keeping the land in 'Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition' (GAECs)

Each element is broken down into individual standards as follows;

SMRs

SMR 1: water protection

SMR 2: wild birds

SMR 3: conservation of fauna and flora (biodiversity)

SMR 4: food and feed law

SMR 5: restricting use of substances having hormonal or thyrostatic action and beta-agonists in farm animals

SMR 6: pig identification and registration

SMR 7: cattle identification and registration

SMR 8: sheep and goat identification

SMR 9: prevention, control and eradication of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE)

SMR 10: restrictions on the use of plant protection products

SMR 11: welfare standards for the protection of calves

SMR 12: welfare Standards for the protection of pigs

SMR 13: welfare standards for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes

SMR 14: Statutory Public Access (includes Public Rights of Way and open access land)

SMR 15: Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

GAECs

GAEC 2: water – use of water for irrigation

GAEC 3: water – groundwater

GAEC 6: soil and organic matter – maintenance

GAEC 7: landscape features (scheduled monuments, ditches and trees)

The detailed requirements are set out in the SFS Regulatory Baseline factsheets. These are available on the Welsh Government website at https://www.gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme-regulatory-baseline-2026

The factsheets also include information on good practice, what to expect at inspection and useful contacts.

G2 Responsibility for the SFS Regulatory Baseline

The SFS Regulatory Baseline applies on annual basis to all land on your holding and all land declared on your SAF, including any ineligible features or areas.

For example, if a shed on your holding is not up to standard, resulting in animal welfare issues, a sanction could be applied even though the area of the shed itself does not contribute to your SFS – Universal Layer payment.

You are responsible and accountable for these requirements for the entire scheme year, even if you do not have management control of the land for the full 12 months of the year.

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions or penalties may be applied in accordance with the SFS Regulatory Baseline Verifiable Standards and Payment Reduction Matrix, which are available on the Welsh Government website at https://www.gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme-regulatory-baseline-2026

G3 Further information

‘When the inspector calls’ – a helpful guide for farmers’ will be available on the Welsh Government website and provides information on what to expect at inspection and good practice guidance to help you follow and comply with the requirements.

The Gwlad e-newsletter will regularly highlight key messages, amendments and updates.

Section H: Universal Code

H1 Details of the Universal Code

The Universal Code is a set of non-regulatory requirements which all claimants participating in the SFS - Universal Layer must follow.

You will be expected to meet the requirements of the Universal Code for the full 12 months of the scheme year.

The Universal Code is made up of four parts:

1. Soil protection
2. Biodiversity and habitats, including 10% habitat on your farm
3. Trees
4. Landscape features

The requirements for the 10% habitat on your farm are set out in Section I
If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q).

H2 Activity Diary

There are certain activities permissible in the Universal Code where you should keep a record in an activity diary. Specific details are set out for these requirements below.

Your activity diary can either be in an electronic or paper format and you should keep it on farm for at least 5 years and make it available at inspection if requested.

Further guidance regarding activity diaries and example templates are available in the ‘When the inspector calls - a helpful guide for farmers’ which will be published on the Welsh Government website.

H3 Part 1: soil protection

The aim of these requirements is to protect soil and surface water against the consequences of erosion and runoff, including after harvest or grazing.

In this code:

1) ‘mechanical field operations’ includes all harvesting, cultivation and spreading operations, including those for manures and slurries and all vehicle activity. In certain circumstances we may publish written directions allowing certain mechanical field operations.

2) normal definitions of ‘waterlogged’ apply i.e. Soaked with water to the point where it cannot absorb any more, making it overly wet or saturated.

3) surface water includes coastal waters, estuaries, canals, lakes, ponds and watercourses, such as rivers, streams and ditches which contain free flowing water; and also includes temporarily dry ditches and blind ditches.

You must:

- Protect soil from erosion down slope or off site (site meaning field) including to watercourses and roads.

- Not carry out supplementary feeding within 10 metres of surface water.

- Not apply Plant Protection Products within 2 metres of surface water.

- Not cultivate or plough land within 1 metre of surface water.

- Wherever possible, avoid overgrazing. Poaching and rutting must not occur to a level which causes soil erosion down slope or off site (site meaning field) including to watercourses and roads.

- Not grow maize on land with a slope of 12 degrees or more.

- Not grow maize on land liable to flooding, unless under sown to the following requirements;
  - crop must be sown by 10 July.
  - cover crop must be established between rows of established maize by direct drilling or target broadcasting, followed by tines.
  - broadcasting of seeds across the fields is not eligible.
  - maintain a 1m grass buffer strip adjacent to a hedge, earth bank or watercourse.
  - cover crop must remain on the ground until 15 February.
  - crop may be grazed, but do not over-graze so that winter crop cover is maintained and poaching avoided.
  - a record should be kept in your activity diary.

- Ensure that all land is sufficiently covered by crops, stubbles, residues or other vegetation at all times, to prevent soil run off, except where establishing a cover would conflict with the requirements below regarding mechanical field operations on waterlogged soil or cultivating land to leave a rough surface.

- Ensure, where land has been harvested with a combine harvester, forage harvester or mower, one of the following conditions should be met at all times between the day after harvest to the 1 March:

  - the stubble of the harvested crop remains ion the ground; or

- the land is prepared as a seedbed within 14 days for a crop and the crop is sown within a period of 10 days beginning with the day after final seedbed preparation.

- Ensure, when ploughing out existing grassland, the land must be prepared as a seedbed within 14 days from ploughing with the crop/grass sown within a period of 10 days, beginning with the day after final seedbed preparation. If cultivation or sowing within that 10-day period would mean breaching any of the other Universal Code requirements, the crop or temporary cover crop should be sown as soon as is practical after it ceases to be waterlogged.

- Not carry out (or allow) any mechanical field operations on an area of waterlogged soil, unless one or more of the following applies:

  a) animal welfare or human safety.

  b) improving drainage of the soil.

  c) incorporating gypsum following saltwater intrusion.

  d) meeting contractual obligations in relation to the harvesting of a crop on saturated soil, including where the quality of the crop would deteriorate if it was not harvested. See restriction below.

  e) the soil is waterlogged within 20 metres of the access point and access is required to an area which is not waterlogged. See restriction below.

  f) the waterlogged area forms part of a track to an area of soil which is not waterlogged.

  Restriction: exemptions listed at d) and e) above do not apply to designated sites (SSSIs) as follows:
  - within the catchment of a lake designated site, or
  - within a 100m buffer of the boundary of any river or water dependent designated site.

- You are only permitted to cultivate land in order to leave it with a rough surface, between the day after harvest and 1 March, if it complies with the following conditions:

  - the site is not considered at high risk of erosion, and
  - it is left with a rough surface to encourage the infiltration of rain and:
  - soil does not run off down slope or off site (field parcel) and:

    - you have undertaken a risk assessment and completed and submitted a notification via your RPW account on or before the day the land is cultivated to leave a rough surface.

- As a minimum, either chisel plough or install sediment fencing, to limit soil erosion if;

    - it is not possible to sow a cover crop on land which has been late harvested,
    - the stubble does not provide cover, or
    - a forage or root crop has been grazed out.

H4 Part 2: Biodiversity and habitats

The aim of these requirements is to prevent damage and loss of existing semi-natural habitats and to support their enhancement.

These requirements apply to all habitat land on your holding, whether or not you have confirmed this as existing semi-natural habitat as defined under UA5: Habitat Maintenance.

All habitat is defined as:

Any vegetation which has a composition of less than 25% sown agricultural species as per the Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) (Wales) (EIA) Regulations 2017, or land confirmed as newly created habitats as part of UA5: Habitat maintenance.

These requirements do not apply to land included as Temporary Habitat under UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land.

Do not:

- Damage habitat land

    Damage is defined as causing a loss of the vegetation type typical of that habitat. Examples of actions which could cause damage are over or under grazing, poaching by livestock or rutting by farm machinery or other vehicles.

    You must protect native ground flora, trees and their roots from direct or indirect damage due to cultivation, compaction, use of machinery or use of agrochemicals, including fertilisers.

- Agriculturally improve habitat land

Agricultural improvement involves practices and management that leads to an increase in agricultural species such as rye grass and white clover.

Habitat land must not be agriculturally improved irrespective of whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening consent has been received.

- Clear ditches between 1 March and 31 August on habitat land. Details of ditch clearance must be recorded in the activity diary. Routine maintenance may be carried out on existing ditches or drainage channels outside of these dates as follows:
  - vegetation and silt may be cleared, leaving it along one side of the ditch
  - deepening, widening of ditches or laying drainage pipes and infilling ditches is not permitted

  Ditch Clearance within Internal Drainage Districts will require Land Drainage Consent from NRW.

  Ditch clearance is not permitted within the boundary of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA). The normal process of applying to NRW for SSSI consent via a notice of intent will be required.
- Roll or chain harrow on habitat land between 15 March and 15 July – you must record details of all rolling and chain harrowing on habitat land in your activity diary.
- Plough, cultivate or re–seed habitat land.
- Carry out any earth moving activities on habitat land, including cutting peat and infilling natural hollows.
- Extract rock, scree, sand, shingle, gravel, clay or peat from habitat land or rivers.
- Construct tracks, roads, yards, hardstanding or any new structures on habitat land, except where permitted by a specific Welsh Government or NRW agreement.
- Convert, cultivate or re-seed land on Sites of Special Scientific Interest without a current consent for the activity.

- Install new drainage or modify existing drainage on habitat land or within 100m of a wetland habitat where the ditch or drain would intercept water running towards the wetland. Wetlands are defined as peatland related habitats that have water at or close to the surface for most of the year. Mole ploughing is not permitted.

- Store materials, vehicles, trailers or machinery on habitat land.

- Store manure, silage or other farm wastes and any hazardous or non-hazardous substances on habitat land

- Burn vegetation, grassland or any cut material on habitat land, except as part of a Heather & Grass Burning Regulation and Code (2008) compliant Burning Management Plan (BMP).

- Apply organic manures (as defined under Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations) e.g. livestock manures, slurry, digestate, sewage sludge, waste-paper sludge, other off and on–farm wastes, manufactured fertilisers, basic slag, calcified seaweed, gypsum, and any hazardous or non-hazardous substances (including sheep-dip) on habitat land

- Apply farmyard manure except where permitted by a specific SFS Universal or Optional habitat action (for example UA5: Enclosed semi-natural dry grassland managed as hay meadow. You must record the application of farmyard manure in the circumstances above in your activity diary.

- Apply lime on habitat land except where permitted by a specific SFS Universal or Optional habitat action (for example UA5: Enclosed semi-natural dry neutral grassland). You must record the application of lime in your activity diary.

- Use Plant Protection Products (PPP) on habitat land, except to:

    - spot treat and control the following injurious weeds; spear thistle, creeping thistle, curled dock, broad–leaved dock and common ragwort, for example, where there is a threat to the health and welfare of livestock and horses, or

    - control invasive non-native species such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, rhododendron, giant hogweed

    - control invasive vegetation on historic features and traditional buildings and farm structures

- treat plant or tree pests and diseases as recommended by relevant authorities and/or if required in a Statutory Notice, e.g. Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHN)

  See Table 1: Undesirable vegetation control methods for different vegetation types. Please also refer to Universal Action 2: Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

- Plant trees without prior approval from Welsh Government

Supplementary Feeding across the holding

- Do not Supplementary feed livestock on or next to archaeological sites, steep slopes, watercourses or Public Rights of Way.

Supplementary Feeding on habitat land

- Supplementary feeding must be carried out in such a way that avoids causing damage to the vegetation, soil and watercourses. Damage may be from overgrazing, nutrient enrichment, excessive trampling of vegetation, soil poaching by grazing animals, rutting by vehicles used to transport feed, resulting in soil erosion and water pollution.

- Do not supplementary feed on **enclosed** habitat land, except for areas of existing hardstanding where required specifically for the welfare of livestock (see below).

  - remove plastic wrap and containers once feed has been dispensed

  - site feed locations at least 10 metres from any watercourse

- Do not Supplementary feed on **unenclosed** habitat land (land beyond the upper limit of enclosure) except, where required specifically for the welfare of livestock*, as follows:

  - when feeding a concentrated feed, all livestock should have adequate access and be able to eat at the same time.

  - supplementary feeding sites must avoid peatland and vegetation which is sensitive to damage and nutrient enrichment including blanket bog, heathland, species rich grassland, mires and native broadleaf woodland.

- only the feeds from the following list can be used and the ration fed should be appropriate for the category of animals being fed:
    - hay (to be scattered)
    - haylage (preserved grass with a dry matter content of at least 60%) (To be scattered)
    - compound feed
    - dried sugar beet feed (nut form only); not allowed where equines can access the supplementary feed
    - feed blocks and liquid feed in suitable containers
    - Move feed locations on a daily basis. Feed blocks may be moved less frequently but damage as described above must be avoided
- bale/ring feeders and troughs must not be used at any time
- remove plastic wrap and containers from the land once feed has been dispensed
- site feed locations at least 10 metres from any watercourse

*Supplementary feeding, as outlined above, is permitted on habitat land where this practice is required specifically for the welfare of livestock. Adverse weather conditions and meeting the nutritional demands of heavily pregnant animals, are likely to trigger a need for the provision of supplementary feed.

Supplementary feeding will be permitted where access to forage is severely restricted during adverse weather conditions, provided it is supplied without causing environmental damage and the welfare of livestock is not compromised.

Adverse weather is defined as a period when the available vegetation is covered by snow or is subjected to continuous hard frost, prolonged drought, or prolonged heavy rainfall.

Exemptions to the above conditions may apply where they are required to deliver towards specific environmental benefits required within the SFS Optional Layer. These exemptions will be included in specific habitat management requirements if applicable.

Gamebirds are not considered livestock for the purposes of the SFS. Supplementary feeding of gamebirds in line with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)

‘Sustainable Gamebird Releasing’ Guidelines is permitted where birds are lawfully released.

Table 1: Undesirable vegetation control

Undesirable vegetation includes injurious weeds under the Weeds Act 1959, invasive native species, such as bracken, invasive non-native species (INNS), such as Rhododendron ponticum, and other undesirable vegetation, such as soft rush and nettles.

Please refer to the table below for the acceptable control management, the maximum extent, correct timings and which broad habitat classifications where acceptable control methods may be applied.

Vegetation type	Acceptable control method	Maximum extent to manage	When to manage	Permissible in habitat classifications
Injurious weeds (Weeds Act (1959))	Topping (not mowing) Spot treatment Weed wiping	N/A	May - August	1 to 12
Invasive native species	Cutting, topping or mowing Bruising Cattle / pony grazing	N/A	May - August	1 to 12
Invasive non-native species (INNS) (	Cutting, topping or mowing Bruising	N/A	All year round	1 to 12

	Cattle / pony grazing Spot treatment Weed wiping			
Soft Rush	Topping or cutting, but not mowing	30%	not permissible 15 March – 15 July	1, 3, 4, 5a, 6
Other e.g. nettles	Topping or cutting, but not mowing	30%	May to August	1, 3, 4, 5a, 6

H5 Part 3: Trees

This part applies to individual trees, or groups of trees under 0.1ha. For areas of tree canopy cover and woodland over 0.1 ha see UA9: Woodland Maintenance.

The aim of these requirements is to retain and maintain all trees on your holding, including existing mature, veteran and ancient trees as well as any tree planted as a demonstration of progress towards delivery of your tree and hedgerow planting opportunity plan.

You should:

- Prevent damage to trees from livestock or machinery.
- Retain standing dead trees where safe to do so (where not a demonstrable hazard).
- Ensure pruning or lopping is undertaken appropriately with a clean cut and does not damage or harm the tree.
- Retain fallen dead timber (except for all species of spruce) in situ or remove to a nearby shady location.
- Report potential tree health diseases using the Tree Alert website

Do not:

- Plough or roll under the crown / canopy of in-field trees.

- Apply organic manures (as defined under Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations) e.g. livestock manures, slurry, digestate, sewage sludge, waste-paper sludge, other off and on–farm wastes, manufactured fertilisers, basic slag, calcified seaweed, and any hazardous or non-hazardous substances (including sheep-dip) on habitat land.

- Apply lime under the crown / canopy.

- Spray or allow drift of Plant Protection Products under the crown/canopy.

- Plant additional trees within 5m from the edge of the tree canopy.

- Supplementary feed beneath the canopy of / or within 5 metres of any veteran trees.

- Store machinery or materials beneath in-field veteran trees.

- Cut or trim trees during the bird nesting season (1 March to 31 August) unless the following exceptions apply and you can also meet your obligations under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for the protection of wild birds.

    - the tree overhangs a highway, road, track or footpath to which the public have access, and the work is necessary because the overhanging vegetation:
        - obstructs the passage of vehicles or pedestrians
        - obstructs the view of drivers, or the light from a public lamp, or
        - is a danger to horse-riders
    - the tree needs to be cut or trimmed because it is dead, diseased or damaged or insecurely rooted, and is therefore likely to cause danger by falling onto a highway, road or footpath
    - the company responsible for the maintenance of any overhanging electricity or telephone lines, needs to cut back trees for safety reasons
    - on arable land, where the normal agricultural practice requires that a winter arable crop is planted before 31 August, you will be able to cut back the relevant trees from 1 August as long as nesting birds are not disturbed
    - there is an enforcement notice issued by the Local Authority under the Highways Act 1980 Section 154 in order that the passage of vehicles or pedestrians is not obstructed or endangered, it is considered that the tree

and/or branches of trees at the locations described require trimming/lopping or pleaching
    - the cutting or trimming is carried out in order to maintain a ditch
    - the tree is in an orchard
    - hedgerow restoration, e.g. laying/coppicing can be carried out in March as long as nesting birds are not disturbed.
    - hedge restoration e.g. laying or coppicing is permitted up to 30 April if specifically for a competition and/or training event, as long as written permission is obtained from Welsh Government in advance of the event. The event also needs to comply with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

      You should retain evidence, e.g. photographs and/or any letters from the relevant competent authorities that show clearly why it was necessary to cut or trim trees between 1 March and 31 August. These should be provided at inspection if requested.

- Fell any tree unless an exemption applies. These are:

    - a valid felling licence
    - full planning permission
    - a notice issued to comply with an Act of Parliament or Act of the Senedd, such as a notice served by a highway authority
    - a Statutory Plant Health Notice

    The exception to the above is if the tree is dangerous and there is a real and immediate danger, rather than a perceived danger.

    If you are challenged you will need to provide evidence that the trees were dangerous, for example through an accredited arboriculturist's report or photographic evidence.

H6 Part 4: Landscape features

The aim of these requirements is to maintain and retain historic and landscape features, which are important features in our cultural and physical landscape.

In addition to the requirements in the Universal Code, you are required to manage any known historic features on your farm in accordance with UA11: Historic Environment. The detailed management requirements of different types of historic features are set out in section J11.

Landscape Features are defined as:

Hedges, stone walls, earth banks, stone-faced banks, slate fences, stone stiles, sheep creeps and culverts, field margins and ponds. Some of these are used as traditional field boundaries, but that may not always be the case.

- ‘Hedges’ include any hedge up to a maximum width of 10 metres.

- ‘Stone wall’ means traditional stone wall and includes earth banks / Cloddiau with two constructed stone faces such as the traditional ‘Penclawdd Wall’ or ‘Pembrokeshire Hedge’.

- ‘Stone-faced bank’ means an earth bank where one side is constructed of stone.

- ‘Stone stiles’ are made of large slabs cantilevered on both sides of a stone wall.

- ‘Sheep creeps’ are a purposely constructed gap in the base of a drystone wall, commonly topped with a granite lintel.

- ‘Culverts’ are a structure that channels water past an obstacle or to a subterranean waterway. This does not refer to culverts constructed of plastic or other modern materials.

- ‘Pond’ means a body of water up to 1ha.e. It may occur naturally or have been historically created through a previous rural development scheme (e.g. Glastir Advanced) or otherwise.

You must:

- Ensure all external boundaries are stock proof appropriate for the livestock kept on the land. This only applies to your existing enclosed farm boundaries, for which you have sole and full management responsibility.

- Retain all landscape features such as stone walls, stone-faced banks, hedges, earth-banks, and slate fences. Their removal or destruction is not permitted without written planning or development consent from the relevant authority.

- Maintain traditional boundary features such as iron railed fencing, wooden pales, slate fencing, cloddiau, or stone walls. You must:

    - inspect on a regular basis for deterioration

    - carry out basic scrub and invasive vegetation removal (to include non-native species) on scrub developed since you first claimed the SFS - Universal Layer.

- carry out basic erosion repair, on erosion which has occurred since you first claimed the SFS - Universal Layer.

- Retain all stone stiles, sheep creeps, culverts and other traditional features.

- Keep your land free from rubbish, litter, derelict machinery and equipment. Whenever possible all bale wrappings and other plastics should be recycled through an approved carrier.

- Retain a buffer of 1m from the edge of a hedgerow (or the fence for hedgerows that are fenced) that is not ploughed and receives no organic or inorganic fertilizers, pesticide or herbicide (or drift). This buffer is measured from the edge/heel of the hedge bank or base or the fence.

- Retain all ponds on the holding and do not fill in or drain part of a pond.

Do not:

- Damage any traditional boundary features such as iron railed fencing, wooden pales, slate fencing, cloddiau, hedges or stone walls.

- Use soil and other fine material to fill in gaps in the middle of a dry-stone wall between face stones.

- Use wedges (small stones to secure larger stones) on the face of a wall.

- Store manure, silage or other farm wastes and any hazardous or non-hazardous substances on landscape or archaeological features.

- Cultivate (e.g. plough, rotovate, tine or disc) any land within 1m of a hedgerow, stone wall or earth bank, regardless of the size of the field.

- Cut or trim hedgerows (including hedgerow trees) during the bird nesting season (1 March to 31 August) unless:

  - the tree overhangs a highway, road, track or footpath to which the public have access, and the work is necessary for health and safety reasons because of overhanging vegetation:
    - obstructs the passage of vehicles or pedestrians
    - obstructs the view of drivers, or the light from a public lamp,
    - is a danger to horse-riders

- the tree needs to be cut or trimmed because it is dead, diseased or damaged or insecurely rooted, and is therefore likely to cause danger by falling onto a highway, road or footpath
- the company responsible for the maintenance of any overhanging electricity or telephone lines, needs to cut back trees for safety reasons
- on arable land, where the normal agricultural practice requires that a winter arable crop is planted before 31 August, you will be able to cut back the relevant trees from 1 August as long as nesting birds are not disturbed
- there is an enforcement notice issued by the Local Authority under the Highways Act 1980 Section 154 in order that the passage of vehicles or pedestrians is not obstructed or endangered, it is considered that the tree and/or branches of trees at the locations described require trimming/lopping or pleaching
- the cutting or trimming is carried out in order to maintain a ditch
- the tree is in an orchard
- hedgerow laying restoration, e.g. laying/coppicing can be carried out in March as long as nesting birds are not disturbed.
- hedge restoration e.g. laying or coppicing is permitted up to 30 April if specifically for a competition and/or training event, as long as written permission is obtained from Welsh Government in advance of the event. The event also needs to comply with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

The exceptions described above are allowed as long as you also meet your obligations under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for the protection of wild birds.

You should retain evidence, e.g. photographs and/or any letters from the relevant competent authorities that show clearly why it was necessary to cut or trim trees between 1 March and 31 August. These should be provided at inspection if requested.

- Fell any tree unless an exemption applies. These are:

  - a valid felling licence
  - full planning permission
  - a notice issued to comply with an Act of Parliament or Act of the Senedd, such as a notice served by a highway authority
  - a Statutory Plant Health Notice

  The exception to the above is if the tree is dangerous and there is a real and immediate danger, rather than a perceived danger.

  If you are challenged you will need to provide evidence that the trees were dangerous, for example through an accredited arboriculturist’s report or photographic evidence.

H7 Derogations

Where you are unable to meet one or more of the requirements of this Universal Code, a derogation must be requested by completing the ‘Sustainable Farming Scheme - Derogation or Enquiry Form’ on your RPW Online account. Each case will be considered individually. See Section K for further information.

Section I: 10% Habitat Requirement

It is a Universal Code requirement for at least 10% of each farm to be actively managed as habitat to benefit biodiversity alongside food production. This is an important element of the scheme to help Welsh Government achieve our biodiversity targets and tackle the nature emergency.

The SAF will automatically calculate the area required to meet the 10% threshold and based on your declaration it will confirm if you have met this Universal Code requirement or not.

If we find you have not met the 10% habitat requirement (e.g. at inspection) a sanction may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix. (see Section Q)

I1 Calculating the 10% habitat requirement threshold

The minimum area required to meet the 10% threshold will be calculated on the SAF from your eligible Whole Farm Area.

Areas of apportioned common land (except for sole grazier common), and shared grazing land will not be used or included to calculate this requirement.

Details on how the Whole Farm Area will be calculated are available at Section D.

Example:

A farm with a calculated Whole Farm Area of 75 hectares will be required to have at least 7.5 hectares of habitat across the Whole Farm Area i.e. 75ha / 10 = 7.5ha.

I2 Eligible land covers and landscape features for the 10% habitat requirement

The total areas of the following land cover and landscape features criteria, will be used to determine if you have met the 10% habitat requirement, in the order set out below:

1) All semi-natural habitat as defined under UA5: Habitat Maintenance.
2) Established broadleaf woodland. These are areas of tree canopy or woodland of 0.1ha or more.
3) Hedgerows restored or created since 1 April 2022 under the Glastir Advanced, Glastir Small Grants or Small Grants – Environment schemes.
4) Hedgerows in ‘good condition’.
5) Temporary Habitat under UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land

Details for each land cover and landscape feature, and how they will be considered in the SAF are outlined below, including the proxy habitat areas which will be calculated from any declared hedgerows.

I3 Existing semi-natural habitat as defined under UA5: Habitat Maintenance.

These semi-natural habitat areas will be shown on your SFS Map. If you completed a SFS Data Confirmation form, any areas updated should be reflected in the SFS Map.

You will have an opportunity to amend, confirm and declare all areas of semi-natural habitat on your farm in the Habitat Baseline Review on your SAF 2026. See Section L7

Habitat on common land and land used in common/shared grazing, except for sole grazier common, registered as a field parcel with RPW, cannot be used to meet the 10% habitat requirement.

The SAF will automatically include all areas of declared semi-natural habitat from your field parcels to confirm if you have met the 10% requirement.

I4 Established broadleaf woodland. Areas of 0.1ha or more of woodland

Broadleaf woodland and tree canopy areas will be shown on your SFS map. If you completed a SFS Data Confirmation form any areas updated should be reflected in the SFS Map.

You will have an opportunity to confirm and declare all areas of woodland and tree canopy on your farm in the Habitat Baseline Review on your SAF 2026. See Section L7.

The areas of established broadleaf woodland used for the 10% habitat requirement are defined as:

- Woodland or areas of tree canopy, mapped in individual blocks of 0.1 hectares or more. Please note, this area may also include any canopy overhang from neighbouring farms.
- Areas of broadleaf woodlands established up until the point you submit your SAF 2026. These may not have been included in your SFS Data Confirmation or SFS map.
- ‘Established,’ means newly planted woodland or groups of trees in the ground. Newly planted woodland does not need to have reached a certain maturity.
- ‘Broadleaf,’ means more than 80% of the area is made up of broadleaf trees. These areas may contain a maximum of 20% conifer and evergreen species throughout.

All tree canopies or woodland, in individual blocks of 0.1 hectares or more must be managed in accordance with UA9: Woodland Maintenance. See Section J9.

The SAF will automatically include all areas of declared broadleaf woodland of 0.1 ha or more to confirm if you have met the 10% requirement or not.

Please note: Areas of habitat within the established woodland areas, or underneath the tree canopy areas, will not be used to calculate the 10% requirement. This would amount to double counting the habitat area.

If you do not automatically meet the threshold from semi-natural habitat and woodland areas, you will need to consider hedgerows and/or temporary habitat cover options to meet the 10% habitat requirements.

I5 Hedgerows restored or created since 1 April 2022 with Welsh Government Support.

These are any hedgerows, restored or created since 1 April 2022 under the Glastir Advanced, Glastir Small Grants or Small Grants – Environment schemes.

These hedgerows do not need to meet the definition of hedgerows in 'good condition'.

Please note: Hedgerows restored or created before 1 April 2022, with or without Welsh Government support, can only be included to meet the 10% habitat requirements if they meet the definition of hedgerows in 'good condition' (see below).

You must continue to meet the requirements of the scheme under which you have received funding to restore or create the hedgerows for them to be considered.

These are defined as:

- 'Restored' means improving the condition of an existing hedgerow, through rejuvenation (coppicing or laying) and/or re-stocking and gapping-up as required to restore stem density and continuity.
- 'Created' means establishing a functional hedgerow where none previously existed, such as along existing field boundaries or to establish new boundaries.

You will have an opportunity to declare the length of these hedgerows on your holding in the Field Data Section on your SAF 2026. See Section L6.

I6 Hedgerows in 'good condition'.

Hedgerows in 'good condition' must meet the following criteria to be included and considered for the 10% habitat requirement:

- Be a mix of woody shrubs that provide significant value for biodiversity and shaped by trimming.
- Measure at least 3 metres wide and 2 metres tall, or 2 metres wide and 3 metres tall.
    - The hedgerow should be measured in the winter, after any cutting/trimming has been completed.

- The height should be measured at the base of the hedgerow. This would be the ground or the top of an earth bank if present.
- The width should be taken from the base of the hedgerow.

- Are at least 20 metres in continuous length, measured along a traditional field boundary. This need to be a current field parcel boundary.
  - Gateways do not form part of the continuous length. Where a gateway is present, either side of the gateway will be considered the start of a new length of hedgerow.

- Gaps must total no more than 5% of the continuous length of the hedgerow.
  - A gap is defined as a clear void in the vertical profile of the hedgerow (from top to bottom) which is greater than 1 metre in length.
  - This is to allow for the occurrence of acceptable gaps such as stile access points, incorporated water troughs and shaded areas under hedgerow trees.

  Example:

  A hedgerow of 30 metres, with a 3-metre gap in the middle. As the gap is more than 5% and the remaining hedgerow lengths are less than 20 metres of continuous lengths each, the hedgerows cannot be included.

- Livestock must be prevented from damaging the hedgerow from both sides.
  - Provided livestock do not have access to the hedgerow, it does not need to be fenced i.e. where one side of the hedgerow is adjacent to a public road, or the hedgerow is on arable land.
  - Should the management of adjacent land parcels change to keeping livestock, fencing should be erected.
  - It is acceptable to use electric fencing to protect the hedgerows if the electric fencing ensures stock exclusion.
  - If you have management control of only one side of the hedgerow and it is not stock proof on your neighbour’s side, the hedgerow cannot be included.

- Where the hedgerow is double fenced, there must be a minimum of 3 metres between double fences.

  As a concession, we will allow a minimum of 2 metres between double fences if the fences have been erected under the Glastir Entry scheme from 1 January 2012 or the Glastir Advanced scheme from 1 January 2013.

However, all other Hedgerows double fenced with or without Welsh Government support must be double fenced at a minimum of 3 metres between double fences to be meet the ‘Good Condition’ definition.

- Hedgerows adjacent to ineligible features such as roads, tracks or areas declared as non-agricultural activities may be included to meet the 10% habitat requirements.

You will have an opportunity to declare the length of the ‘Good Condition’ hedgerows on your holding in the Field Data Section on your SAF 2026. See Section L6.

For internal boundaries: If it is an internal hedgerow between your own field parcels this would be considered as having 50% management control for each parcel resulting in 100% overall.

For external boundaries: You will need to consider whether you have management control of 100% of the hedgerow (both sides) or only 50% of the hedgerow (one side).

I7 Calculating the habitat area of the hedgerows declared for 10% habitat requirements

We will use the following calculation to establish the habitat area of hedgerows to contribute to the 10% habitat requirement:

- Length of hedgerow multiplied by 3 where you have 100% management control
- Length of hedgerow multiplied by 1.5 where you confirm you have management control of 50% of the hedgerow (one side)
- The total in metres squared is then divided by 10,000 to give a figure in hectares.

Example:

A 100-metre-long hedgerow (where you have management control of both sides) is multiplied by 3 to equal 300 square metres. This will equal 0.03 hectares to contribute towards the 10% habitat requirement. i.e. 300m^2 /10,000 = 0.03ha.

Please note: Hedgerows used to contribute to the 10% habitat requirement do not attract the Habitat Maintenance Payment.

All hedgerows that are regularly cut or trimmed must be managed in accordance with UA8: Hedgerow Management. See Section J8.

If you do not meet the threshold from semi-natural habitat, woodland areas and hedgerows you will need to create temporary habitat on your holding to ensure you meet the 10% habitat requirement.

I8 Temporary habitat created under UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land.

If you have insufficient existing habitat on your farm to meet the 10% habitat requirement, you must create additional temporary habitat in accordance with UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land.

You will have an opportunity to declare any temporary habitat already created and confirm the areas and location of any new temporary habitat that will be created in the Habitat Baseline Review on your SAF 2026. See Section L7.

You will have until the end of the scheme year to create the temporary habitat; and will need to confirm the completion of UA6 on the SFS Universal Dashboard.

Areas of temporary habitat created to meet the 10% threshold are eligible for the Habitat Maintenance Payment up to the 10% threshold.

Any areas of temporary habitat created above the 10% threshold will not be eligible for the Habitat Maintenance Payment.

If temporary habitat is required, we recommend you create enough to exceed the 10% threshold to allow for any miscalculations of area.

I9 How the SAF will calculate the 10% habitat requirement

The SAF 2026 will automatically:

- Calculate the **Whole Farm Area** from the field parcel size and any confirmed ineligible features on the land parcels claimed for the SFS in the Field Data Section.
- Add up the areas declared for each individual habitat criteria, outlined above, and calculate the **Total Habitat Area** on your holding.
- Calculate and confirm if you have met the 10% habitat threshold or not:

The percentage of habitat on the farm will be calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\textbf{Total Habitat Area}}{\textbf{Whole Farm Area}} \times 100$$

You will be unable to submit your SAF until you have declared sufficient habitat to meet the 10% habitat requirement, either immediately or during the scheme year.

Example 1: 10% habitat requirement threshold met from existing semi-natural habitat and established broadleaf woodland areas on the farm.

Total Whole Farm Area = 95.0 ha

10% habitat requirements (10% of Whole Farm Area) = 9.5 ha

- Total area of Permanent Habitat i.e. existing semi-natural habitat = 8.0 ha
- Total Area of Broadleaf Woodland Area = 3.0 ha
- Total Length of Hedgerow Declared (converted to area) = 0.0 ha
- Total Area of Temporary Habitat = 0.0 ha

Total Habitat Area = 11.0 ha

Habitat % on the farm $\frac{\text{Total Habitat Area - 11.0 ha}}{\text{Whole Farm Area - 95.0 ha}} \times 100 = 11.6\%$

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As the 10% threshold is already met from existing semi-natural habitat and established broadleaf woodland areas, no hedgerows need to be declared, or temporary habitat created to meet the requirement.

Example 2: 10% habitat requirement not met from existing semi-natural habitat and established broadleaf woodland areas.

Total Whole Farm Area = 95.0 ha

10% habitat requirements (10% of Whole Farm Area) = 9.5 ha

- Total Area of Permanent Habitat i.e. existing semi-natural habitat = 5.0 ha
- Total Area of Broadleaf Woodland Area = 0.0 ha
- Total Length of Hedgerow Declared (converted to area) = 1.00 ha

- **Total Area of Temporary Habitat = 3.5 ha**

Total Habitat Area = 9.5 ha

Habitat % on the farm $\frac{\text{Total Habitat Area - 9.5 ha}}{\text{Whole Farm Area - 95.0 ha}} \times 100 = 10.0\%$

As the 10% threshold was not met from existing semi-natural habitat and there were no established broadleaf woodland areas, additional habitat is calculated from any hedgerows declared on the SAF.

However, as the combined areas of semi-natural habitat and hedgerows is only 6 ha, and 9.5 ha is required to meet the 10% habitat requirement, an **additional minimum of 3.5 ha temporary habitat must be created to reach the 10% threshold.**

I10 Inspection Findings

At inspection, we will check the existing semi natural habitat, established broadleaf woodland and any hedgerows and temporary habitat declared to meet the 10% habitat threshold.

Any land or landscape features that do not meet the UA requirements or definitions outlined above will be removed and we will not use any additional habitat features found at inspection to ‘offset’ against any land cover or features found to be ineligible i.e. we will not exchange ineligible features for any eligible features found at inspection, retrospectively.

We recommend you declare enough habitat to exceed the 10% threshold to allow for any miscalculations or ineligible areas which may be found at inspection.

If we find you have not met the 10% habitat requirement a sanction may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanction Matrix (see Section Q).

I11 Permanent habitat creation under Optional layer of the scheme

Any permanent habitat created, after you have submitted your SAF, including those created under the Optional Layer of the scheme will not count towards the 10% habitat requirements within the scheme year.

Areas of newly created permanent habitat will need to be confirmed and declared on your SAF in the following scheme year i.e. permanent habitat created after 15 May 2026, can count towards the Universal Code 10% habitat requirements in the 2027 scheme year.

Section J: Universal Actions

The SFS – Universal Layer contains a set of requirements, known as Universal Actions (UA).

The Universal Actions are;

- UA1: Soil Health
- UA2: Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- UA3: Benchmarking
- UA4: Continuous Procession Development (CPD)
- UA5: Habitat Maintenance
- UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land
- UA7: Designated Site Management Plan
- UA8: Hedgerow Management
- UA9: Woodland Maintenance
- UA10: Tree and hedgerow planting opportunity plan
- UA11: Historic Environment
- UA12: Animal Health and Welfare

The rational and detailed requirements for each Universal Actions are set out in the sections below, and will explain the following:

J1 Who needs to complete the Universal Action

Universal Actions must only be completed if they are relevant to your holding. For example, the following Universal Actions may not be applicable to your farming business:

- UA1 is not applicable if your agriculturally improved land has not previously received or may not receive inputs (natural and artificial) or lime.
- UA2 is not applicable if plant protection products are not used on your land.
- UA6 is not applicable if you have enough existing habitat to meet 10% habitat requirement.
- UA7 is not applicable if your farm does not contain a designated site such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- UA8 is not applicable if your farm does not have any hedgerows or you do not manage any of your hedgerows by cutting or trimming.
- UA9 is not applicable if you have no existing woodland in individual blocks of tree canopy of 0.1ha or greater.
- UA11 is not applicable if you do not have any historic features on your land.
- UA12 is not applicable if you do not have any livestock on your land, for which you are the owner or registered keeper.

J2 Requirements

Full details of the Universal Action requirements that must be met.

J3 Management Recommendations

Details management recommendations, to guide you to achieve the aims and outcomes where appropriate. These are best practice and will not be checked at inspection.

J4 Derogations

Details of what action you should take if you are unable to meet one of more of the requirements set out for the Universal Action.

J5 SAF 2026

Explains what information will need to be declared on the SAF. This information will be used to populate the SFS Universal Dashboard.

J6 SFS Universal Dashboard

Explains what information must be confirmed on the SFS Universal Dashboard. Further details regarding the dashboard are set out in Section L12

J7 Record Keeping

Explains record keeping requirements for each of the Universal Actions and what might be checked at inspection.

Please note: The Universal Action are scheme requirements. You must ensure you comply with all legal requirements regarding your holding and farming business.

J1 UA1: Soil Health

J1.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to contribute to the understanding of the condition of your soil and effectively plan how to increase and/or maintain the long-term health, productivity, and resilience of your soil.

Carrying out soil sampling and analysis is vital to identify areas that may require targeted management or action. It can support more sustainable and efficient food production; help mitigate and adapt to climate change and improve environmental outcomes.

A 5-year soil testing cycle is considered good practice for low-intensity agricultural systems. We also intend to capture soil testing results for national monitoring and reporting purposes. The test results will not be used for any other purpose and will not be used to identify individual farms i.e. we will aggregate the data.

J1.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action

You must complete this Universal Action if you claim on field parcels with Improved Land. This is land that has been managed to improve agricultural productivity, for example by reseeding, or that has previously received or may receive lime and/or inputs.

We define inputs as the application of slurry, inorganic fertilisers, organic manures and fertilisers, farmyard manure, lime, basic slag, calcified seaweed, sewage sludge and wastepaper sludge.

Land that is classified as permanent habitat land does not need to be soil tested under the SFS - Universal Layer.

J1.3 Requirements

You must ensure a minimum of 20% of your fields containing improved land are soil tested in 2026 (year 1) or have been tested in the past five years.
You must soil test on average 20% of your field parcels containing improved land from year 2 onwards, so that all parcels are sampled within a 5-year period unless you opt for a break in year 2.

<u>Soil Testing undertaken before SFS</u>

Soil testing completed on field parcels containing improved land after 1 January 2022 can count towards this Universal Action. The test results must have included results for P, K, Mg and pH but does not require a result for SOM.

In line with good practice, field parcels will require soil-testing again 5 years from the date of the last test. This is in line with the soil testing requirements.

Soil Testing under SFS.

From 1 January 2026, you must test for, as a minimum, Phosphorous (P), Potassium (K), Magnesium (Mg), Potential Hydrogen (pH - Soil pH is the measure of soil acidity or alkalinity, and Soil Organic Matter (SOM). Soil samples must be sent to an accredited laboratory for testing. It is important that all the samples for your farm are sent to the same accredited laboratory to ensure they are treated and analysed identically and are comparable.

The AHDB website lists a range of accredited laboratories where soil samples can be sent for analysis and provides details of companies that can undertake the soil sampling and conduct the laboratory analysis. sent for analysis and provides details of companies that will both undertake the soil sampling and conduct the laboratory analysis.

Technical Guidance for Soil Testing will be published on the Welsh Government website.

The soil testing must be completed by 31 December each year.

A 5-year testing regime could look like this:

Scheme year	% of field parcels containing improved land tested	Minimum cumulative requirement
Year 1	20% of land parcels tested	20% tested
Year 2	20% of land parcels tested	40% tested
Year 3	20% of land parcels tested	60% tested
Year 4	20% of land parcels tested	80% tested
Year 5	20% of land parcels tested	100% tested

You may test more than 20% in any scheme year provided you meet the cumulative requirement in each year across the five-year period.

Where you opt for a break in year 2, a soil testing regime could look like this;

Scheme Year	% of field parcels containing improved land tested	Minimum cumulative requirement
Year 1	20% of land parcels tested	20% tested
Year 2	Break – no soil testing completed	Break
Year 3	20% of land parcels tested	40% tested
Year 4	20% of land parcels tested	60% tested
Year 5	20% of land parcels tested	80% tested
Year 6	20% of land parcels tested	100% tested

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q)

J1.4 SAF 2026

We will identify your improved land on the SAF and will use that information to identify the potential field parcels that require soil testing.

If you have improved land that has not received inputs since 1 April 2022, and/or will not receive inputs (natural and artificial) and/or lime within the scheme year, you will need to confirm this on the SAF. Those fields will then be removed from the soil testing requirements.

This information will be used to identify if the Universal Action is applicable to your holding and will be shown on your SFS Universal Dashboard.

J1.5 SFS Universal Dashboard

The SFS Universal Dashboard will identify all the individual field parcels that must be soil tested.

You must record the soil testing results for each individual field parcel you have soil tested by 15 January 2027 on the SFS Universal Dashboard.

You will need to confirm the field number, date of test and the results of the test (P, K, Mg, pH, SOM).

As a minimum, you must enter one set of soil test results for each field parcel.

The SOM result is not mandatory for any test results before 1 January 2026, and for testing carried out before 1 January 2026 you will only need to enter the date of the soil testing as a minimum.

Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action from the soil test results entered.

Soil test results entered will be used for national monitoring only and will not be used for farm-level assessment. Further information is available at Overview-of-National-Soil-Monitoring-Schemes-Dec24.pdf

J1.6 Record Keeping

Your soil testing results should be kept on-farm for a minimum of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested.

J1.7 Farming Connect

From 1 April 2026, Farming Connect will no longer fund soil testing for farmers in SFS, however Farming Connect support will still be available to interpret the results and advise on any appropriate follow up actions.

J2 UA2: Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

J2.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to consider Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as a whole-farm approach that uses all available methods to prevent, monitor, and control pests, weeds and diseases.

It can help manage pesticide resistance and minimise the risks of environmental harm by targeting application and making use of non-chemical alternatives.

IPM is not a fixed set of practices but a flexible approach to help you make the best decisions for your farm.

J2.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action

You must complete this Universal Action if you use, or employ contractors to use, Plant Protection Products (PPP) on any of the land you farm and claim. This includes any small amounts of PPP used for spot spraying or targeted hand-held applications e.g. if you are using a weed wiper or spraying docks/thistles.

PPP includes the following; insecticides, herbicides, pesticides, fungicides (including seed dressings), molluscicides or plant growth regulators.

A list of approved products is available at: Pesticides Register

If you have not used, or do not intend to use, PPP during the entire calendar year you do not need to complete this Universal Action.

J2.3 Requirements

PPP

You must collect and record data of all **PPP** used on your holding

This is a requirement of the SFS Regulatory Baseline: SMR10 – restrictions on using plant protection products and Universal Code. Your records should include details of;

- when – date and time applied
- where – location and size of the area treated
- what crop was being treated
- why – reason for treatment
- what product was used – including Ministerially Approved Pesticide Product (MAPP). For products first authorised before 1 July 1999, this is known as a Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) number.
- how much – product and total dressing
- weather conditions at the time of the treatment
- any other relevant information

There is no standard format for recording PPP usage. You may find it useful to use the **Pesticide Treatment Record** available on the Welsh Government website.

If you do not meet the requirements, sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (See Section Q)

Integrated Pest Management Plan

Integrated pest management (IPM) plan involves a coordinated approach for the prevention, detection, and control of pests, weeds, and diseases.

You must complete an assessment, by 31 December 2026, of the use of PPP and record this in your IPM plan.

Your plan must be updated annually and be used to review your pest management decisions throughout the year.

We are not specifying which plan should be completed, as there are many suitable industry templates available.

The following organisations offer free guidance and information (this list may not be exhaustive);

- ADAS conducts research and provides guidance
- Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board's (AHDB) IPM hub provides IPM tools and guidance for farmers
- IPM@Hutton conducts research and provides IPM resources
- IPM Works is a network demonstrating and promoting IPM strategies
- Voluntary Initiative is an industry led scheme which provides IPM planning tools, infographics and guidance for farmers

Your IPM plan should demonstrate the following as a minimum;

- your assessment of alternative methods used to reduce chemical usage
- an assessment of your current approach to crop pest, weed and disease management,
- opportunities for using additional IPM approaches.

IPM approaches include using appropriate cultivation techniques, diverse crop rotations and companion crops, pest-resistant crop varieties, tailored and efficient use of inputs (pesticides and fertiliser), and wildlife habitats in and around fields to encourage predators and other insects that feed on crop pests.

We encourage you to use this information to help identify opportunities to target and reduce PPP use to help achieve the benefits above.

You do not need to complete a separate IPM Plan if you already complete an annual plan which contains all the information above.

More information can be found on the Welsh Government website: Integrated Pest Management (IPM) | GOV.WALES

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q).

J2.4 SAF 2026

You must confirm on the SAF 2026 whether or not you use, or intend to use, PPP on your holding in 2026.

This information will be used to identify if the Universal Action is applicable to your holding and will be shown on your SFS Universal Dashboard.

J2.5 SFS Universal Dashboard

You must confirm on your SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027 that you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

You are not required, as part of this confirmation to submit records of your PPP use or submit your IPM plan.

J2.6 Record Keeping

The record of your PPP usage and your annual IPM plan must be completed and kept on your farm for a minimum of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested.

J3 UA3: Benchmarking

J3.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to support your business to benefit from basic benchmarking using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Measuring and monitoring key aspects of your farming business through the process of benchmarking will help you identify opportunities for improvement and efficiency.

KPIs show which areas are performing well and those areas that could be improved when compared to the wider industry and sector standard.

These KPIs can be used to monitor and improve farm performance, increase the farms' ability to adapt to change, enhancing profitability whilst providing benefits for the environment.

This action can link to other Universal Actions, particularly the requirements of UA12: Animal health and welfare.

J3.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action

You will need to complete this Universal Action.

J3.3 Requirements

You must complete benchmarking by 31 December 2026.

You'll need to either complete:

1) An approved industry or supplier benchmarking tool. Examples of such tools are:
   - AHDB Farmbench.
   - Farm Business Survey (England & Wales)

Or

2) You can use the benchmarking tool: FARMDATA+ available from 1 April 2026 through Farming Connect.

Please note: We will not accept your own records as evidence of benchmarking, you must use a dedicated benchmarking tool.

We will review the details of benchmarking tools used in 2026 to develop a full list of benchmarking tools acceptable under the scheme for future years.

If you do not meet the requirements, sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanction Matrix (see Section Q).

FARMDATA+ benchmarking tool

FARMDATA+ has been developed specifically for SFS and will be freely available through Farming Connect from 1 April 2026.

It will have a list of KPIs for the following sectors: Arable, Beef, Dairy, Sheep, Pigs, Poultry and Horticulture. It also has a “Whole Farm” section.

Registration details and a full list of KPIs available for SFS – Universal Layer are at Annex 1 along with guidance on how to register for the new Farming Connect Programme and access FARMDATA+.

If you use the FARMDATA+ benchmarking tool for this Universal Action you will be required to complete the following:

- If you only have a single sector farm you must complete a minimum of two sector specific KPIs, and one “Whole Farm” KPI.
- If you have multiple sectors, you must complete a minimum of two sector specific KPIs per sector, and one “Whole Farm” KPI
- If you do not own or keep appropriate livestock or grow crops, you must complete three ‘Whole Farm’ KPIs.

These KPIs should reflect aspects of your farming business that are most relevant and meaningful to your operations.

You do not need to complete the same KPIs each year as your circumstances may change, however, KPIs work best when you can monitor trends over several years to see whether performance is improving.

Once you have entered your data in FARMDATA+, the tool will calculate and display your results. Based on these results you will be signposted to support available from Welsh Government, Farming Connect and other providers to help you make improvements where you feel they are needed.

The KPIs are for your own use. We will not be monitoring or assessing the benchmarking data.

The KPIs are specific to your farm, and the results will have no impact on your Universal Payment.

J3.4 SAF 2026

You will be required to confirm which Agriculture Sectors apply to your business when completing your SAF.

J3.5 SFS Universal Dashboard

You must confirm on your SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027 that you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

If you are using an approved industry or supplier benchmarking tool you must provide the following details;

- Benchmarking tool used

- Date benchmarking completed

Once the information has been validated, the SFS Universal dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

If using FARMDATA+, the titles of the completed KPIs will be automatically shared with RPW and used to update your SFS Universal dashboard. Your KPI results will not be shared.

J3.6 Record Keeping

Your benchmarking results should be kept on-farm for a minimum of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested.

If the Universal Action has been completed using FARMDATA+, no records will be required for inspection.

J4 UA4: Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

J4.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to invest in your professional development and your farm's future success.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is an essential learning and development approach for staying up to date with the latest farming practices, technology, and regulations. By regularly taking part in training, workshops, and learning activities, you can improve your skills, boost productivity, and ensure compliance with environmental and health and safety standards. CPD also supports sustainability goals and helps you adapt to market changes.

This action can link to other Universal Actions, particularly the requirement of UA12: Animal health and welfare.

J4.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action

You and/or your business partner(s) will need to complete this Universal Action

J4.3 Requirements

You and/or an individual within your farm business, as registered with RPW, must complete this action by 31 December 2026.The learning can be provided through Farming Connect (FC) or delivered by a different and independent provider. The requirement is to complete:

- a minimum of six hours of learning, and
- a mandatory Health and Safety training module

Any additional learning completed during a scheme year cannot be carried forward to future years.

However, if an individual in your business completes the learning and is also a member of another farm business (as registered with RPW), the learning completed can count towards the Universal Action for each business.

If you do not meet the requirements, sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanction Matrix (see Section Q)

Farming Connect delivered activity

The Farming Connect delivered activities listed below will only apply if completed from 1 April to 31 December 2026 and for the 2026 scheme year only.
For subsequent scheme years, they will apply from 1 January of the scheme year.

- discussion groups
- animal health and welfare workshops
- accredited training
- masterclasses

- mentoring
- Agri Academy
- Agrisgôp

All learning completed through Farming Connect is automatically recorded within an individual's Farming Connect Storfa Sgiliau account.

Specific requirement and exception for 2026 Scheme Year only.

1) The mandatory health and safety training must be completed through Farming Connect. The e-learning module is now available online, but in person support will also be made available across Wales for those that require assistance.

2) SFS related e-learning modules, already completed with Farming Connect from 1 August 2025, will count towards this Universal Action for 2026 only.

A full list of the applicable e-learning modules is available at Accredited E-learning Suites | Farming Connect

Applicable horticultural e-learning modules can be found at Horticulture E-learning modules for SFS | Farming Connect

SFS related e-learning modules, completed from 1 January 2027, will apply to the 2027 scheme year.

Each completed e-learning module is recorded as 1 hour of learning.

Link to UA12: Animal health and welfare

The Animal Welfare element focuses on lameness and body condition, which are the two most significant sources of welfare problems on farms in Wales and that also significantly impact on productivity.

You, or a member of your farm business (or a nominated individual) must complete training for competence in body condition scoring (BCS) and mobility scoring every 5 years.

Farming Connect funded animal health and welfare workshops delivered by vet practices or completion of the animal health and welfare e-learning modules can count towards the requirement of UA4 CPD (when completed in scheme year) and UA12 Animal health and welfare, if completed by the appropriate person.

The 5-year completion period under UA 12 means any of the training listed below and completed after 1 January 2022 can count for 2026 scheme year.

- Sheep Lameness AH&W Workshop (Vet-delivered, LANTRA-accredited)
- Reducing Dairy Cattle Lameness AH&W Workshop (Vet-delivered, LANTRA-accredited)
- Wales Master Lameness Accredited Training Course
- Intermediate Hoof Trimming Accredited Training Course

Full details of UA12: Animal health and welfare requirements is available at Section J12

External Learning (non-Farming Connect)

For learning provided by external providers or other organisations to be considered eligible for the requirements of this Universal Action, the learning must:

- meet one or more of the following Sustainable Land Management (SLM) objectives
    - producing food in a sustainable manner
    - mitigating and adapting to climate change
    - maintaining and enhancing the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide
    - conserving and enhancing the countryside and cultural resources; promoting public access to and engagement with them; and sustaining the Welsh language and promoting and facilitating its use

- have clear learning outcomes (the ability to define what you will have acquired and will be able to do upon successfully completing the activity).
- test the learning – either through a formatted assessment, or verbal feedback throughout the activity.
- provide confirmation of attendance, including duration i.e. time taken.

We will accept learning in the same format as those provided through Farming Connect, which will include:

- e-learning
- discussion groups
- animal health and welfare workshops
- accredited training
- masterclasses
- mentoring

We will not accept attendance at conferences, roadshow events or meetings. However, where these events include structured session or discussion groups that meet the above criteria (e.g. they meet one or more of the SLM objectives) these can be considered, provided you retain evidence of participation and details of the learning undertaken.

J4.4 SAF 2026

There is no specific information you are required to provide on the SAF 2026 in relation to this Universal Action.

J4.5 SFS Universal Dashboard

You must confirm on your SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027 that you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

If completed through Farming Connect, the details of the completed learning will be automatically shared with RPW, to update your SFS Universal Dashboard.

If the learning has been delivered by an external provider, you must confirm the following details;

- Course title
- Date of attendance
- Hours of learning
- SLM Objectives covered
- Individual from the farm business who undertook learning.

Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

J4.6 Record Keeping

Your learning records should be kept on-farm for a minimum of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested. They should evidence the details captured on your dashboard.

If the Universal Action has been completed through Farming Connect, no records will be required for inspection.

J5 UA5: Habitat Maintenance

J5.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to retain and maintain important semi-natural, or newly created, permanent habitats on your farm to benefit grazing livestock and the natural environment.

Semi-natural habitats can range from the coast to the uplands and include heathlands, wetlands and the range of species-rich grasslands of all types managed as pasture or hay fields across Welsh farms. These habitats provide forage for livestock and depend on sustainable levels of grazing to provide a home for wildlife and an attractive and diverse landscape. See Habitat Classification guidance. A

Areas of semi-natural habitat claimed and managed in accordance with this Universal Action will be eligible for the additional Habitat Maintenance Payment (see Section O).

J5.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action

You must complete this Universal Action if you have one or more of the following;

1. Coastal saltmarsh
2. Coastal sand dune and shingle beach:
   a) sand dune
   b) sand dune and shingle beach
3. Lowland and coastal heath
4. Enclosed wetland and marshy grassland:
   a) enclosed wetland: lowland bogs, fens and flush / mire
   b) marshy grassland
5. Enclosed semi-natural dry grassland:
   a) managed as grazed pasture
   b) managed as hay meadow
6. Upland open habitats
7. Traditional orchards
8. Dense bracken
9. Scrub
10. Wood pasture
11. Permanent wildlife ponds
12. Newly created habitat areas on improved land:
    a) new streamside corridors
    b) newly restored peat
    c) no input grassland from previous schemes
    d) any other improved or previously afforested land which is under habitat creation management

The location and extent of each habitat classification will be shown on the SFS Map.

Further guidance to help you identify semi-natural habitat on your holding will be available on the Welsh Government website.

Semi-natural habitat for the purposes of this Universal Action is defined as any vegetation which has a composition of less than 25% sown agricultural species as per the Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) (Wales) (EIA) Regulations 2017, or newly created habitats as confirmed on the Habitat Baseline Review on the SAF 2026.

J5.3 Requirements

You must meet these requirements and meet the requirements of the Universal Code: Part 2 – Biodiversity and Habitat (see Section H).

You must manage all semi-natural habitats on your holding, in accordance with the relevant habitat classification.

The detailed requirements for each of the broad habitat classifications are set out at Annex 2.

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions or penalties may be applied in accordance with the Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q).

J5.4 Activity Diary and Stocking Diary

There are certain activities which you should keep a record of in an activity diary. You are also required to keep a stocking diary if you have Upland open habitats. Specific details are set out in the detailed requirements in Annex 2.

Further guidance regarding activity and stocking diaries and example templates will be available in the ‘When the inspector calls’ – a helpful guide for farmers’ available on the Welsh Government website.

J5.5 Designated Sites

Land in Designated sites (e.g. Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA)) must be managed in accordance with the appropriate habitat classification. However, this may be varied if:

- You have an existing Land Management Agreement, such as a Section 16 Agreement, in place with NRW. You must continue to manage your land in accordance with this agreement until it expires.
- You have an agreed Management Plan and Schedule of works (SoW), for which SSSI consent has been issued, as part of *UA7 Designated Site Management Plan,* or
- You are undertaking more targeted habitat management under an SFS Optional theme, for which SSSI consent has been issued.

As these involve tailored site-specific management requirements and SSSI consents, where these are in place, they will supersede the requirements of this Universal Action.

If an existing Land Management Agreement with NRW requires the same action as this Universal Action for the same area of land, then the Habitat Maintenance payment will be adjusted accordingly to avoid double funding on that area.

J5.6 Derogations

The requirements of the habitat classifications set out at Annex 2 includes details of potential derogations which may apply. These are for information and are not an exhaustive list. Any requests for a derogation must be submitted using the form on your RPW Online account. Where you are unable to meet one or more of the requirements of this Universal Action, a derogation must be requested by completing the ‘Sustainable Farming Scheme - Derogation or Enquiry Form’ on your RPW Online account. Each case will be considered individually. See section K for further information.

If your holding is predominantly made up of semi-natural habitat and you are concerned there is insufficient flexibility to meet the requirements, you will be able to request advice to consider options or potential derogations to help you meet this Universal Action. Advice will be available and fast-tracked for those whose holding contains over 90% semi-natural habitat.

J5.7 SAF 2026

You must confirm areas of semi-natural habitat on your holding on the SAF 2026 in the Habitat Baseline Review. Further guidance to help you complete the baseline review will be available with the SAF ‘How to complete’ guide in March.

To avoid double funding, you must confirm on the SAF 2026 whether you are receiving payment for any of the management requirements above from any other source (e.g. NRW S16 Management Agreement). As part of the validation of your SFS - Universal Layer claim, we may request additional information to support your declaration.

J5.8 SFS Universal Dashboard

You will need to confirm on the SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027 that you have met the requirements for this Universal Action. Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

J5.9 Record Keeping

Your activity diary and stocking diary (if appropriate) must be completed and kept on your farm for a period of 5 years and make it available at inspection if requested.

J6 UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land

J6.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to create temporary habitat to complement any existing habitats on your farm and help you meet the 10% habitat requirements.

Temporary habitats, such as arable margins or herbal leys, not only support farm wildlife like pollinating insects and birds but also act as natural buffers for streams and ponds, helping to filter pollutants and reduce soil erosion.

Depending on which habitat types you choose to create, these temporary habitats can improve soil quality, reduce soil loss, reduce the impact of drought and flooding on farm, and boost beneficial invertebrates such as hoverflies and other pollinators.

J6.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action.

If you do not have sufficient semi-natural habitat, established broadleaf woodland, newly created hedgerows since 1 April 2022, or hedgerows meeting the 'good condition' criteria you must create temporary habitat on improved land to meet the 10% habitat requirement annually.

Areas of temporary habitat created and managed in accordance with this Universal Action will be eligible for the Habitat Maintenance Payment (see Section O).

However, please note any areas of temporary habitat created above the 10% threshold will not be eligible for the Habitat Maintenance Payment.

See Section I for further details regarding the 10% habitat requirement.

J6.3 Requirements

You must create sufficient temporary habitat before the end of the scheme year (i.e. 31 December 2026).

You can choose one or more temporary habitats from the following list:

1. fallow crop margins
2. unfertilised, unsprayed and unharvested cereal and linseed headlands
3. fixed rough grass margins on arable land
4. rotational rough grass margins on arable land
5. unsprayed spring sown cereal and protein crop mix with stubbles retained
6. retain cereal winter stubbles
7. wildlife cover crop on improved land
8. unsprayed, unfertilized and uncultivated buffer adjacent to existing habitat. (including open water) on improved grassland
9. mixed leys on improved land with a closed period (also referred to as multi-species or herbal leys)
10. late cut improved grasslands
11. improved grassland allowed to set seed

The detailed management requirements for each temporary habitat type are included at Annex 3.

Temporary habitat is not classified as semi-natural habitat. Therefore, you do not need to meet Universal Code: Part 2 Biodiversity and Habitat requirements on this land. You do however need to meet all other Universal Code requirements as far as they apply to you.

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q).

J6.4 Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations

When selecting land to be used to create temporary habitat, the definition of improved land under the **Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) Regulations 2017 (guidance)** must be used to determine which land can be cultivated.

Care should be taken where permanent grassland (claimed as GR2 on SAF) is considered for cultivation to create temporary habitat as it may already include high existing habitat potential.

Selecting permanent grassland younger than 10 years is recommended to reduce this risk. Alternatively, implement non-cultivation temporary options (e.g. 10 Late cut, or 11 Allowing to set seed).

J6.5 Designated Sites

You are not permitted to select any of the temporary habitat types where cultivation is required on land classified in 2025 as permanent pasture (SAF crop code GR2), within the:

- catchment of a designated lake or
- inside, or within a 100m buffer zone of any designated river, or
- other water dependent designated site

Cultivation within a designated site is not permitted, unless you have a current SSSI consent for this activity.

A constraints map for the above is available on your SFS Map. If you wish to undertake any of these activities within any area identified on this constraints map, the normal process of applying to NRW for SSSI consent via a notice of intent will be required and no action to create a temporary habitat can be started until written consent is received.

J6.6 Activity Diary

There are certain activities for which you should keep a record in an activity diary. Specific details are set out in the detailed requirements in Annex 3.

Further guidance regarding activity diaries and example templates will be available in the ‘When the inspector calls’ - ‘a helpful guide for farmers’ available on the Welsh Government website.

J6.7 SAF 2026

If you do not meet the 10% habitat requirement, you must declare areas of temporary habitat already created, and/or confirm the areas and location of any new temporary habitat that will be created before ethe end of the scheme year, in the Habitat Baseline Review on your SAF 2026. Further guidance to help you complete the baseline review will be available with the SAF ‘How to complete’ guide in March.

You will need to declare appropriate crop codes to confirm your temporary habitat, including the use of secondary crop codes if applicable (see Annex 4).

J6.8 SFS Universal Dashboard

You will need to confirm on the SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027 that you have met the requirements for this Universal Action. Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

J6.9 Record Keeping

Your activity diary must be completed and kept on your farm for a period of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested.

J7 UA7: Designated Site Management Plan

J7.1 Aim

Wales' network of designated sites includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Ramsar Sites and National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

They are the very best examples of our precious natural environment and part of our farmed landscape. As well as playing a vital role in halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity and nature, effective management of designated sites can deliver many more crucial outcomes such as flood risk reduction and carbon storage.

Our ambition is for all designated sites in the scheme, to be under effective management by the end of 2030.

This action is the first step towards that ambition, by working with you to develop a Management Plan and agree a Schedule of Works which can then enable further actions to support and improve any designated sites on your holding.

Pre Management Plan, you will be required to maintain the site in line with requirements of UA5: Habitat maintenance and/or UA9: Woodland maintenance.

J7.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action?

You must complete this Universal Action if your holding includes part, or all, of a Designated Site (e.g. SSSI, SPA, SAC, Ramsar Site and NNR). This would also include any Common land where you are the sole owner/grazier.

We will confirm any sites you have on your holding via the SFS Map.

If you have a management agreement already in place, including a Section 16 agreement with NRW, covering the management of Designated Sites on your holding it may be sufficient to satisfy the requirement for this Universal Action.

If you have grazing rights for common land with designated sites, the owner and graziers will be able to access the collaborative layer in the SFS for a Designated Site Management Plan.

J7.3 Requirements

You will need to work in partnership with the Welsh Government and NRW to develop a Designated Site Management Plan and agree a Schedule of Works.

This Universal Action must be completed by 31 December 2030, and you will be contacted to begin the process of developing your Management Plan.

Each Designated Site on your holding will require its own Management Plan. The Management Plan will cover the area of the designated site. A 'buffer' around the site may also be considered on a case-by-case basis due to any potential impact on the site.

The Management Plan will include a description of the site as well as setting out future aspirations. It will also include a Schedule of Works that can be carried out over a 5-year period.

The content of the Schedule of Works will be site dependant and could include annual area-based management payments as well as capital works**.** Full details of the Technical Specifications for these actions will be published in Spring 2026.

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q).

How Do I Get a Designated Site Management Plan?

Following receipt of all SAF 2026, we will review the number of sites claimed and you will be contacted in due course to begin the process.

A site assessment will be undertaken with you for each Designated Site on your holding, which will consider your current farming practices and identify the most appropriate management actions and needs. Following the assessment, we will work with you to agree, management actions and activities to be included in the Schedule of Works.

The Schedule of Works will be agreed by you and approved or consented by NRW.

Subject to the level of demand, it may not be possible to offer a Management Plan in the first year that you participate in the SFS - Universal Layer. You will still be considered for a Management Plan in subsequent years.

How can I prepare for the site assessment?

In advance of any assessment, you may wish to consider your aspirations for the site and its management, as well as specific issues of concern around the current site management, and how they could be dealt with.

Consideration could also be given to any capital works that may be needed to support the management of the site. This information can then be discussed as part of the development of the Management Plan and Schedule of Works.

Consulting Other Organisations

In certain circumstances, it may also be necessary to consult with other organisations. This will be site specific and will be dependent on the management actions being proposed for the Schedule of Works.

NRW will clarify where other organisations may need to be involved and if you need to seek any additional consents.

Organisations that may need to be consulted include Cadw and the Welsh Archaeological Trusts, if there are historic features present or Local Authorities if there are Public Rights of Way present and, where applicable, for the creation of ponds.

J7.4 SAF 2026

You will need to confirm whether you have a designated site on your holding and confirm your intention to carry out appropriate management operations.

In addition to the above, you will still be required to confirm the habitat and woodland areas on the designated sites as part of the Habitat Baseline Review. Further guidance to help you complete the habitat baseline review will be available with the SAF ‘How to complete’ guide in March.

J7.5 SFS Universal Dashboard

Where applicable, the SFS Universal Dashboard will highlight the need for a Designated Site Management Plan.

You will also be able to indicate whether you are ready to be contacted to start developing the Management Plan

The Dashboard will be updated:

- If you have a management agreement already in place, including a Section 16 agreement with NRW, covering the management of Designated Sites which meets the UA requirements, or
- Once NRW have issued consent for the Management Plan and agreed to the accompanying Schedule of Works.

J7.6 Record Keeping

There are no specific record keeping requirements for this Universal Action.

J8 UA8: Hedgerow Management

J8.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to create thick, dense hedgerows which provide shelter and are allowed to store more carbon, produce flowers, fruit and seeds as a food source for a variety of species including birds and pollinating insects.

Hedgerows exist in a continuous cycle from newly planted through to wider, taller, less uniform boundaries. Active management is key to this process, allowing hedgerows to grow and mature while maintaining structure and health for future generations.

Our landscapes and our wildlife thrive on a patchwork of hedgerows, each made up of different plant species and at various stages of growth. This diversity strengthens landscape character and creates essential habitats for wildlife to thrive.

Dense hedgerows act as windbreaks for crops and shelter and security for your livestock. Wider and taller hedgerows at farm boundaries can provide valuable biosecurity boundaries between neighbouring livestock.

J8.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action

You must complete this Universal Action where you have management control of hedgerows on your holding, that are managed by cutting and/or trimming.

If you do not cut or trim your hedgerows, you do not need to follow the requirements below.

J8.3 Requirements

- Do not trim or cut the same hedgerow in successive years. i.e. do not cut a hedgerow back two years in row.

  This requirement applies to both sides of an individual length of hedgerow. For example, you cannot cut one side of the length of hedgerow in year 1 and the other side of the same length of hedgerow in year 2.

  However, this does not prohibit the cutting of encroaching bramble outside the hedge profile, if it is for animal health and welfare reasons.

  The following exemptions from this requirement are permitted, where cutting or trimming may be carried out annually as appropriate:

  - the hedgerow or hedgerow trees overhang a highway, road, track or footpath and the work is necessary for health and safety reasons.
  - the cutting or trimming is carried out as part of wider routine ditch maintenance on improved land.

- the utility company responsible for the maintenance of any overhanging electricity or telephone lines may cut back trees and or hedges for safety reasons.
- hedge restoration e.g. laying or coppicing may be carried out during March as long as nesting birds are not knowingly disturbed
- hedge restoration e.g. laying or coppicing is permitted up to 30 April if specifically for a competition and/or training event, as long as written permission is obtained from Welsh Government in advance of the event. The event also needs to comply with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

  You should retain evidence, e.g. photographs and/or any correspondence from the relevant companies or competent authorities that clearly show why it was necessary to cut or trim hedges more often than every other year.

- You must also not cut or trim hedgerows during the bird nesting season, 1 March to 31 August (exemptions apply). These requirements are set out in the Universal Code (see section H).

- You must allow the hedges to grow thicker and taller by trimming them to a slightly higher and wider point each time they are trimmed or cut. These should be at least 5cm incremental growth between trimming. Once the hedge has reached a width and height of 3m by 2m (or 2m by 3m) you have the choice to retain it at this size through incremental cutting.

  We recognise where hedgerows are exposed to strong winds in coastal or upland areas, hedgerow growth may be slower and not meet the 5cm expectation, however, the requirement for incremental growth and trimming still applies.

- You must maintain or establish at least one hedgerow tree on average for every 50m of hedgerow. You should meet this requirement on a field parcel basis.

For example, a field parcel with a 200m hedgerow boundary, should aim to have 4 hedgerow trees within the hedgerow around the field parcel. Where a hedgerow divides two field parcels the same trees can be included in the calculation for adjoining field parcels.

Where you need to establish hedgerow trees to meet this requirement this can be achieved by either:

1) identifying hedgerow plants that have the potential to develop into hedgerow trees and allowing these to grow up, or
2) by planting new standard trees within the hedgerow.

Allowing existing hedgerow plants to grow up.

These trees must be identified before the first time the hedgerow is trimmed or cut after your first claim for the SFS - Universal layer. It is recommended you tag these plants to avoid accidental damage when trimming. When deciding which trees to retain in hedgerows, species other than Ash should be prioritised as far as possible.

Planting new trees within the hedgerows.

You must plant the trees by the end of the first planting season after you claim for SFS Universal i.e. by 31 March 2027.

New hedgerow trees can count towards the requirements of UA10: Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan (see section J10).

New tree saplings must be at least 1m tall when planted and be a native species that grow well in local hedges, as they will contribute to an attractive landscape and can increase the wildlife value of the hedgerow.

We recommend the following species:

Alder, Cherry (Wild & Bird), Rowan (Mountain Ash), Aspen, Crab Apple, Hawthorn, Birch (Silver & Downy), Willow (Crack, Goat & Grey,) Field Maple, Lime (Small & large leaved), White Poplar, Black Poplar, Oak (Sessile & Pedunculate)

Do not plant ash trees due to ash dieback disease.

It is recommended you tag the trees to avoid accidental damage when trimming or cutting.

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q)

Derogation for ground nesting birds

There will be areas where it may not be appropriate to establish new hedgerow trees, for example areas important for ground nesting birds such as curlew or lapwing.

Where field parcels are located within or share a boundary with the Curlew and Lapwing constraint layer you will not be required to establish hedgerow trees. These areas are referred to as Breeding Waders and this information will be available on the SFS map on RPW Online.

J8.4 SAF 2026

You must confirm on the SAF 2026 whether you have management control of any hedgerows on your holding.

You will not be required to identify and confirm individual lengths of hedgerow on the SAF 2026. However, if you are declaring any of your hedgerows to meet the 10% habitat requirements, you will need to declare the lengths of the eligible hedgerows on the SAF.

J8.5 SFS Universal Dashboard

You will need to confirm on the SFS Universal Dashboard that you have met the requirements for this Universal Action.

Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

J8.6 Record Keeping

It may be beneficial to keep an activity diary which records all hedgerow activities, including any planting and dates of hedgerow cutting / trimming

You must retain evidence, e.g. photographs and/or any letter/emails from the relevant companies or competent authorities that show clearly why it was necessary to cut or trim hedges more often than every other year.

Your activity diary should be completed and kept on your farm for a period of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested.

J9 UA9: Woodland maintenance

J9.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to retain and maintain the existing woodlands on your holding.

Woodland within livestock systems, improve animal welfare, farm resilience, and environmental outcomes

Woodlands are also a vital part of our landscape, important for wildlife, for our health and enjoyment and as integral features on farmland.

J9.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action?

You must complete this Universal Action where you have existing woodland on your holding for which you have management control, in individual blocks of 0.1 hectares or greater. It can be broadleaf woodlands, conifer plantation, or a mixture of both.

Areas of woodland managed in accordance with this Universal Action will be eligible for the additional Woodland Maintenance Payment (see Section O).

You must also meet the requirements of the SFS Regulatory Baseline GAEC 7 in relation to trees (see Section G). For example, when you are permitted to fell or cut trees.

Please note:

Individual trees or groups of trees smaller than 0.1 hectares should be managed in accordance with the Universal Code: Part 3 – Trees (see Section H). These areas are not eligible for the Woodland Maintenance Payment.

Orchards and wood pasture are not considered woodland and should be confirmed and managed in accordance with UA5: Habitat maintenance (see Section J5) and the Universal Code (see Section H)

J9.3 Compliance in relation to Woodland and Tree Reservations within Tenancy Agreements

When assessing your ability to comply with the requirements of this Universal Action, it is essential to consider the specific terms of your tenancy agreement regarding woodland and tree reservations. Your eligibility and responsibilities will vary depending on the nature of these reservations:

- **If both the woodland and the trees are reserved from the tenancy**: The tenant does not have management control over either the land or the trees. In

this case, you are unlikely to be able to meet the requirements and, if the land is not within your management control, it should not be declared on the SAF.

- **If only the trees are reserved but the woodland itself is included in the tenancy**: The tenant may have some responsibilities for land management (e.g. ground flora, access routes, or habitat maintenance) but cannot undertake activities that affect the trees directly (e.g. pruning, felling, or planting). In this scenario, the land should be declared on the SAF, and you should be able to meet the requirements but may need to seek a derogation from specific requirements relating to the trees directly, should the landlord wish to take action that is not permitted.

- **If neither the woodland nor the trees are reserved**: The tenant has full management control over both the land and the trees. In this scenario, you are expected to comply fully with the requirements. You should declare the land on the SAF.

It is therefore critical to review your tenancy agreement in detail to determine the scope of your management control and responsibilities.

J9.4 Requirements

You must:

- follow all legal requirements regarding trees and woodland. Rules around how much you can fell as well as requirements for felling licences can be found in the SFS Regulatory Baseline (see Section G).

- retain any deadwood present equating to at least 5% of the stand volume (1 in 20 living canopy trees). Felled tree stumps do not count towards this figure. The 5% should include a mix of both standing and fallen deadwood, if present. Ideally deadwood will be made up of canopy sized trees of a range of species. Deadwood over 5% can be removed, provided a minimum 5% is retained.

- monitor the impact of grazing, grey squirrel damage and any deer browsing which can be detrimental to the survival of trees and woodland. Indicators of unacceptable impact can include debarking of trees, bare and heavily trampled soil (poaching) on more than 10% of the woodland floor and a lack of flowering plants on the woodland floor during the spring and summer. If possible, you should avoid grazing woodlands in the spring and early summer.

- retain all existing intentional open spaces within the woodland, such as rides and glades. Open space allows movement and access within the woodland and contributes to its ecological value. Retaining open space requires regular maintenance to ensure they remain free from trees, this can include cutting, mowing and grazing. Intentional open space can occupy up to 20% of a woodland block.

- ensure pruning or lopping is undertaken appropriately with a clean cut and does not result in any deterioration in the tree condition.

- encourage natural regeneration by occasionally cutting back plants like bracken or bramble that might suppress young trees. Keep open spaces like rides and glades clear. Over time, this helps a mix of young trees and shrubs grow to support the woodland canopy.

Do not:

- Breach felling licence requirements. For more information on felling licenses see GAEC 7 of the SFS Regulatory Baseline (see Section G) and Natural Resources Wales / Check if you need a felling licence

- Damage native ground flora trees and their roots directly or indirectly. This includes avoiding the following activities within woodland areas:
    - No cultivation or ploughing of soil within the root protection area of trees.
    - No use of agro-chemicals, including:
        - Fertilisers
        - Herbicides
        - Pesticides
    - No use of heavy machinery that could cause:
        - Soil compaction
        - Root disturbance
        - Bark damage
    - No trenching, digging, or soil stripping near trees.
    - No storage of materials (e.g. logs, equipment, chemicals) at the base of trees
    - No lighting of fires or burning near trees.

- Cut, trim or fell trees during the bird nesting season between 1 March and 31 August unless the following exceptions apply and you can also meet your obligations under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for the protection of wild birds;

- the tree overhangs a highway, road, track or footpath to which the public have access, and the work is necessary because the overhanging vegetation:
  - obstructs the passage of vehicles or pedestrians
  - obstructs the view of drivers, or the light from a public lamp, or
  - is a danger to horse-riders
- the tree needs to be cut or trimmed because it is dead, diseased or damaged or insecurely rooted, and is therefore likely to cause danger by falling onto a highway, road or footpath
- the company responsible for the maintenance of any overhanging electricity or telephone lines, needs to cut back trees for safety reasons
- on arable land, where the normal agricultural practice requires that a winter arable crop is planted before 31 August, you will be able to cut back the relevant trees from 1 August as long as nesting birds are not disturbed
- there is an enforcement notice issued by the Local Authority under the Highways Act 1980 Section 154 in order that the passage of vehicles or pedestrians is not obstructed or endangered, it is considered that the tree and/or branches of trees at the locations described require trimming/lopping or pleaching
- the cutting or trimming is carried out in order to maintain a ditch

You should retain evidence, e.g. photographs and/or any letters from the r relevant competent authorities that show clearly why it was necessary to cut or trim trees between 1 March and 31 August. These should be provided at inspection if requested.

- Carry out supplementary feeding within broadleaf woodland. Supplementary feeding may take place in conifer woodlands where required specifically for the welfare of livestock. Where supplementary feeding in conifer woodlands is being considered, you must follow guidance within the Universal Code: Biodiversity and habitat, relating to supplementary feeding on enclosed habitat land (see Section H).

  Gamebirds are not considered livestock for the purposes of the SFS. Supplementary feeding of gamebirds in line with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) 'Sustainable Gamebird Releasing' Guidelines is permitted where birds are lawfully released.

- Use Plant Protection Products, except for the purposes of controlling invasive non-native species or managing notifiable tree pests and diseases. Ensure you follow product guidance and have NRW approval if using them within or next to a watercourse or Designated Site.

- Use the woodland for unapproved off-road vehicle activities. Any events must follow the Trail Users Code, Countryside Code, and relevant legal and safety regulations.

- Carry out earth moving activities or construct new tracks, roads, yards, loading bays/stacking areas or any new structures within the woodland, without prior approval. You must seek approval from the relevant local planning authority prior to the commencement of any works.

If you have a valid NRW approved Forest Management Plan, or felling licence, you should continue to manage your woodland in accordance with these requirements.

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q)

J9.5 Designated Sites

If the area of woodland is within a designated site you must not undertake the felling of trees, removal of dead wood, supplementary feeding or use machinery or plant protection products or undertake management works listed as a Potentially Damaging Operation (PDO) or Operation Likely to Damage the Special Interest (OLDSI) without a SSSI consent within the boundary of the SSSI. Prior to undertaking any such activities, the normal process of applying to NRW for SSSI consent via a notice of intent will be required. Any works undertaken will need to be carried out strictly in accordance with the issued SSSI consent. The exceptions to this will be:

- You have an existing Land Management Agreement, such as a Section 16 Agreement, in place with NRW. You must continue to manage your land in accordance with this agreement until it expires.
- You have an agreed Management Plan and Schedule of works (SoW) for which SSSI consent has been issued as part of UA7 Designated Site Management Plan.
- You are undertaking more targeted habitat management under an SFS Optional theme, for which SSSI consent has been issued.
- You have a UKFS compliant Forest Management Plan which has been approved by NRW. If an existing Land Management Agreement with NRW requires the same action for any given area of woodland, then the woodland maintenance payment will be adjusted accordingly to avoid double funding on that area.

If an existing Land Management Agreement with NRW requires the same action as this Universal Action for the same area of land, then the Woodland Maintenance payment will be adjusted accordingly to avoid double funding on that area.

J9.6 Derogations

Where you are unable to meet one or more of the requirements of this Universal Action a derogation must be requested by completing the 'Sustainable Farming Scheme - Derogation or Enquiry Form' on your RPW Online account. Each case will be considered individually. See Section K for further information.

J9.7 SAF 2026

You must confirm areas of woodland and/or tree canopy over 0.1 hectares on the SAF 2026 as part of the Habitat Baseline Review.

Areas of established broadleaf woodland (comprising at least 80% broadleaf species) over 0.1 hectares can be used to meet the 10% habitat requirement (see Section I).

To avoid double funding, you must confirm on the SAF 2026 whether you are receiving payment for any of the management requirements above from any other source (e.g. NRW S16 Management Agreement). As part of the validation of your SFS - Universal Layer claim, we may request additional information to support your declaration.

J9.8 SFS Universal Dashboard

You will need to confirm on the SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027 that you have met the requirements for this Universal Action.

Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

J9.9 Record Keeping

You must retain evidence of why trees have been cut / trimmed between 1 March and 31 August as set out above and make this available at inspection if requested.

If a tree is felled because it is dangerous, evidence of it being a danger rather than a perceived danger should be kept i.e. photographic evidence.

If you have a valid NRW approved Forest Management Plan, or felling licence that could override some of the requirements listed above, you may need to supply evidence of this.

Any approvals/authorisations granted for activities in woodland should be retained, as they may need to be presented at inspection. All evidence must be kept on your farm for a period of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested.

J10 UA10: Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan

J10.1 Aim

The aim of this action is to encourage you to consider where tree, woodland or hedgerow planting would benefit your farming business.

Additional trees and hedgerows integrated throughout your holding can provide biosecurity barriers, if planted as farm boundaries, and shade and shelter benefits to your livestock and crops if planted as shelterbelts or interspersed across your land in a silvopasture or silvoarable agroforestry system. Trees have an extensive root system, which supports the soil to hold more water and prevents erosion, helping farms become more resilient against both drought and heavy rainfall.

Planting a future timber crop as part of a diversified farm business is a suitable option.

This action also links to other Universal Actions and can support the 10% Habitat Requirement

Additional trees planted or established within hedgerows, to meet the requirements of UA8: Hedgerow Management, can also count towards progress of the minimum planting area requirement for this Universal Action.

Any newly planted broadleaved woodland (containing at least 80% broadleaf trees) in individual blocks of 0.1 hectares or greater, or new hedgerow planting of individual lengths of 20m or more can count towards your annual 10% habitat requirement if planted before the 15 May, SAF closing date. See 10% Habitat requirements in Section I.

J10.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action

You will need to complete a Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan, regardless of the current area of tree canopy cover or hedgerows on your holding or the tenure of the land.

J10.3 Requirements

There are two distinct requirements of this Universal Action:

- Complete a Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan on RPW online by 31 December 2026.
- Demonstrate progress towards implementing your plan by 31 December 2028.

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q)

1. Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan

Your plan should identify areas of your holding which you think would benefit from new trees, woodland or hedgerows based on your farming knowledge, farm type and location.

The plan can include blocks of trees, individual trees or a mixture of both.

You may include individual trees to be planted along traditional field boundaries, including within existing hedgerows.

Tree plan

As a minimum, your plan must include at least 0.1 hectares of potential new tree planting. We will calculate this for you using the areas and trees you've plotted within your opportunity plan.

- The minimum size of an area that can be identified on the plan is 0.01ha.
- Individual trees plotted on the plan will be given a notional area of $4m^2$

Hedgerow plan

If you include new hedgerow planting in your plan, the minimum length of an individual hedgerow must be 20 metres.

Completing your Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan on RPW Online

The Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan will be available for you to complete via your RPW Online account from Summer 2026.

You will be required to answer a series of questions about the outcomes you may want to achieve e.g. mitigating flood risk. These will guide you to considered which areas might be most suitable for planting before mapping the details.

Once you have completed the plan, a summary of the areas of new trees and length of hedges you have mapped will be provided.

All land classed as existing habitats, or land important to priority species, such as curlew, may be unsuitable for planting. These are all classed as sensitivities, and any known sensitivities will be highlighted when you complete the plan.
Whilst new tree planting completed since 1 April 2022 will count towards demonstrating progress towards implementing the plan, you will need to include additional areas of tree planting on your plan in 2026.

Further details regarding ineligible areas, sensitivities and potential derogation are provided below.

Amendments to your Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan

Once completed, you can amend your plan at any time. This will enable you to account for a change of circumstances, such land changes, changes to a tenancy agreement or if you wish to change the areas and lengths of potential tree and hedgerow planting.

2. Progress towards implementing your plan and minimum planting requirements

You must demonstrate progress towards implementing your plan by 31 December 2028. This can be demonstrated as follows:

Demonstrating Progress	Deadline
Tree and/or woodland planting covering a minimum area of 0.1ha since 1 April 2022. ● If you completed this planting in a Welsh Government woodland creation scheme, we will automatically confirm you have met the requirement. ● If you completed this planting outside of a Welsh Government scheme, you will need to confirm on the SAF, the areas or number of trees planted and the establishment dates.	Not applicable.
Having an approved Welsh Government Grant Award Letter (GAL) to undertake the planting of a minimum of 0.1ha of new trees or woodland and completing the planting by 31 March 2029	GAL accepted by 31 December 2028 Planting completed by 31 March 2029.
Completing planting of a minimum of 0.1ha of trees or woodland outside of a Welsh Government grant scheme.	Planting completed by 31 March 2029
Submit and have a derogation request approved if appropriate.	31 December 2028

Please note: You must plant a minimum of 0.1 hectares (at a minimum planting density of 2,500 trees/ha) or 250 individual trees which could be in one block or a combination of individual trees, trees in hedgerows and smaller groups of trees. Trees which fail to establish must be replaced with new ones.

Tree planting must be completed by 31 March 2029 regardless of whether you first claimed for the SFS - Universal layer in 2026, 2027 or 2028.

Once planted, areas of new tree planting in individual blocks smaller than 0.1 hectares will not be eligible for the Woodland Maintenance Payment and will not contribute to the 10% habitat requirement.

You may choose to complete your new tree planting either within or outside of a Welsh Government woodland creation scheme.

You will need to have applied for a grant by 1 November 2028 if choosing to plant via a Welsh Government Scheme.

Further details regarding tree planting, ineligible areas, potential derogations and grant funding available is provided below.

What tree planting does not count towards the 0.1ha requirement?

The following planting will not count towards the minimum tree planting requirement:

- Planting on ineligible land *(see details below)*
- Orchards
- Christmas tree plantations
- Hedgerow creation or restoration. Whilst the hedgerow itself does not count, individual trees planted within hedgerows (e.g. one every 50m) can count toward the 0.1ha/250 trees requirement.

Ineligible land

Any planting that takes place on the following land will not count towards the minimum planting requirement:

- Areas of land within existing woodland or underneath the canopy of existing trees, as confirmed on the SAF Habitat Baseline Review.
- Land declared on your SAF as Ineligible Features and Non-Agricultural Activities/Land.
- Areas of land that are designated sites where you do not have the permission or consent to plant for example, a Site of Special Scientific Interest *(see sub-heading "Sensitivities" for further information")*
- Areas of land where trees will be established by natural colonisation and/or natural regeneration.

- Areas of land where trees will be planted as re-stocking, this includes the re-planting of dead or fallen trees.
- Areas of land or individual trees where compensatory tree planting is required because trees have been illegally felled and you are required to replace the trees, for example, as part of a restock or enforcement notice.
- Areas of land where you do not possess full management control e.g. common land, land used in common, shared grazing or land held on a grazing licence.

Sensitivities:

Whilst you will be able to map planting opportunities on sensitivities you should not plant unless you have received permission from NRW via a verified Woodland Creation Plan or have an approved Small Grants Woodland Creation contract for the planting.

You may not be allowed to plant on sensitivities, so we encourage you to map planting opportunities elsewhere on your farm as it is likely to be simpler and quicker for you to deliver your plan.

Derogation from minimum tree planting requirements

A derogation from the minimum tree planting requirement may apply in the following circumstances;

- You are a tenant who does not have your landlord's permission to carry out new tree planting. You may be required to provide your tenancy agreement or a letter from your landlord if you have an unwritten tenancy, as evidence you are unable to plant new trees.
- You have insufficient suitable land available to plant new trees due to sensitivity, for example, priority habitat or peatland. You must have submitted a pre-application to NRW and received confirmation from NRW that no tree planting can be carried out on your land. You will need to ensure reasonable time has been given for both your pre-application and for a response to be received in advance of the 31 December 2028 deadline.
- You do not have any/enough eligible areas on your farm.

  Please note: You will not be required to submit a derogation request if you are relying on tree planting carried out since 1 April 2022 to meet the requirements of this Universal Action.

  If you believe a derogation applies to you, you should complete the Derogation or Enquiry form via your RPW Online account (see Section K)

Welsh Government Grant Support available

Optional support is available for a variety of different planting options depending on your farming system, land type and its environmental sensitivity.

- Some schemes support planting from 0.1 hectares on agriculturally improved land
- Others are designed for more sensitive land, and may require a larger minimum area, such as 0.25 hectares.
- There is also an option to meet the requirement through **agroforestry**, through planting **a minimum of 250 scattered trees**.

Further information on our grant schemes can be found at Rural grants and payments | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES

Independent planting (outside of a Welsh Government Grant Scheme)

- Do not plant ash due to the risk of ash dieback disease.
- It is recommended that tree planting is carried out from autumn through to spring to encourage establishment.
- Trees must be protected from potential damage by grazing or browsing animals (for example, by using tree guards), but individual trees or areas of new tree planting do not need to be stock excluded.
- Trees which fail to establish must be replaced with new ones.
- All new tree planting must be completed in accordance with your legal requirements. You must ensure any works undertaken to meet the requirements of this Universal Action do not breach environmental obligations under other environmental legislation, including European Protected Species (EPS), or damage any historic environmental features.

J10.4 SAF 2026

New tree planting should be declared using the relevant Crop Codes and by updating the tree canopy details in the Habitat Baseline Review. Further guidance to help you complete the baseline review will be available with the SAF ‘How to complete’ guide in March.

J10.5 SFS Universal Dashboard

Once you have completed and submitted your Tree and hedgerow planting opportunity plan the SFS Universal Dashboard will be automatically updated.

Progress towards implementing your plan and completing the tree planting requirements will be shown from 2027 onwards.

J10.6 Record Keeping

There are no record keeping requirements for this Universal Action, but you may wish to keep any records associated with planting that is not directly supported by Welsh Government.

J11 UA11: Historic Environment

J11.1 Aim

The aim of this Universal Action is to monitor, maintain and protect our important historic features (sometimes referred to as assets) from damage and help sustain the distinctive cultural character of Wales.

Our countryside is made up of a patchwork of natural and cultural landscapes, formed through thousands of years of interaction with the natural environment, including generations of farmers. The landscape of Wales as it is today, is what gives Wales its distinctive visual and cultural character.

J11.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action?

You must complete this Universal Action if you have any of the following on your holding;

Scheduled Monuments

Monuments of national importance are classed as Scheduled monuments. They are legally protected from damage, disturbance and unauthorised works under the **Historic Environment (Wales) Act, 2023 (on legislation.gov.uk)**.

Historic Environment Features (HEFs)

HEFs can be a single site, a group of sites or larger archaeologically sensitive areas. Whilst not legally protected, they are important as sites of local or regional significance which contribute to the historic character of the countryside.

Registered Historic parks and gardens

Historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes can be found in a variety of forms, from deer parks and rural parkland around country houses to hospital grounds and public parks. They often cover large areas and may include archaeological remains and built structures, formal and informal planting, parkland, farmland, woodland, water features, and natural and artificial landforms. These elements all contribute to the special historic interest of the site and gaining a good understanding of them, including historic layout and historic land-use, can help you make informed and sympathetic management decisions without compromising the historic significance.

Traditional farm buildings

Traditional farm buildings were usually constructed before 1919, with solid walls and built using locally sourced materials including slate, stone or wood. They are generally functional and rugged and many still retain original external features. They

provide important historical evidence of functional domestic construction and past farming practices, often undisturbed by modern intervention. They are a key part of the historic environment but are not necessarily legally protected. Traditional farm buildings are worth maintaining as they contribute to the wider landscape, scenic beauty and our understanding of history, as well as being useful, functional structures.

The location and extent of these features will be identified on the SFS Map.

J11.3 Requirements

You must meet the following requirements;

Scheduled Monuments

- You must meet your legal requirements in relation to any Scheduled Monuments on your land, in accordance with the SFS Regulatory Baseline GAEC 7.

- You must inspect at least once per year for deterioration.

- You must obtain evidence, such as geo-tagged photographs of any deterioration must retain this for five years. You **may** also submit the photographs to Cadw via this link https://datamap.gov.wales/survey/cadw-condition-monitoring/ or email: ScheduledMonuments@gov.wales.

- You should prevent scrub encroachment and should carry out basic scrub and invasive vegetation removal (including any invasive non-native species*).* You should not carry out any scrub or vegetation management during the bird nesting season, 1 March to 31 August.

- You should carry out basic erosion repair where parts of the Scheduled Monument are suffering from minor erosion.

- You must keep vehicles away from upstanding remains and use lighter vehicles or vehicles fitted with low ground pressure tyres, particularly at critical times of the year, when the ground is wet or saturated. Use an alternative route away from the Scheduled Monument whenever possible.

- You must not supplementary feed or introduce new water troughs inside the Scheduled Monument Area, to prevent poaching and erosion from livestock.

- **Please note:** Other than scrub removal and basic erosion repair no work to a Scheduled Monument may be carried out without written consent from Cadw. Further guidance is available on the Cadw website: Looking after your scheduled monument | Cadw

HEFs

You must not damage HEFs identified on your holding. Types of damage include any of the following:

- Ground disturbance or excavation, especially extending beneath topsoil.
- Dumping or storage of material, including temporary storage.
- Removal of any material, including stones, soil or subsoil.
- Visible signs of active erosion (loss or disturbance of topsoil or subsoil) caused by livestock and vehicles or other agricultural practice.
- Planting trees.
- Allowing scrub to establish and develop unless agreed for conservation objectives.
- Ploughing or reseeding uncultivated sites.
- Displacing individual stone features.
- Deeper cultivation than in previous years.

Registered Historic parks and gardens

- You must retain historic park and garden buildings and structures.
- You must undertake routine maintenance, for example, basic scrub removal.
- You must retain historic routes and avoid making additional routes which fragment parkland and alter the historic layout.
- The management of Registered Historic parks and gardens, which are also designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) should be completed in accordance with the UA7 Designated Site Management Plan.

Do not:

- supplementary feed or introduce new water troughs near historic features or parkland trees.
- allow livestock to erode or damage parkland or garden/historic features.
- allow livestock to damage parkland trees i.e. bark stripping, root damage and soil compaction.
- damage historic routes through parkland.
- remove historic plantings.
- use machinery to damage parkland trees.
- remove or disturb structural or landscape features.
- dump or store material, including temporary storage.
- remodel the landscape such as to significantly re-profile the topography i.e. undertake major earth works or introduction of new infrastructure.

Traditional farm buildings

Please note: The requirements do not prevent you adapting or converting any farm building, however, it is your responsibility to ensure you have all consents and licences from the relevant authorities.

The requirements below involve basic maintenance and repair and therefore do not require Listed Building Consent. However, if you intend to carry out any works on a listed building in addition to those set out below you should check whether you require consent.

- You must retain all traditional buildings and remnant structures on your land, regardless of condition, unless they cause a demonstrable health and safety hazard.

- A demonstrable hazard is defined as where it occurs close enough to a public or permissive right of way that falling material could obstruct the path or where it is close enough to another access route or building that falling masonry could cause damage.

- If removing a traditional building or part of a traditional building you determine to be a hazard you must retain evidence, such as geo-tagged photographs.

- You must remove new vegetation from walls before it takes hold. Invasive growth that cannot be removed by hand without damaging masonry or pointing should be treated with a systemic herbicide, by stem injection, and left in place to die and fall away.

- You should remove vegetation growing against external walls, where doing so does not reduce the structural integrity of the remaining walls, and ensure that soil does not build up at the base of walls or above the level of underfloor ventilation grilles or air bricks. Check drainage channels and gullies for cracks and open joints and seal if necessary. Avoid storing materials outside the building close to the walls.

- You should re-bed isolated loose stones and replace small areas of pointing or render, matching with the existing lime mortar or render. Do not point any crevices at the wall top or seal gaps between walls and barge / facia / soffit boards. In addition, 10% of remaining crevices to be left unfilled. Examine any crevice to be filled with a torch prior to any works and if any bats or bat droppings are seen, stop all pointing work and seek professional advice. Works should be undertaken between 15 March and 1 April and / or 1 September and 31 October.

- You should clear gutters of leaves and debris, especially during autumn and winter.

- When re-fixing downpipes, you should install wooden spacers behind the brackets to improve ventilation and access for redecoration. Where present, ensure that grilles and mesh covers are in place. Rod drains, if necessary.

Technical guidance will be published on the Welsh Government website to help you meet the requirements of this Universal Action.

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q)

J11.4 Derogations

Where you are unable to meet one of more of the requirements of this Universal Action, a derogation must be requested by completing the ‘Sustainable Farming Scheme - Derogation or Enquiry Form’ on your RPW Online account. Each case will be considered individually. See Section K for further information.

J11.5 SAF 2026

You will be required to confirm whether you have any historic environment features on your holding.

J11.6 SFS Universal Dashboard

You will need to confirm on the SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027 that you have met the requirements for this Universal Action.

Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

J11.7 Record Keeping

The detailed requirements for this Universal Action contain a description of different types of evidence needed to record changes in condition, (such as geo-tagged photographs) or active management undertaken to benefit the historic asset.

Evidence and/or activity diary should be kept on your farm for a minimum of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested.

J12 UA12 - Animal Health and Welfare

J12.1 Aim

The aim of action is to provide animals with a good quality of life through a ‘prevention is better than cure’ approach.

It is also designed to support collaborative working with your vet to optimise animal health and productivity on your farm and further support the excellent health and welfare standards and initiatives being carried out on Welsh livestock farms.

This action has strong links to UA3: Benchmarking and UA4: Continuous Professional Development (see Sections J3 and J4).

It is recommended you complete this action early in the scheme year, as it may help inform the benchmarking and learning for 2026.

J12.2 Who needs to complete this Universal Action

You will need to complete this Universal Action if you are the owner or registered keeper of livestock, where they are reared or farmed to produce food or goods.

You are not required to complete this Universal Action if:

- you own or keep animals only as pets or as part of petting zoo type activities.
- you only have animals on your land that are not your responsibility (i.e. on tack).

J12.3 Requirements

There are three distinct requirements of this Universal Action:

- Animal Health Improvement Cycle (AHIC)
- Incoming Animal Biosecurity Risk Assessment
- Animal Welfare

The Animal Health Improvement Cycle (AHIC) element will not need to be completed by small-scale enterprises which support farmgate sales only (e.g. eggs), or where livestock are kept only for private consumption.

All elements of this Universal Action are the responsibility of the business owner or registered keeper, but responsibility can be delegated to a nominated member of farm staff (e.g. farm manager, stock person) who must have regular responsibility for

animal management, and appropriate real time knowledge of the livestock and farming system.

If you do not meet the requirements, sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanction Matrix (see Section Q)

J12.4 Animal Health Improvement Cycle (AHIC)

The AHIC process aims to improve animal health, welfare, and productivity and promotes farm sustainability through a structured, multistep and on-going vet and farmer collaboration.

If you have multiple livestock species on your holding, the AHIC only needs to be completed for one livestock species. This will be for you and your vet to assess where the AHIC is most appropriate.

Which Vet should complete the AHIC

Welsh Government has been rolling out mandatory AHIC training to large animal veterinarian practices across Wales. The AHIC should therefore be delivered by the local veterinary practice responsible for prescription medicines and with your animals under their care. They will be best placed with existing knowledge of the health status of your livestock and can use this to understand and identify realistic goals and actions for your farm business.

In exceptional circumstances, where local vet capacity or capability may be limited, other veterinarian practices or veterinary consultant, who routinely give herd and flock health advice and provided they have completed the mandatory AHIC training, can be used.

The AHIC Process

The AHIC template must be completed and must be signed by both your vet and an appropriate member of your farm business. This template can also be completed digitally using an appropriate digital application (app) if available.

The AHIC template is available on the Welsh Government website Sustainable Farming Scheme | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES

The AHIC process includes four steps, outlined below, which must be completed in order to meet the requirements of this Universal Actions. The four steps are;

1. Measure
2. Plan
3. Act
4. Review

The AHIC steps should be completed on a rolling 12-month cycle.

- Steps 1 & 2 must be completed and the AHIC template updated and signed by 31 December 2026.

- Steps 3 & 4 must be completed within 12 months from when you signed off the ‘measure’ step. This means that by 31 December 2027, you will have completed a full AHIC and repeated steps 1 & 2 again for the 2027 scheme year.

Measure – Collect important information about livestock production and health (called Production Health Metrics (PHMs)). Look at this data in relation to the farm’s goals and needs. Then, work out the costs linked to animals performing below their best.

Plan - Select one or more PHMs relating to health or production identified for improvement. These are the ones that will have the greatest impact on productivity, health and welfare of the animals, and where improvements are realistically achievable. You and your vet will then make a plan to deliver the agreed improvements.

Act – You must, with your vet’s guidance or other appropriate support as necessary, carry out the agreed actions over an appropriate period of time. Where there are proposed actions which are not yet fully completed, you are expected to note this on your AHIC template and provide an explanation.

Review - review progress and impact within 12 months of agreeing the measure step.

Once you have completed the ‘Review’ step, you should start the ‘measure’ and ‘plan’ steps for a second time. If you have not been able to complete all the action(s) identified in the first cycle, you can incorporate any outstanding actions into your new AHIC cycle.

AHIC and Farm Assurance Scheme

Farm assurance schemes set out important animal health and welfare standards that producers are expected to meet.

The AHIC process, whilst being complementary to farm assurance schemes, promotes a structured continuous improvement approach to animal health planning and delivery.

Farm assurance schemes therefore provide a solid foundation on which the AHIC can complement and enhance animal health and welfare planning processes already established

If your farm assurance scheme provider confirms the AHIC can be completed by the vet and farmer on their digital platforms, this will be acceptable for this element of the universal action.

J12.5 Incoming Animal Biosecurity Risk Assessment

The Biosecurity element is designed to actively manage biosecurity and safeguard livestock health as much as practically possible, on an annual basis

An Incoming Animal Biosecurity Risk Assessment must be completed by 31 December 2026.

This must be signed by both your vet and an appropriate member of your farm business.

You must use the following templates available on the Welsh Government website. Three templates are available ‘sheep’ ‘cattle’ and ‘other’ Sustainable Farming Scheme | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES

This template can also be completed digitally using an appropriate digital application (app) if available.

The template guides you and your vet through a prescribed process that is the standard of the action to ensure consistency, quality and impact.

Where you have multiple livestock species, the Risk Assessment should be completed for the one livestock species which you and your vet assess is the most appropriate.

You do not need to complete the annual Risk Assessment for more than one livestock species. However, if you have both beef and dairy cattle, the Risk Assessment would apply to both.

Together with your vet, you should establish a protocol for identification, management and mitigation of biosecurity risks from incoming livestock (livestock purchased or returning home from tack). You should assess and agree farm specific appropriate measures to promote biosecurity that may include:

- Isolation of incoming stock
- Prepurchase enquiries
- Prepurchase testing/interventions
- Treatments/vaccinations on arrival

You must keep a record of the actions taken to mitigate your biosecurity risks on the Risk Assessment template provided.

If your farm assurance scheme provider confirms the Risk Assessment can be completed by the vet and farmer on their digital platforms, this will be accepted for this element of the universal action.

J12.6 Animal Welfare

The Animal Welfare element focuses on lameness and body condition, which are the two most significant sources of welfare problems on farms in Wales and that also significantly impact on productivity.

This element requires you, as a keeper of livestock, to carry out a critical assessment of your stock's mobility and condition score and aims to equips you with the skills to do it. This is the first step to increasing awareness of potential welfare issues and to taking steps to manage and prevent welfare problems occurring in the future.

The Animal Welfare requirement therefore consists of two parts.

1. Proficiency training

You, or a member of your farm business (or a nominated individual) must complete training for competence in body condition scoring (BCS) and mobility scoring by 31 December 2026.

If you keep more than one livestock species, only training for one species is required in the first year you claim SFS – Universal Layer. Training for other livestock species should be completed in subsequent years. The training for each livestock species must then be completed every 5 years.

For example, you keep sheep and cattle. You complete the training for sheep by 31 December 2026. You must complete the training for cattle by 31 December 2027. You will not be required to complete any further training for sheep until 2031 and training for cattle until 2032.

The 5-year completion period means any of the training listed below and completed after 1 January 2022 can count for 2026 scheme year.

Completing the online proficiency training via Farming Connect

There are 5 relevant Farming Connect e-learning modules available at E-learning | Farming Connect

If completed from 1 August 2025, this learning, if completed by the appropriate person will also count towards UA4: Continuous Professional Development.

Completing accredited training via Farming Connect

The following courses also count towards the requirements of this Universal Action:

- Sheep Lameness AH&W Workshop (Vet-delivered, LANTRA-accredited)
- Reducing Dairy Cattle Lameness AH&W Workshop (Vet-delivered, LANTRA-accredited)
- Wales Master Lameness Accredited Training Course
- Intermediate Hoof Trimming Accredited Training Course

All training completed through Farming Connect is automatically recorded within Storfa Sgiliau and RPW will be notified of the date completed, course title and duration.

Other training or evidence requirements:

The following training is also acceptable for body conditioning and mobility scoring as appropriate:

- Completion of Bovine Lameness and Professional Bovine Foot Trimming RAU level 4 qualification
- Evidence of a veterinary planned animal health programme to manage lameness (e.g. sheep 5-point plan) and body condition on livestock on your farm, with evidence of monitoring scoring activity.

- Membership of ‘Healthy Feet’ programme for cattle

For Other species (Camelids, Goats, Pigs, Poultry, Deer):
Instead of the specified proficiency modules you must provide evidence of a veterinary planned animal health programme to manage lameness and body condition for these livestock on your farm, with evidence of monitoring scoring activity.

Accredited Farming Connect learning or any of the other learning listed above completed from 1 January 2026, if complete by the appropriate person will also count towards UA4: Continuous Professional Development.

2. Body condition and mobility scoring

Body condition and mobility scoring should be implemented on your farm at an appropriate time, for example, body condition scoring pre-tupping, and in such a way that it achieves the maximum benefit for animal welfare.

Once the ‘proficiency training’ is completed, you must complete and record herd and/or flock scoring for body condition and mobility on a **representative number** of livestock, as directed by best practice advice within the training.

The herd and flock scoring for body condition and mobility must be completed at least annually, by 31 December (i.e. 31 December 2026)

You can share this information with your vet and use it to help shape your AHIC visit.

For mobility scoring for cattle this can also be done by your vet if they are an accredited Mobility Mentor ™ (Find a Mobility Mentor: Healthy Feet Programme | AHDB) or you can use a RoMS ™ accredited scorer (RoMS | The Register of Mobility Scorers - UK).

J12.7 Vet Attestations for export

The veterinary visits for both the AHIC and Biosecurity elements of this Universal Action will serve as meeting the criteria for the annual Veterinary Attestation for export of products to the EU. As such, a Vet Attestation number (VAN) can be generated and put on the AHIC and Biosecurity templates using this guidance:

Veterinary attestation for animal health visits (previously veterinary declaration) - GOV.UK

Please note: Members of approved accredited farm assurance schemes are already and will continue to be exempt from the requirement to provide a VAN number for export certification of products to the EU.

J12.8 SAF 2026

You must confirm if you have livestock either owned or kept by you as the registered keeper on your SAF 2026.

J12.9 SFS Universal Dashboard

You must confirm on your SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027 that you have met the requirements of each element of this Universal Action. This will be confirmation that you have completed:

- The relevant AHIC steps,
- Incoming Animal Biosecurity Risk Assessment and
- Animal Welfare – proficiency training and body condition and mobility scoring.

Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

For AHIC and Incoming Animal Biosecurity Risk Assessment
If these have been provided by a Farm Assurance provider, confirmation of the completed templates can be automatically shared with RPW, to update your SFS Universal Dashboard.

For proficiency training:
If the training has been delivered by an external provider, you must enter the following:

- Course title
- Date of attendance
- Hours of learning
- The Individual who completed the learning

Once the information has been validated, the dashboard will confirm if you have met the requirements of this Universal Action.

If completed through Farming Connect, the details of the completed training will be automatically shared with RPW, to update your SFS Universal Dashboard.

You do not need to submit your completed AHIC, Incoming Animal Biosecurity Risk Assessment, or Body Condition and Mobility scoring records.

J12.10 Record Keeping

The following records must be kept on your farm for a minimum of 5 years and made available at inspection if requested.

- AHIC template,
- Incoming Animal and Biosecurity Risk Assessment template,
- Record of ‘proficiency training’, and
- Body condition and mobility scoring

However, if the AHIC & Incoming animal biosecurity risk assessment has been completed on a farm assurance digital platform and the proficiency training has been completed through Farming Connect, these records will not be required at inspection.

You may wish to speak to your farm assurance provider to understand if this process could help avoid duplication and minimise costs.

Section K: Derogations

A derogation is a temporary exemption allowing you to deviate from one or more of the SFS – Universal Layer requirements.

It is appropriate in circumstances beyond your control, for example, extended periods of extreme weather, issues related to tenancies or where there are risks to animal welfare or health and safety.

Where you are unable to meet a specific requirement, and an exemption has not already been set out in the requirements, a derogation may be requested by completing the Derogation or Enquiry form via your RPW Online account.

The form will be available from 31 December 2025 and can be used to request a derogation at any time for the current (or future) scheme year(s). You will have the ability to submit supporting evidence and/or you may be requested to submit additional evidence to support your request, depending on the circumstances.

A derogation will only be considered where you can demonstrate why you are unable to meet the relevant scheme requirement and each case will be considered individually and may involve consulting with external bodies (e.g. NRW)

Whilst awaiting approval of a derogation, you must not take any action related to that request.

If there are events or circumstances that affect farmers across Wales or in a given region (e.g. severe drought) Welsh Government may issue blanket derogations. In these circumstances, you will be notified of the specific derogation and to which requirements it applies.

Section L: Application and Validation

L1 Application

Too apply and claim for the SFS Universal Layer you will need to ensure;

- your business or organisation is registered through RPW Online. See further information RPW Online guidance for customers | GOV.WALES
- Your land is registered with RPW. See section M3
- You submit the SAF by **15 May 2026.**

Please note:

The SAF will be available on RPW Online from **Monday 2 March 2026.**

You will be given a choice to apply for the SFS - Universal Layer or BPS. Once your claim for the SFS Universal Layer has been submitted, and the SAF deadline has passed (15 May 2026 or 9 June 2026 with late claim penalties), if you hold BPS entitlements, these will cease to be available to you for 2026 and for future years. You do not need to take any action.

L2 How to apply on the SAF

The '2026 Single Application Form (SAF) Online How to Complete Guide for Sustainable Farming Scheme – Universal Layer' will be available on the Welsh Government website from **2 March 2026**. This guide provides detailed instructions for completing each section of the SAF to claim SFS – Universal Layer and other associated land-based schemes.

The SAF also includes help within the application itself:

• If there is guidance available for the page a 'Help for this Page' button will be visible on the top right-hand side of the page. This button will open guidance which will provide a further explanation for each question or item on the page.

• Some questions on the SAF will also include specific help on how to provide an answer. If help for the question is available a Help button will appear next to the question.

If you have any problems when completing your SAF please contact the RPW Customer Contact Centre (see Annex 7 for contact details). Staff are available to provide help and explain how the application should be completed.

Our Regional Offices are open to the public strictly by appointment only. If you need 1-2-1 support, particularly if you are completing the SAF for the first time the Customer Contact Centre can provide telephone support, they can also make a 'Digital Assistance' appointment for you to attend a Regional Office where a member of staff can guide you through the application.

Please make arrangements to complete your SAF as soon as possible once it is made available using the available guidance and help outlined above.

Please note Welsh Government will provide help and support but cannot be held responsible for what you do or do not claim – this is your responsibility.

L3 Deadline for submitting the SAF

RPW must receive your completed SAF no later than midnight on Friday 15 May 2026. Applications received from 16 May 2026 up to and including 9 June 2026 will incur financial penalties.

Applications and claims received after 9 June 2026 cannot be accepted.

A SAF submission reminder broadcast message will be issued during the week commencing 20 April 2026, 4 May 2026 and 1 June 2026 to existing SAF claimants who are yet to submit their 2026 application.

L4 Who can submit your SAF?

The SAF must be submitted by you or someone who has been authorised by the farming business to submit applications on your behalf.

If you wish for an agent or third party to submit the SAF on behalf of the business, and they are not already authorised to do so, please follow the instructions on the RPW Online webpages, or contact the Customer Contact Centre to request a 'Rural Payments Wales (RPW) Online Authorisation for Agent / Woodland Agent / Farming Union and Farming Association' form.

L5 Claiming payment for the SFS - Universal layer on the SAF

The 'Claims' page will be the first page presented to you when you begin to complete your SFS SAF, we will have automatically populated the claim for SFS - Universal Layer for you.

In the field data section, you will need to populate the claim tick against each field parcel which you consider to be eligible for SFS. You must claim on all eligible parcels.

In the Common Land Section, you will need to populate the claim tick against any common land grazing rights which you consider to be eligible for SFS.

L6 Declaring land on the Field Data section of the SAF (see also Section D Eligibility)

We will prepopulate you field parcels, in the ‘Field Data’ section and wherever possible the crop codes and area declaration will be pre-populated based on your 2025 declaration.

If you need to make changes to the boundaries or permanent features of the field parcels pre-populated in your SAF or need to add additional parcels, you will need to submit a Manage My Land before starting the field data section of your SAF.

The SAF will automatically populate the changes made in the ‘Manage my Land’ into the Field Data section for you. However, if you make any changes to the field parcel before you submit the “Manage My Land” form, those changes will be lost, once the SAF updates the parcel details.

You must declare all land where you have management control for at least 10 months of the calendar year, this includes sole grazed commons. The 10 Month period does not need to be continuous, but you must have management control on 15 May 2026.

You should not declare land you own but have rented out, unless you are retaining management control.

You should not declare land which you do not have the appropriate management control over, for example, land used under the terms of a grazing licence.

You should confirm or amend the crop codes and areas pre-populated as necessary to reflect the situation on the ground as of 15 May 2026. Annex 4 provides a full list of the crop codes that are available to do this.

You must accurately declare all ineligible and permanent features on the holding and temporary ineligible features. Annex 4 provides further guidance for declaring these features.

You must also take account of any eligible land temporarily taken out of production (e.g. pipelines for utility companies).

You must accurately declare the length of any hedgerows if you require them to meet the 10% habitat requirement.

It is important you check and ensure all the land you need to declare and claim your SFS Universal Payment has been included on your SAF.

L7 Habitat Baseline Review (HBR)

During the completion of the Field Data section, you will have to complete the Habitat Baseline Review. This is your final opportunity to confirm, add, remove or amend the following mapped areas for the SFS Universal Layer:

- Existing habitat as defined under UA5: Habitat Maintenance: All semi natural habitat must be confirmed as one of the 12 broad habitat classifications.
- Areas of land being used to create Temporary Habitat in accordance with UA6 Temporary Habitat, if required.
- Tree canopy: You will need to confirm areas of woodland trees canopies on your holding, including established broadleaf woodland of 0.1ha or greater which will count towards UA9: Woodland maintenance.

If the habitat is present on a HBR constraint layer you must provide supporting documentation if you wish to amend or delete the existing habitat.

As part of the SAF we will present a farm level summary showing the total areas declared for Permanent Semi Natural Habitat, Established broadleaf woodland of 0.1ha or greater, hedge lengths declared to meet the 10% habitat requirement and Temporary habitat and how they contribute to the 10% Habitat requirement.

L8 Declaring common land on the SAF

You should use the ‘Common Land’ section to declare any common land rights you hold and indicate whether you wish to claim a SFS Universal Payment against these rights.

If you have applied for and been given a field parcel reference number of sole grazed common this will need to be declared at the Field Data section of the SAF. You must not declare sole grazed commons in the Common Land section.

L9 Confirming additional information on the SAF

You will also be required to confirm details applicable to Universal Actions. This information will be used to determine which Universal Actions apply to your holding and will be used to create the SFS Universal Dashboard for your farming business.

You will also be required to accept the Declaration and Undertakings with regards to the SFS Regulatory Baseline, Universal Code and any Universal Actions that are, or have been, applicable to you from 1 January 2026.

L10 Submitting the SAF

Once you have completed the application, and in accepting the Declarations and Undertakings you are entering into an agreement with the Welsh Government and thus become an agreement holder for the purposes of the Agriculture Support Schemes (Eligibility, Enforcement and Appeals) (Wales) Regulations 2025. You will

continue to be an applicant for the purposes of the legislation until your eligibility has been confirmed.

The copy of your application which is generated once your application is submitted and is available on your RPW Online account, will also include a list of applicable Universal Actions for your farming business based on the answers you provide on the SAF.

L11 Supporting Documents

You must submit the following supporting documents (if applicable) in order to confirm your eligibility for the SFS - Universal Layer;

Evidence of Eligibility – 550 standard labour hours

If you have less than 3 hectares of eligible agricultural land (including common land apportionment) registered with RPW, you must submit evidence to demonstrate over 550 standard labour hours in agricultural or ancillary activities carried out in the calendar year 1 January – 31 December 2025. The evidence must be submitted with your application.

Acceptable documentary evidence are:

- An accredited accountant's letter to confirm the business has completed more than 550 hours in the 2025 calendar year.

Or

- Supporting evidence other than a letter from an accountant will only be accepted as evidence if it provides an equivalent level of assurance. This means that it should be verified by an independent, accredited source, such as a solicitor, with sufficient understanding of the business to confirm the claim of 550 hours work being undertaken.

Evidence to support the removal or amendments to habitat areas on the HBR constraints layer for UA5: Habitat Maintenance

- Ecological survey / report (with evidence of the experience / qualifications of the ecologist/ agronomist)
- Geotagged photographs of the site
- Confirmation of whether an Environmental Impact Assessment on the area / parcel has been undertaken at any point
- Information on management - e.g. when or if reseeded, fertiliser use, grazing and whether silage or hay is taken.

Additional Evidence

Additional supporting evidence may be requested as part of the claim validation process. Details of the evidence required and reasons why it is required, as well as submission deadlines will be provided via RPW online.

L12 SFS Universal Dashboard

Your SFS Universal Dashboard will be made available on your RPW Online account after June 2026. This dashboard will initially confirm the Universal Actions applicable to your farming business.

Later in the year, the dashboard must be used to confirm you have completed all relevant Universal Actions applicable to your farm.

You will be notified via a broadcast message when the dashboard will be available for you to complete.

The requirements of all Universal Actions are set out in Section J and details the information you will need to provide on the SFS Universal Dashboard for each individual Universal Action.

All Universal Actions that need to be completed by 31 December 2026, should be updated on the dashboard by **15 January 2027.**

The SFS Universal Balance payment will not be paid until the dashboard has been updated to confirm all actions have been completed.

If you do not complete your Universal Actions or where you have completed your actions and do not update your SFS Universal Dashboard by 15 January 2027, sanctions may be applied to your Universal Payment in accordance with the Verifiable Standards and Sanction Matrix.

L13 SSSI Consent

Where there are Designated sites on your farm you will need to confirm this on the SAF. You will also be asked to confirm your decision to join the SFS - Universal Layer be taken as your notice of intent to undertake management operations within the SSSI land under your control in accordance with the Universal Code and Universal Actions of the SFS.

Confirmation of what elements of the scheme your consent will cover will be provided to you on your RPW online account after the 9 June. For any additional requirement as identified separately within the guidance you must ensure you apply to NRW through the normal SSSI consent process

For any additional requirement as identified separately within the guidance you must ensure all consents, licences and permissions have been granted where required before undertaking any of those actions.

L14 Validation

Once you have submitted your claim, RPW will carry out administrative checks to confirm your eligibility, including the requirements of the SFS Regulatory Baseline, the Universal Code, the 10% habitat requirements and all applicable Universal Actions for your farm business.

Cross checks will be completed to verify the correctness and completeness of the information provided on your SAF, in relevant supporting documents where applicable, and in the confirmation provided via your SFS Universal Dashboard.

Cross checks will also be carried out against the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) and the information declared on all SAFs. Cross checks ensure payments are made on the correct land area, that there is no double funding, and that the land use classifications do not contradict the land use required as part of your claim.

Failure to provide sufficiently detailed information may lead to a delay in validation and payment being released while the claim is checked and may result in payments being reduced or sanctions being applied.

Potential non-compliance resulting from cross-checks may be followed up by any other appropriate administrative procedure, and if necessary, by an inspection.

If you do not meet the requirements, sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q)

The Welsh Government will take every possible step to identify and pursue all suspected fraudulent claims. It will also seek to ensure no payment is made to claimants who artificially create the conditions required for obtaining payments. Payments will be made only where eligibility can be confirmed beyond reasonable doubt.

Section M: Business Structure and Land Changes

M1 Business Structure

If you are involved in more than one farming businesses you should not assume the businesses, even if they are separate legal entities, such as a Limited Company or a partnership, will be treated as separate for the purposes of applying for agricultural funding. This is to ensure farmers are not artificially creating circumstances to receive payment.

Separate applications may be submitted for different businesses in which you are involved, but only if they are managed as separate businesses according to certain criteria. The Welsh Government will take into account:

- the legal status of the businesses
- the names and responsibilities of those involved (including percentage shareholdings if appropriate)
- how far operations are run separately on a practical day-to-day basis
- whether there are separate farm plans and accounts
- independence of decision-making between the separate farms, and
- where the overall economic control and benefit rests.

These factors are not necessarily conclusive by themselves, and you may be asked to provide additional information such as partnership agreements, Certificate of Incorporation, Articles of Association and/or accounts. It is ultimately your responsibility to demonstrate to the Welsh Government's satisfaction that the businesses are separate.

Farming businesses that merge or split will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis as to their particular circumstances in relation to the agricultural funding applied for.

Written details of any mergers/splits must be submitted, using your RPW Online account or by sending them to RPW, to be assessed.

M2 Updating your business records

You should notify RPW of any changes to your business details. The majority of changes to business details can be done via RPW Online. However, we may require further details on any major changes.

The Welsh Government requires changes such as a partner joining or leaving the business, i.e. a change to the business structure, to be notified in writing and signed by all partners.

Amendments to incorrect details pre-populated on forms or printed on correspondence, e.g. incorrect phone numbers or misspelling of names or addresses, can be notified in writing to the Customer Contact Centre or by using your RPW Online account, but need not be signed by all partners.

It is your responsibility to ensure that records held for your farming business are kept up to date and accurate. This includes your language preference (Welsh or English) for correspondence.

M3 Registering land and Land Changes

You should inform RPW of changes to land parcels and any land transfers within 30 days of the change(s) taking place. Where the 30-day deadline is not met, you must notify us of changes to your land at the earliest possible opportunity.

You should complete ‘Manage My Land’, on your RPW Online account to;

- Register land parcels.
- Add, delete or change non-eligible features.
- Notify us of land transfers (i.e. purchases, sales, rentals, business mergers/splits)
- Change rental end dates.
- Notify us of boundary changes (merges, splits, moving boundaries).

Please refer to the ‘RPW Online: using manage my land’ guidance available on the Welsh Government website for further details.

The Manage My Land application will be available on RPW Online from 12 January 2026.

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M4 Changes to land that require new field numbers

Field parcels which fall into one of the categories listed below may need new field numbers:

• fields not previously registered with RPW

• fields which have been permanently split

• fields which have been permanently amalgamated

• fields which have new boundaries, e.g. following part land sale.

You do not need to notify RPW where a field has been divided on a temporary basis e.g. between two or more crops. These should be shown on your SAF using separate lines for each area of the field if they are still at your disposal on 15 May.

Buildings and yard areas may only be split if an obstructing boundary is in place and both areas have a separate access route. If there is no obstructing boundary and separate access route you must not split the existing land parcel.

Applications for new field numbers must be made via ’Manage My Land’ on RPW Online before completing the field data section of your SAF.

M5 Transferring land during the 10 Month period

If you transfer out land included on your SAF during the 10 Month period, you must notify the RPW via “Manage my Land” within 30 days.

No payment will be made on the land you transfer out. There is no provision to transfer your claim for this land to another business or organisation within the SFS - Universal Layer.

If you transfer in land after the SAF closing date of 15 May 2026, you cannot add additional land to your claim for that year. You will need to wait until the following year to make a claim on that land.

M6 Mapping updates of the agricultural land in Wales

RPW is continuously updating its LPIS using the latest MasterMap information provided by Ordnance Survey or Aerial and Satellite Imagery.

This may result in changes to the land parcels on your holding, such as alterations to field boundaries and/or areas of permanent features, such as buildings, roads, rivers and ponds. We will inform you of any changes that impact on your claim as part of the validation process.

It is important you check the Field Data section of your SAF 2026 to ensure it is fully completed. You should also check to ensure any changes resulting from a land inspection undertaken during 2025 (details are contained within the IACS 7A report provided on you RPW Online account), or changes as a result of an appeal, have been made to your SAF.

Section N: Inspections

N1 On-farm inspections

A percentage of claimants will be selected and inspected each year to ensure compliance with the scheme requirements, including the SFS Regulatory Baseline.

The SFS Regulatory Baseline, includes requirements of Livestock Identification and the Control of Agriculture Pollution (CoAP) regulations. These elements have separate inspection regimes and targets.

All inspections will be carried out by Welsh Government' Rural Inspectorate Wales (RIW) and/or other Competent Control Authorities (CCA) or Delegated Agents on behalf of the Welsh Government.

Inspections will be selected using a combined risk and random assessment process.

- The risk selection will use appropriate risk criteria to determine which farms are to be inspected.
- The random selection will be a control sample, and account for between 20% and 25% of the overall selected population.

The minimum percentage of farms to be inspected each year, for each element of the SFS - Universal Layer and SFS Regulatory Baseline, is:

- SFS - Universal Layer (Universal Code and Universal Actions) - 3% of all claimants/agreement holders.
- SFS Regulatory Baseline - 1% of all claimants/agreement holders.
- Cattle Identification (SMR 7 of SFS Regulatory Baseline) – 3% of livestock keepers.
- Sheep and Goat Identification (SMR 8 of SFS Regulatory Baseline) – 3% of livestock keepers.

Additional inspections may also be undertaken as a result of a referral from a member of the public or other organisations.

For the SFS – Universal Layer and the SFS Regulatory Baseline the percentage of claimants selected may be adjusted each year based on the error rate of the random control sample for the previous year (greater or lower than 2% error rate). This is a continuation of the control rates used for previous schemes.

Where possible, inspections will be combined to check multiple elements or schemes during a single farm inspection or visit. For example, inspections to check compliance with the SFS Regulatory Baseline may be combined with inspections to check compliance with the SFS - Universal Layer, as well as any other agricultural support, such as Woodland Creation or Organic Support.

The notice of an inspection will be strictly limited.

- For the SFS - Universal Layer and SFS Regulatory Baseline, inspections are generally expected to be conducted within 5 working days of notification, however up to 10 working days' notice may be provided in exceptional circumstances.
- For Cattle Identification and Sheep & Goat Identification and Animal Welfare -, inspections are to be unannounced, although in exceptional cases it is acceptable to allow up to 48 hours' notice.

Inspections are designed to support you, not create unnecessary stress. By working together with our inspectors, we can make the process straightforward and beneficial. For example, if the scheduled date is not convenient, alternative arrangements can be agreed, and you can nominate someone to attend on your behalf if needed.

Communication is key, whether it's notifying delays or unforeseen circumstances, inspectors will do their best to accommodate your situation. This collaborative approach ensures inspections are fair, practical, and focused on helping you meet requirements without becoming a burden.

Generally, one inspector will carry out the inspection, but colleagues or auditors (or both) may accompany them occasionally.

Satellite and aerial imagery technology may also be used to assess land eligibility and can be used to identify specific parcels to be visited as part of the inspection.

N2 SFS - Universal Layer Inspections

What will we do at inspection?

Our inspectors will visit your farm and check, your land, crops, records and where appropriate, that scheme requirements have been met.

When making the appointment or after arriving at your farm, the inspector will discuss:

- the purpose of the visit
- the applicable Universal Actions for your farm
- how the inspection will be carried out
- what they will need from you
- how long the inspection may take (although this may depend on the findings of the inspection).

Visits will, where practical, begin at the main holding and the inspector will introduce themselves to the farmer/representative and will always carry official identification which will be produced if requested.

How can you be ready for an inspection?

You can be ready for an inspection by:

- ensuring you have responded to all RPW correspondence to resolve any queries with your application.
- informing RPW of any changes to your applications or claims, e.g. land use changes, in a timely manner.
- keeping up-to-date, complete and accurate records.

Further information is also available in the 'When the inspector calls - a helpful guide for farmers' booklet available on the Welsh Government website.

What the inspector does

The inspector will check the claimed areas do not include land that is not eligible for the SFS - Universal Layer and assess whether the 10% habitat requirement is being met. This may involve checking boundaries, measuring fields, hedges and woodland, assessing crop and habitat types and excluding ineligible areas such as roads, hardstandings, buildings, river/streams and non-agricultural areas.

They will use maps and aerial imagery to carry out measurements, these will not take into account gradients/slopes.

Where possible a sampled approach will be undertaken to identify which parcels need to be assessed to ensure scheme requirements are being met. This sample may be increased if discrepancies or errors are found.

The inspector may need to check evidence that supports your land declaration, e.g. rental agreements to confirm you meet the 10-month management control requirement. They may also have to undertake additional checks to evidence you are carrying out the agricultural / ancillary activity (where applicable). This could include checking receipts and invoices.

What we will check

The inspector will check documentary evidence which confirms the completion of all relevant Universal Actions for your farm business.

Farm Record & Retention Period

You must keep, all farm records and supporting documentation needed to evidence you have complied with the scheme requirements and completed all the relevant Universal Actions applicable to your farm, for at least 5 years.

If you would like the Welsh Government to look at your records to give you guidance as to whether they meet the necessary standard, you should contact the RPW Customer Contact Centre to make an appointment for you to meet the FLS.

The FLS is not able to check the accuracy of the records but can give guidance on whether the format meets the scheme requirements. Remember, this service cannot rectify errors already discovered at inspection, or if an inspection has already been announced.

N3 SFS Regulatory Baseline Inspections

The SFS Regulatory Baseline is a set of existing legal requirements which all farmers must adhere to.

These requirements are made up of Standard Management Requirements (SMR) and Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC). (see Section G)

If you do not meet the requirements sanctions or penalties may be applied in accordance with the SFS Regulatory Baseline Verifiable Standards and Payment Reduction Matrix, which are available on the Welsh Government website at https://www.gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme-regulatory-baseline-2026

SFS Regulatory Baseline inspections will be carried out by the following Competent Control Authorities (CCA) and Delegated Agents as follows:

Competent Control Authority (CCA)	Area of Responsibility
Welsh Government's Rural Inspectorate Wales (RIW)	SMRs 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15. GAECs 6 and 7.
Natural Resources Wales	SMR 1 and GAEC 2 and 3
Animal and Plant Health Agency	SMRs 11, 12, 13
Veterinary Medicines Directorate (Inspections performed by the Animal and Plant Health Agency)	SMR 5

A SFS Regulatory Baseline inspection may include different elements that need to be inspected. This means you may be inspected more than once during the year because the relevant CCA was unable to check all the requirements for which it has responsibility at a single inspection or because your farm has been selected for inspection by more than one CCA. Where possible we will try to align inspections to reduce the burden.

What we will check

The inspector will confirm SMRs and GAECs are being met through:

- visually assessing the land
- physically checking animals (inc checking ear-tags)
- examining on farm records
- check farm infrastructures (where appropriate).

We also check Cattle Tuberculosis (TB) tests under SMR 4 (Food and Feed Law) have been completed from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) database directly.

N4 What happens after an inspection?

At the end of the visit the inspector will complete an inspection summary form (IACS7) which summarises the main findings and provide details of any breaches found. You will be asked to sign the form to acknowledge the inspection has taken place and you understand the main findings.

You will also be given the opportunity to include any remarks or comments following the inspection, including any evidence you consider appropriate in respect of any breaches discovered during the inspection.

Where the breach has been classified as ‘rectifiable’, you will be provided with details on the IACS7 of any action you must take to rectify the breach, and the timescales for completion.

The top copy of the IACS7 will be left with you and the bottom copy will be retained by the inspector. Sometimes there may be other forms left with you, which set out in detail additional findings and action required.

If we have completed a cattle inspection and found an error, we will leave you another form with a list of the tag numbers on which we have found error(s). We will take away any spare passports found and give you a receipt for these.

If we have completed a livestock inspection and found a high number of ear tag errors or are unable to reconcile all the animals on the farm, we may place the farm under a movement restriction order.

If you do not understand anything on these forms, ask the inspector to explain.

Other CCAs or Delegated Agents may alternatively issue a detailed post visit letter to summarise the inspection findings.

For all inspections, further administrative checks may need to be made after the inspection before the details can be finalised.

When all checks have been completed the inspection details are entered into our computer database to allow validation of your claim. An ‘inspection findings letter’ will be sent to you explaining the breaches found at inspection.

Please note, administrative checks following the inspection may also identify additional breaches.

Where an inspection is compliant, a letter will not be issued.

N5 Obstruction of an inspection

It is a legal requirement that you allow an inspection to conducted to verify compliance with scheme eligibility conditions and requirements, including the SFS Regulatory Baseline.

If you refuse the inspection to be conducted without good reason (e.g. serious illness, bereavement) and where the inspector has indicated flexibility to reschedule the visit, the inspector will advise of the implications of such a decision and notify you in writing of the date and time for the inspection, allowing at least 48 hours advance notice.

If you or your representative prevents this inspection from being carried out, your applications or claims will be rejected.

N6 Unacceptable Behaviour

Welsh Government officials, individuals or organisations carrying out duties on behalf of the Welsh Government (e.g. NRW, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS), Food Standards Agency (FSA), EID Cymru, Local Authorities), should not be subjected to aggressive, abusive or offensive behaviour or unreasonable demands and persistence from applicants/claimants or their representatives. This also applies to members of the Independent Appeals Panel.

A Managing Unacceptable Behaviour of Welsh Government Customers document is available on the Welsh Government website which explains what we consider unacceptable behaviour.

Unacceptable behaviour may lead to the withdrawal of payments and/or the rejection of applications or claims

Section O: Payments

O1 SFS - Universal Layer Payments

The annual SFS - Universal Layer Payment is made up of four separate payment categories across two elements, as follows:

- Universal Baseline Payment, and
- Social Value Payment:

Universal Baseline Payment

The Universal Baseline Payment consists of three separate payment categories which reflect the costs incurred and income foregone for undertaking the scheme requirements, including the Universal Code and the Universal Actions. The three payment categories are:

Whole Farm Payment

This is a tiered payment, paid as a rate per hectare on the total Whole Farm Area eligible on your application, including common land or land used in common/shared grazing.

Habitat Maintenance Payment

This is paid in addition to the Whole Farm Payment. It is a single payment rate paid per hectare of permanent semi-natural habitat, managed in accordance with UA5: Habitat Maintenance, excluding habitat on common land or land used in common/shared grazing.

Temporary habitat created in accordance with UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land, will also be paid at the same rate up to the threshold required to meet the 10% habitat requirement for your holding.

Any additional temporary habitat created above the 10% threshold will not attract a habitat maintenance payment.

Woodland Maintenance Payment

This is paid in addition to the Whole Farm payment. This is a single payment rate paid per hectare of woodland, managed in accordance with UA9: Woodland Maintenance, excluding woodland on common land or land used in common/shared grazing.

Please note: The Habitat Maintenance Payment and Woodland Maintenance payment are not eligible on any areas already under a management agreement outside of SFS Universal Layer where a revenue maintenance payment is being received (either annually or as a single cumulative payment).

If you do not have a current management agreement on your designated site with any other regulatory body (e.g. Section 16 management agreement with NRW) you will be entitled to the applicable payments.

Social Value Payment

The Social Value Payment is a single payment rate paid per hectare on Total Whole Farm Area eligible on your application, including common land or land used in common/shared grazing.

This is the fourth payment category and reflects the social value of the Universal outcomes delivered through sustainable agriculture practices, which are not properly reflected in market practices for agricultural output, and which contribute to the statutory Sustainable Land Management objectives.

O2 Payment Rates

The payment rates for the 2026 scheme year are:

Payment Categories	Payment Rate
Whole Farm Payment	£70 for the first 70 hectares, then £2 per hectare for all remaining eligible land
Habitat Maintenance Payment	£69 per hectare
Woodland Maintenance Payment	£62 per hectare
Social Value Payment	£107 per hectare

O3 Payment Capping

Capping will be applied to the Universal Payment (total of Universal Baseline Payment and Social Value Payment) as follows:

Tier Payment Value	Capping Rate
Tier 1 up to £25,000	0%
Tier 2 More than £25,000 up to £50,000	5%
Tier 3 More than £50,000 up to £150,000	10%
Tier 4 More than £150,000 up to £200,000	15%
Tier 6 More than £200,000 up to £250,000	30%
Tier 7 More than £250,000 up to £300,000	55%
Tier 8 More than £300,000	100%

Checks will be carried out to ensure farmers have not artificially created circumstances to avoid these reductions. If you are found to have artificially split your business to gain advantage, you could lose your payment.

O4 Stability Payment for 2026

A one-off Stability Payment of £1,000 will be payable to eligible SFS Universal claimants where the total Whole Farm Area is less than or equal to 100 hectares. This includes any apportioned area of common land claimed or land used in common/shared grazing.

The Stability Payment is not subject to the capping rules as set out above but will be subject to reductions and penalties should sanctions apply.

O5 Payment Reduction and Penalties

Deductions to scheme payments and the order in which they will be applied are set out in Section Q8.

O6 Linear Reductions

SFS - Universal Layer payments are subject to an overall budget ceiling set annually by the Welsh Ministers.

If the total payment value of all eligible claims submitted exceeds the maximum budget available to the SFS - Universal Layer, a linear reduction will be applied to scale back all individual Universal Payments to the level of the maximum budget ceiling.

O7 Making Payments

All payments must be made by Bankers Automated Clearing System (BACS), to a verified bank account.

Subject to an eligible claim and receipt of all necessary supporting documents we aim to make an Advance Universal Payment of up to 70% of your estimated claim value from October 2026.

Full and balance payments will be made from December 2026, subject to full validation of your claim, including notification of the completion of all applicable Universal Actions via the SFS Universal Dashboard on your RPW Online account.

You should not make business decisions on the assumption of receiving an Advance Payment or being paid your Balance Payment on the earliest date possible. Your Universal Payment may be paid at a later date once all validation checks have been completed.

O8 Recovery of Previous Payments

Where it is found incorrect payments have been made, those payments may be recovered in whole or in part.

Where you are required to re-pay monies you will be notified of the debt in writing by RPW.

Where a debt remains outstanding, the full amount will be automatically recovered from the first available future agricultural support payments that becomes due to you under the SFS or any other support schemes established under the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023.

Section P: Changes of Circumstances

In accordance with the legislation governing the SFS - Universal Layer, you must notify RPW as soon as reasonably practicable, of any change of circumstances which might reasonably be expected to affect your ability to meet the eligibility criteria and/or scheme requirements. This should be within 60 days of the relevant change of circumstances.

Where you have notified us, we may take one or more of the following actions:

(a) amend, remove or replace a condition either temporarily or permanently.

(b) amend, remove or replace any requirements or timescales either temporarily or permanently

(c) apply sanctions and/or reduce payments

(d) require you to repay some or all of previous payments made, in the current or any previous scheme year.

RPW may accept that you were was prevented from fulfilling certain obligations due to a course of events amounting to Exceptional Circumstances. Further details are set out in Section Q13.

Section Q: Payment reductions, sanctions, exclusions and the provision for the correction of errors

No payment (including an advance payment) will be paid until we have confirmed your eligibility. If evidence is required but not submitted by the SAF deadline of 15 May 2026 your claim will be rejected.

Payment reductions may be applied to your Universal Payment if:
- your SAF is received late.
- it is found information you have provided is incomplete or inaccurate i.e. under or over declared land.

Additional sanctions may be applied if:
- notification of completed Universal Actions and supporting documentation is received late.
- you do not meet the requirements of the scheme i.e. non-compliance and breach.

Payment reductions may be applied, including exclusion from the scheme, without prejudice, if, you have artificially created conditions to meet the scheme requirements.

Q1 Late SAF Submission

You must apply and claim the SFS - Universal Layer on the SAF before the closing date of 15 May 2026.

The SAF can be accepted up to 25 calendar days after the closing date. This is known as the SAF late claim period.

If you submit your SAF after 15 May, the Universal Payment will be reduced by 1% per working day (Monday to Friday inclusive, excluding bank holidays) Throughout the late claim period, up to and including 9 June 2026.

A SAF cannot be submitted or accepted after the late claim period.

Full details of the SAF submission deadlines will be provided in the Single Application Rules Booklet published annually.

Q2 Under-declared land

The SFS - Universal Layer is a ‘Whole Farm’ scheme.

You must declare all available Welsh agricultural land on the SAF, including all landscape features, man-made features and any other features not eligible for payment.

You must declare all your land where you have management control for at least 10-months of the calendar year on the SAF. Failure to declare all your land, including non-eligible areas, may result in your Universal Payment being reduced.

Where there is a difference between the area declared on the SAF and the total area on the holding that should have been declared, Universal Payment reduction will apply as follows;

Difference	Reduction
Up to 3%	No reduction in payment
More than 3% and up to 20%	1% reduction in payment
More than 20% and up to 50%	2% reduction in payment
More than 50%	3% reduction in payment

Q3 Over-declared land

A penalty may be applied where we find the total Whole Farm Area declared is more than the total Whole Farm Area determined. This may be in circumstances where you claim on land parcels, but we later establish you do not have management control of the land for 10-months of the scheme year.

Where the difference between the total Whole Farm Area declared and determined is more than either 3% or 2 hectares of the determined area, the Whole Farm Area eligible for payment will be reduced by 1.5 times the difference found.

Difference in area	Reduction
Up to 3%	No reduction in payment
Up to 2 hectares	No reduction in payment
When the over-declaration is more than 2 hectares and the difference is more than 3% and up to 10%	Whole Farm Area determined minus (0.75 x difference)
When the over-declaration is more than 2 hectares and the difference is more than 50%	Whole Farm Area determined minus (1.5 x difference)

Examples:

- The Whole Farm Area is declared as 100 hectares but is determined to be 98.5 hectares. The Whole Farm Area used to calculate the Universal Baseline Payment will be 98.5 hectares, and no additional reduction will apply since the difference is not more than 3% or 2 hectares.

- The Whole Farm Area declared as 100 hectares but is determined to be 80 hectares. Since the difference is 20 hectares, the Whole Farm Area used to calculate the Universal Baseline Payment will be 50 hectares, which is 80 hectares minus 30 hectares i.e. the difference found of 20 hectares x 1.5.

However, where the difference between the area declared and determined is more than either 3% or 2 hectares, **but no more than 10% of the determined area**, the penalty applied will be calculated (as described above) but will be reduced by 50%.

Example:

- The Whole Farm Area declared as 100 hectares but is determined to be 90 hectares. The Whole Farm Area reduction is calculated as 10 hectares x 1.5 = 15 hectares. However, as the over-declared area is no more than 10%, the 15-hectare area of reduction is halved. The Whole Farm Area will be 82.5 hectares, which is the 90 hectares determined, less 7.5-hectare reduction.

Over-declared penalties will not be applied on Habitat land or Woodland. Where areas of Habitat or Woodland have been declared but are either found not to be present or not being managed in accordance with the Universal Action requirements, sanctions will apply in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q5).

Q4 Completing Universal Actions

Notification of completed Universal Actions via the SFS Universal Dashboard, must be received by **15 January 2027.**

If you do not meet the requirements, sanctions may be applied in accordance with the published Verifiable Standards and Sanctions Matrix (see Section Q5).

Q5 Non-compliance with Scheme requirements

Non-compliance with the SFS Regulatory Baseline or Universal Code and Universal Actions requirements will be referred to as a breach and may be identified as a result of an inspection or administrative checks.

RPW will assess these breaches against sets of published Verifiable Standards and Sanction Matrices.

There are two separate Verifiable Standards and Sanction Matrices. One of which applies to the SFS Regulatory Baseline, the other applies to the Universal Code and Universal Actions requirements.

The matrices will determine the appropriate level of sanctions to be applied for all breaches found. Sanctions can range from advisory letters to financial penalties depending on the seriousness of the breach. You will be notified in writing of the breach and the sanction applied.

Sanctions will be categorised under the following;

- SFS Regulatory Baseline
- Universal Code, including 10% habitat requirement.
- Universal Actions

If the breach results in financial penalties, these will be applied to your Universal Payment.

The table below shows how financial penalties may be applied to each individual element of the Universal Payment.

	SFS Regulatory Baseline	Universal Code and Universal Actions			
	Breach of SFS Regulatory Baseline	Breach of Universal Code, including 10% habitat requirement	Breach of Universal Actions (excluding UA5,UA6 and UA9)	Breach of Universal Actions UA5 and/or UA6	Breach of Universal Action UA9
Whole Farm Payment	✓	✓	✓		
Habitat Maintenance Payment	✓	✓		✓	
Woodland Maintenance Payment	✓	✓			✓
Social Value Payment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stability Payment (2026 only)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Q6 SFS Regulatory Baseline

Where we identify breaches of the SFS Regulatory Baseline sanctions will be applied in the same way as Cross Compliance breaches, the framework which has underpinned BPS.

The requirements of the SFS Regulatory baseline must be met for the entire scheme year in which you claim.

If you fail to meet the requirements of the SFS Regulatory Baseline a financial penalty may be applied to your Universal Payment. The penalty would be applied to the payment for the year in which the breach is found.

In addition, non-compliance may result in prosecution by the relevant CCA

In determining the sanction consideration will be taken of the intent, extent, severity, duration and reoccurrence of the breach and to whom the breach is directly attributable.

- Intent – whether the breach is classified as ‘negligent’ or ‘intentional’
- Extent – whether the breach has an ‘off-farm effect’ or is limited to an ‘on-farm effect.
- Severity – the breach will be classified based on the severity of the non-compliance, ranging from ‘minimal’ to ‘high’
- Duration – the breach will be classified as either ‘rectifiable’ or ‘permanent’ depending on whether we consider the effects of the breach can be rectified.

Sanctions are applied where the breach is directly attributable to you or your business/organisation. In circumstances where land may have transferred between claimants, sanctions will apply to whom the breach is directly attributable.

However, if you transfer your land to another business or organisation for part of the year who do not claim SFS or BPS, any breaches caused by them on that land may impact on your payment, as it is your responsibility to ensure the SFS Regulatory Baseline requirements are met for the entire scheme year.

In the case of non-compliance of the Cattle and/or Sheep & Goats Identification and Registration Regulations, it is normally the keeper of the animals who would be liable for any sanctions arising from associated breaches. However, if you allow such livestock to graze your land you should take reasonable steps to ensure the keeper has properly registered them, including the need to inform BCMS, EID Cymru or the AML2 service of the movement of animals onto and off your land.

Negligence

If you fail to meet the requirements of the SFS Regulatory Baseline a sanction will be applied that will generally be a 3% financial penalty applied to the Universal Payment; but this penalty could be reduced to 0% or increased to 5% depending on the nature of the breach.

The SFS Regulatory Baseline requirements are split into four areas, with each area containing several different standards i.e. SMRs/GAECs;

- Environment, Climate and Good Agricultural Condition of land (SMR 1-3 and GAECs 2, 3, 6 and 7).
- Public health, animal health and plant health (SMR 4-10)
- Animal welfare (SMR 11-13).
- Statutory Public Access and Invasive Non-Native Species (SMR 14-15)

If you fail to comply with more than one requirement against standards within the same area (e.g. within public, animal and plant health), whilst they will be recorded as separate breaches, only one sanction will apply for this area.

If you fail to comply with the requirements against standards in separate areas, these breaches will lead to separate sanctions being applied.

Provided the breach identified is not a re-occurrence and/or has not been classified as intentional, any financial penalties will be added together, however, the maximum penalty will be 5% of the Universal Payment.

Repetition

Where a breach of the same requirement reoccurs within a three-year period, the sanction calculated for the repeated breach will be increased by a multiplier of 3, provided you were informed of the earlier breach, and you had a reasonable opportunity to rectify the breach.

If there are further reoccurrences of the breach, the penalties applied as a result of the previous non-compliance will continue to be multiplied by 3 up to a maximum of 15% at which point the penalty will be capped.

Once a negligent breach penalty has reached the capped threshold of 15%, if you again fail to comply with the same requirement within a three-year period, you will be treated as having intentionally failed to comply. The breach applied will be calculated by taking the previous negligent penalty before being capped to 15% and multiplying by 3. The rules for intentional non-compliance will now be applied for any further repeated breaches of the same requirement. Intentional breaches attract a significantly higher penalty.

If you have received a Cross Compliance penalty within the 3 years before your first claim for Universal Scheme and you subsequently breach the same requirement within the SFS Regulatory Baseline, a repetition breach will apply in accordance with the SFS Regulatory Baseline Matrix.

Intentional Non-Compliance

If we consider you have intentionally failed to comply with any of the requirements of the SFS Regulatory Baseline, you will generally have a 20% penalty applied but this could be reduced to 15% or increased to 100% depending on the seriousness of the breach measured by extent, severity, permanence and repetition. An Intentional breach will be calculated in accordance with the SFS Regulatory Baseline Sanction Matrix.

Q7 SFS Universal Code and Universal Actions

If you fail to meet any of the requirements of the Universal Code and/or applicable Universal Actions we will consider this a breach, and sanctions will apply.

In determining breaches of the Universal Code and Universal Actions, the following will be considered;

Severity

The severity of the breach is classified as either Low, Medium or High depending on the seriousness of the non-compliance.

Extent

The extent of the breach is classified as Extent 1 or Extent 2, depending on the proportion of the breached area in relation to the whole claim area.

Permanence

A breach is classified as ‘Rectifiable’ if the effects of the non-compliance can be rectified within 12 calendar months from the date on which the non-compliance is found.

A breach is classified as ‘Permanent’ if the effects of the non-compliance cannot be rectified within 12 calendar months from the date on which the non-compliance is found or before the Universal Action deadline, if applicable.

Where a breach is classified as ‘Rectifiable’ we will specify the timescale in which you must rectify the breach and may withhold payments until such a time as the non-compliance has been rectified. Where a breach has not been rectified, we may reclassify the breach as ‘Permanent’.

Repetition

Where a breach of the Universal Code or Universal Actions is found within 3 years of the original breach, repetition breaches apply in accordance with the SFS Sanctions Matrix.

Retrospection

Penalties applied due to breaches of the Universal Code or Universal Actions will not generally be applied retrospectively to previous year’s Universal Payments, in addition to a penalty being applied to the year the breach is found.

However, retrospective penalties may be applied in cases where there is compelling evidence that the breach occurred in previous years. For example, where aerial photography shows Permanent semi-natural habitat has been damaged in previous years or it is found you did not complete the minimum soil testing required in a previous year, a sanction may be applied to that previous year’s payment.

Grouping and Capping of Breaches

Universal Code

The Universal Code is made up of four parts, with each part containing several different requirements. The four parts are;

- Soil protection
- Biodiversity and habitats (including 10% habitat requirement)
- Trees
- Landscape features

If you fail to comply with more than one requirement within the same part of the Universal Code (e.g. soil protection), whilst they will be recorded as separate breaches, only one penalty would apply for this part.

If you fail to comply with the requirements in separate parts, these breaches could lead to separate penalties being applied.

Examples:

- If we identify three breaches of the soil protection part of the Universal Code, any penalty applied will be capped to the highest breach found.
- If we identify breaches across multiple parts of the Universal Code, (such as soil protection and landscape features) the highest financial penalty applied to each will be added together and applied to the Universal Payment (see table above)

All breaches of the Universal Code will be recorded, and you will be notified. All breaches may be used for the purposes of applying repetition sanctions should the same breaches be found in future years.

Universal Actions

For Universal Actions (as applicable to you)), if you fail to comply with more than one requirement within the same Universal Action (e.g.UA12: Animal Health and Welfare), whilst each non-compliance will be recorded, only one penalty would apply for this Universal Action.

If you fail to comply with the requirements in separate Universal Actions, these breaches could lead to separate penalties being applied.

Examples:

- If we identify three breaches of UA12: Animal Health and Welfare, any penalty applied will be capped to the highest breach found.
- If we identify breaches across multiple Universal Actions, the highest financial penalty applied to each will be added together and applied to the Universal Payment, with the exception of UA5: Habitat Maintenance, UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land and UA9: Woodland Maintenance. (see table above).
- If we identify breaches of UA5 Habitat Maintenance or UA6: Temporary habitat creation on improved land, the highest financial penalty applied to each will be added together and applied to the Habitat Maintenance and Social Value payments.
- If we identify breaches of UA9: Woodland Maintenance, the highest financial penalty applied will be applied to the Woodland Maintenance and Social Value payments.

All breaches of the Universal Actions will be recorded, and you will be notified. All breaches may be used for the purposes of applying repetition sanctions should the same breaches be found in future years.

Q8 Accumulation of reductions

For the SFS - Universal Layer reductions to payments will be applied where applicable to that part of the payment. Different deductions apply to the Whole Farm Payment, Habitat Maintenance Payment, Woodland Maintenance Payment, Social Value Payment and Stability Payment. Therefore, they are detailed separately. The deductions will be made in the order below and each successive reduction will be based on the amount resulting from the previous reduction:

Whole Farm Payment

• over-declared

• late submission of SAF, and late supporting documentation

• non declaration of area

• Universal actions (Excluding a breach of UA 5,6,9)

• Universal Code

• capping, linear reductions in order to respect the SFS budget

• SFS Regulatory Baseline

Habitat Maintenance Payment

• over-declared

• late submission of SAF and late supporting documentation

• non declaration of area

• Universal Action 5 and 6

• Universal Code

• capping, linear reductions in order to respect the SFS budget

• SFS Regulatory Baseline

Woodland Maintenance Payment

• over-declared

• late submission of SAF and late supporting documentation

• non declaration of area

• Universal Action 9

• Universal Code

• capping, linear reductions in order to respect the SFS budget

• SFS Regulatory Baseline

Social Value Payment

• over-declared

• late submission of SAF, and late supporting documentation

• non declaration of area

• Universal actions

• Universal Code

• capping, linear reductions in order to respect the SFS budget

• SFS Regulatory Baseline

Stability Payment

• over-declared

• late submission of SAF, and late supporting documentation

• non declaration of area

• Universal actions

• Universal Code

• linear reductions in order to respect the SFS budget

• SFS Regulatory Baseline

Q9 Obvious Error

RPW operates an Obvious Error provision in accordance with the legislation governing the scheme. Applications for support or payment claims and any supporting documents or relevant notifications provided by the claimants may be corrected and adjusted at any time after their submission in cases of obvious errors recognised by RPW. Obvious errors may be recognised on the basis of an overall assessment of the particular case and provided the claimant has acted in good faith.

As a general rule, an obvious error may be detected from information given in the documents and information submitted to RPW as part of and in support of applications or payment claims, including supporting documents and relevant notifications, and as a result of coherence checks against other relevant information held by Welsh Government.

Q10 Amendments and Additions to the SAF

Provided your SAF is submitted by midnight on 15 May 2026, you can make amendments to your SAF without penalty up to and including 1 June 2026 to:

• add agricultural parcels of land that were at your disposal/control for 10 months including the 15 May 2026

• change the use of land parcels, and/or

• change the schemes claimed on individual parcels of land.

Amendments received after 1 June 2026 will receive a late submission penalty of 1% per working day in respect of the parcels of land subject to the amendment. No amendments will be accepted after 9 June 2026.

However, if you have already been notified of an error in your SAF, or if you have been notified of an inspection which subsequently reveals errors, you cannot rectify the error or amend details of the parcels of land concerned.

Q11 Notified Error

You may notify RPW in writing at any time that part of your SFS - Universal Layer claim is incorrect or has become incorrect since it was submitted. The information you give will be used to amend your claim without penalties.

You may not correct such errors if you have been notified by the Welsh Government, any other CCA or Delegated Agents, of the error or been notified of an inspection which subsequently reveals non-compliance e.g. notification of a field declared for SFS which is not under your management control.

In respect of the SFS Regulatory Baseline controls, if you discover an error or omission in respect of information entered on the Cattle Tracing System for your cattle, you should notify BCMS of the error immediately. You may avoid penalties if the central livestock movement databases are correct before any inspection begins or you meet the requirements for notified error.

Q12 Withdrawal

You may withdraw your SFS - Universal Layer claim at any time without penalty, except where you have been notified of errors or have been notified of an inspection.

Your application to withdraw must be made either via your RPW Online account or in writing to the RPW Customer Contact Centre.

If you withdraw your SAF 2026 before the 15 May closing date (or SAF late claim period) you will have the opportunity to submit another SAF.

If withdrawn before the closing date (or SAF late claim period) you may re-submit your claim for SFS or submit a BPS claim and/or retain your BPS entitlements for use in future years.

If you withdraw your SAF 2026 after the late claim deadline of 9 June, you will not be able to re-submit and claim for any scheme.

Q13 Exceptional Circumstances

RPW may accept that you were prevented from fulfilling certain obligations due to a course of events amounting to Exceptional Circumstances.

Exceptional Circumstances are defined as unusual circumstances which are outside the control of the claimant, were unforeseen and could not be avoided despite all due care and except at the cost of excessive sacrifice on their part.

Examples of Exceptional Circumstances that may be recognised include:

- Natural events, such as prolonged adverse weather conditions, flooding, or animals or plant disease.
- Serious illness, injury or death affecting the business.
- Unforeseen loss of management control of land, for example where a tenancy is terminated or because of compulsory purchase.
- Financial circumstances such as bankruptcy.
- Evidenced supply chain problems.
- Criminal damage by a third party, such as arson or vandalism.

For RPW to consider and accept an event as Exceptional Circumstances details must be received in writing, within 60 days of the claimants, or someone acting on their behalf, being in a position to do so.

An Exceptional Circumstances event may directly affect just one member of a farm business or organisation, however, it should be explained how the events impacted on the ability of everyone in the business or organisation as a whole to meet their obligations.

Additional documentary evidence may be requested and should be provided as appropriate.

The Exceptional Circumstances provision is available in respect of;

- Late submission of an application or claim.
- Late notification of supporting documentation in respect of an application, claim or confirmation of completion of a Universal Action
- The right to payment in respect of certain eligible areas declared on an application or claim but no longer available to the applicant or agreement holder because of an Exceptional Circumstances event.

- The inability to comply with scheme requirements including eligibility conditions.
- Scheme breach penalties.
- The requirement for partial or full re-imbursement of payments received.

Each notification of Exceptional Circumstances will be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis.

Q14 Offences

Regulation 19 of The Agriculture Support Schemes (Eligibility, Enforcement and Appeals) (Wales) Regulations 2025 establishes offences in relation to certain aspects of financial support provided for under those regulations. That regulation and those offences are applicable to the SFS - Universal Payment.

Examples of offences include at any time giving false or misleading information, failing to provide information, evidence or copies of records when requested and preventing or otherwise obstructing an inspection, including failure to provide reasonable assistance in the completion of an inspection.

Where we establish you have committed an offence in accordance with the regulations your SFS - Universal Payment may be withdrawn in whole or in part.

Q15 Artificiality

If we discover you have artificially created the circumstances to gain an advantage from any of the requirements relating to the Universal Payment, including to avoid payment capping rules, we will investigate and may withhold payments or reject your claim and/or recover monies paid.

Section R: Changes to Scheme Rules

R1 Legislation changes (including changes in interpretation)

Legislation may change from time to time, and you will be required to abide by any changes to the scheme rules, following notification from Welsh Government.

R2 Changes to scheme rules

We may need to make changes to the scheme rules for a number of reasons. For example, we may need to update the management conditions to take account of the latest scientific advice or amend scheme rules to take account of any changes to legislation or policy. We will publicise changes on the **our website** and, where necessary, contact you directly.

Section S: Appeals and Complaints

S1 Appeals

The ‘Independent Appeals Process for Rural Grants and Payments’ allows you to request a case review if you feel RPW has not reached a correct decision according to the rules of the scheme

The appeals process consists of two stages:

- Stage 1: review by a second official, not responsible for the original decision.
- Stage 2: review by an Independent Appeals Panel (if you are dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response).

The Independent Panel makes recommendations to the Welsh Ministers, who take the final decision, which concludes the process.

There is no charge for a stage 1 appeal. Fees apply for a stage 2 appeal, but these are repaid in full if the appeal is successful and accepted in full.

Appeals, including supporting evidence, must be submitted via RPW Online within 60 days of the date of the letter outlining the decision you wish to appeal against.

Further details of the appeals process and how to submit an appeal, using the online appeal form, can be obtained from our website at **Rural Grants and Payments appeals: guidance**.

S2 Complaints

All complaints will be dealt with under the Welsh Government’s formal complaints procedure.

Further advice on how to make a complaint can be obtained from the Complaints Advice Team:

Welsh Government
Crown Buildings
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Tel: 03000 251378

Website: **Complaints about Welsh Government**

You may also choose to contact the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales:

1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae
Pencoed
CF35 5LJ

Tel: 0300 790 0203
Website: **www.ombudsman.wales**

Section T: Privacy Notice

This notice informs you about the Welsh Government's use of the information provided in connection with your SFS - Universal Layer claim. It also explains the Welsh Government's processing and use of your personal data and your rights under the Data Protection Regulation 2018.

The data controller for the information submitted as part of SFS - Universal Layer is the **Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ.**

The data protection officer for the same information is the **Data Protection Officer, Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ.**
Email: DataProtectionOfficer@gov.wales

The lawful basis for the processing is that it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the exercise of official authority vested in the Welsh Government.

The Welsh Government collects personal data to identify you, your location and your business(es).

The data is processed through an automated process of business rules that use the Customer Reference Number (CRN) as a primary key.

Your information will be stored for 10 years following the year of payment.

T1 Reasons for sharing personal data

The Welsh Government may share personal information with;

- NRW
- Farming Connect
- Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)
- Veterinary Medicine Directorate
- Welsh Local Authorities (WLA)
- Food Standards Agency (FSA) Wales
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- Research contractors working on behalf of the Welsh Government
- Other Government departments or regulatory bodies.

The information may be used for the following:

- Assessing eligibility and the processing and validation of SFS schemes requirements and the calculation of payments.
- Production and publication of maps showing the areas of land that have received funding.
- Compilation of reports of aggregated data and/or summary statistics to be made publicly available.
- Informing decisions relating to policy changes and funding, including research studies conducted on behalf of the Welsh Government.

- Identification of landowners/users in events of emergencies, e.g. disease control and breach control.
- Protecting applicant's interest in land conservation and issues that may arise due to funding queries.
- Allowing partner organisations to fulfil their legal duties
- Disclosure to regulatory authorities, such as HM Revenue and Customs, Local Authorities and the Police
- Publication of certain information and responding to requests for information.

T2 The Publication and Disclosure of Information

The information will be managed and used by the Welsh Government in accordance with its obligations and duties under the:

- The Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004
- The Agriculture Support Schemes (Eligibility, Enforcement and Appeals) (Wales) Regulations 2025

The Welsh Government is required to publish details of the amounts paid to rural agreement holders who have received support under the Agricultural Support Schemes Regulations 2025. Information will be published for all agreement holders and will include the full name, the post town and post code area and district where the agreement holder is resident, or where agreement holder's registered office or primary base of business is located and details of the amounts paid for each support scheme in the financial year and a description of the activities financed by the relevant payments.

However, this will not apply for those agreement holders receiving relevant support less than £1,250 in the financial year.

The details published will remain available for three years from the date it is published.

T3 Your rights under the Data Protection Act 2018

Under the data protection legislation, you have the right:

- to access the personal data Welsh Government holds on you
- to require us to rectify inaccuracies in that data

  to (in certain circumstances, such as the withdrawal of your application prior to payment) object to or restrict processing, and your data to be 'erased'

- to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who is the independent regulator for data protection

For further details about the information Welsh Government holds and its use, or if you want to exercise your rights under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), please see contact details below:

Data Protection Officer
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Email: **dataprotectionofficer@gov.wales**

The contact details for the Information Commissioner's Office are:

2nd Floor, Churchill House
Churchill Way
Cardiff
CF10 2HH

Telephone: 0330 414 6421
Website: **https://ico.org.uk/**

Should you have any queries regarding this privacy statement please contact the RPW Customer Contact Centre.

Section U: Monitoring and Evaluation

U1 What is monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring is the collection of data, both during and after scheme implementation to improve current and future decision making.[1]

Monitoring and evaluation are closely related, and a typical evaluation will rely heavily on monitoring data.

Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the design, implementation and outcomes of the scheme. It involves understanding how the support scheme is being, or has been, implemented and what effects it has, for whom and why.[2]

Evaluation also involves identifying what can be improved and how, as well as estimating the overall cost-effectiveness and policy impact.

U2 Why monitor and evaluate?

Monitoring and evaluation are an important way of identifying lessons that can be learnt to improve both the design and delivery of future SFS support.

U3 Monitoring and Evaluation of the SFS

The SFS will be monitored, evaluated and reported by Welsh Government, through:

1. the legal requirements of the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023 focussing on the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) objectives; and,
2. evaluation of the scheme

U4 Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023 requirements

Under the Act, Welsh Ministers have a statutory duty to monitor, evaluate and report progress on the contribution towards achieving the SLM objectives of any support given by the Welsh Government.

Monitoring plays a vital role that enables the Welsh Government to be accountable by measuring its performance against the SLM objectives and the purposes of support. Reporting provides the Senedd and the public with appropriate transparency to enable them to track progress and achievements.

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[1] The Green Book

[2] HMT_Magenta_Book.pdf

The Act sets out a clear monitoring and reporting framework at both the SLM objective and support scheme levels. It contains five levels of reporting:

- The **Multi-Annual Support Plan (MASP**) which is a five year forward plan setting out how Welsh Ministers intend to provide support during the plan period to contribute to achieving the SLM objectives. The first **Multi-Annual Support Plan (MASP)** was published in December 2024.

- A statement establishing **SLM indicators and targets** which will be published in December 2025 and be used to assess progress against the SLM objectives.

- The publication in March 2026 of an **annual report** published at each financial year-end to provide transparency on financial and non-financial support provided under the Act's power to provide support via support schemes, including the SFS.

- An **impact report** will be prepared every five years by Welsh Government which will evaluate all the support provided under the act. This will include an assessment of its impact and effectiveness of the support in achieving the purposes for which the support was provided, and the supports contribution to achieving the SLM objectives. The first impact report will be published in December 2030, reporting on the period up to the end of December 2029.

- A **Sustainable Land Management Report** will be produced every five years to assess the effectiveness of the actions taken by Welsh Ministers in accordance with the duty to achieve the SLM objectives. It will assess cumulative progress towards achieving the SLM objectives (since the SLM duty came into force) as well as progress made during the reporting period. It will also evaluate progress against the SLM indicators and targets and set out whether each target has been achieved. The first SLM reporting period will be up to the end of December 2025 and will be published in December 2026.

U5 The Agriculture Support Schemes (Eligibility, Enforcement and Appeals) (Wales) Regulations 2025

These Regulations make provision in respect of support schemes under which the Welsh Ministers provide support. Regulation 8 requires a person receiving support under a support scheme to provide information or evidence to the Welsh Ministers that may be needed in order to, for example, check that the agreement holder continues to meet the eligibility criteria and verify compliance with the scheme's conditions:

8. An agreement holder must provide, in such manner and at such times as the Welsh Ministers specify, such information or evidence as the Welsh Ministers may require to—

(a) check whether the agreement holder continues to meet the eligibility criteria for receipt of support,
(b) verify compliance with the conditions subject to which support is provided,
(c) monitor the extent to which the purpose of the support scheme has been, or will be, achieved, and
(d) review or evaluate—
(i) any of the activities carried out by the agreement holder under the support scheme, and
(ii) the success of the support scheme as a whole.

There is a direct link between monitoring of the support provided under a scheme established pursuant to section 8 of the Act and the reporting framework contained within the Act. To satisfy the reporting requirements all support issued will be monitored to capture the impact and effectiveness of that support, as well as to apply appropriate and effective fiscal management. We will use the evidence submitted by applicants / agreement holders to monitor the impact of the support in providing an accurate reflection of the impacts of the support schemes across the agricultural sector in Wales and the relevance of the actions in delivering that support, together with their contribution to achieving the SLM objectives. This may include data collected through inspections, declarations or scheme administration and will be subject to compliance with data protection legislation and scheme privacy notices.

U6 Evaluation of the SFS

The SFS will be the primary, but not the only mechanism of support provided by the Welsh Government to meet the SLM objectives. In addition to the monitoring and reporting requirements of the Act, the SFS will also have its own monitoring, reporting and evaluation framework so that the effectiveness and value for money of the scheme itself can be assessed. To support evaluation of the SFS, scheme participants may be asked to take part in research activities. The information and feedback gathered through these activities will play a role in shaping future development of the scheme, helping to ensure it remains effective, responsive, and beneficial for the agricultural industry in Wales.

A future monitoring and evaluation strategy will set out how the Welsh Government intends to assess how SLM objectives and schemes including the SFS will be assessed in terms of value for money and the outcomes it delivers for Wales, including economic, social and cultural outcomes.

The strategy will recognise the long-term nature of the outcomes sought and identify interim measures which can demonstrate progress considering performance and management data from Welsh Government, NRW and other service providers.

U7 What this means for you and your data:

The Welsh Government may share information you have provided in connection with your SFS - Universal Layer claim (including personal data) with third party contractors to enable monitoring and evaluation of the scheme.
As a result, you may be contacted and asked to take part in research activities. The purpose of the research will be outlined, however, participation is voluntary. Any participation will help us to ensure that schemes remain effective.

Contractors will use any data provided only for the purpose of carrying out research activities on behalf of Welsh Government and strictly in accordance with UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Further information about how the information provided in connection with your SFS - Universal Layer claim will be used can be found in the Privacy Notice at Section T.

Annex 1: UA3 Benchmarking – Farming Connect and Key Performance Indicators

This annex contains guidance on how to register or re-register with Farming Connect and how to access FARMDATA+ along with the list of Key Performance Indicators available.

Farming Connect

STEP 1
Move to One Login: If you haven't already you need to migrate your existing RPW account to the new GOV.UK One Login service.

STEP 2
Register / Re-register with Farming Connect through your RPW Online account from 4 March 2026.

Once your registration is approved you will have access to the FARMDATA+ tool.

Farming Connect is available to help you through the migration and registration process.

Call the Farming Connect Service Centre to book a one-to-one ICT appointment on 03456 000 813.

Sector and applicable KPIs

Arable:

- use of insecticides £/ha
- use of herbicides £/ha
- fertiliser costs £/ha
- nitrogen use kgN/ha
- yield t/ha for grains and oil seed rape
- yield t/ha for potatoes

Beef:

- suckler herd replacement rate
- suckler cows and heifers calved in first six weeks %
- calving interval
- suckler cow age at first calving
- daily liveweight gain (DLWG) - beef finishing
- daily liveweight gain (DLWG) - growing stores
- calf daily liveweight gain (DLWG) at 200 days
- concentrate use kg/head - beef finishing
- cattle age at slaughter
- number of calves reared per cow
- cow mortality %

Dairy:

- cow pregnancy rate %
- calving interval
- % calved in first six weeks
- stocking rate for dairy per hectare
- cow - total purchased feed cost pence per litre (ppl)
- dairy cow concentrate use kg/l
- dairy herd replacement rate
- heifer - age at first calving
- average milk protein %
- milk produced litres/cow/year

Horticulture:

- volume per metre2
- sales value per metre2
- gross profit margin
- water consumption (litres)

Pigs:

- pig - finisher Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR)
- pig - Daily Liveweight Gain (DLWG) weaning to finishing g/day
- piglet weaning age (days)
- litters per sow per year
- sow replacement rate %

Poultry:

- broilers - Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR)
- layers - feed intake g/bird/day
- layers - vet & med costs pence/bird
- broilers - vet & med costs pence/bird
- bird cumulative mortality %
- % first quality eggs
- eggs per bird housed

Sheep:

- stocking rate for sheep/ha
- lamb losses - scanning to reared (as a % of lambs scanned)
- ewe scanning %
- purchased feed £/head - breeding ewes
- purchased feed £/head - purchased store lambs
- lamb concentrate use per head
- vet & med £/head - breeding ewes
- lamb rearing %
- mortality % - lambs purchase to sale
- Daily Liveweight Gain (DLWG) - purchase to finish
- Lamb Daily Liveweight Gain (DLWG) - birth to sale
- ewe mortality rate

Whole farm categories

Environmental:

- km of hedges older than 30 yrs
- km of hedges younger than 30 yrs
- on farm woodland type %
- standard soil analysis
- soil organic matter and carbon analysis
- earthworm numbers in grassland soils
- earthworm numbers in cropping soils
- Visual Evaluation of Soil Structure (VESS)
- % of semi-natural habitat on farm
- % of cover crops

Farm overview:

- profit per hectare (before rent and finance)
- profit per hectare (before rent and finance) - other farm type
- profit per hours worked
- proportional analysis of accounts: % of turnover spent on variable costs
- paid labour £/ha
- paid labour £/ha - other farm type
- power and machinery £/ha
- power and machinery £/ha - other farm type
- repairs / maintenance of land & buildings £/ha
- repairs / maintenance of land & buildings £/ha - other farm type
- machinery depreciation
- machinery depreciation - other farm type
- building depreciation £/ha
- building depreciation £/ha - other farm type
- cost of variables £/ha
- cost of variables £/ha - other farm type

Forage:

- fertiliser cost £/ha for grass and maize
- spray cost £/ha
- full forage gross margin £/ha
- artificial nitrogen use kgN/ha on forage
- grazing grass production tonnes (t)/ha
- maize yield t/ha
- grazing rotations per year
- hectares under herbal leys or protein crops

Annex 2: UA5 Habitat Maintenance – Requirements of the habitat classifications

The detailed requirements for each individual habitat classifications are set out below.

You must meet these requirements **in addition to the Universal Code:** Part 2 – Biodiversity and Habitat. (see Section H)

Management Recommendations are also provided to aid your management of the site. These are not mandatory requirements of this Universal Action.

1. Coastal saltmarsh

Description

Saltmarsh is made up of salt tolerant vegetation within the tidal range. This vegetation includes pioneer saltmarsh plants such as samphire, sea aster and common cord grass on the boundary with the sea / tidal river which will be covered by the sea almost daily.

The mid marsh will have common saltmarsh-grass and should also support a range of salt tolerant plants such as sea aster, sea spurrey and sea plantain, this part of the marsh will be inundated more regularly, especially on the spring tides.

The upper marsh can include plants such as sea rush and sea milkwort and plants with lower salt tolerance which may also grow inland such as red fescue, creeping bent and autumn hawkbit. At these upper limits of the tidal range the saltmarsh may only be inundated by the sea just a few times a year.

Saltmarsh provides important habitat for birds, fish and invertebrates, and helps protect inland areas from inundation and erosion.

Aim

The aim is to ensure coarse / tall grasses or stands of grasses with a thick layer of ‘thatch’ (dead grass) do not dominate. with stands of vegetation greater than 15 cm tall covering at least 30% of the marsh.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain a variety of saltmarsh vegetation types which reflect the position of the vegetation within the tidal range.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- avoid widespread overgrazing and undergrazing.
- achieve shorter vegetation between 5 cm and 15 cm tall that covers at least 20% of the mid and upper marsh

Do not

- modify any creeks, pans and hollows or interfere with any natural and dynamic changes such as due to storms.
- cut rushes between 15 March and 15 July or cut or top more than 30% of rush or other undesirable vegetation species in any one year (see Table 1 Undesirable vegetation control in Section H). A record of cutting or topping rushes or other undesirable vegetation species should be recorded in your activity diary.
- plant trees without prior approval from Welsh Government.
- allow the area to be poached (gateways, feeding and watering areas are acceptable provided that poached and bare areas are less than 5% cover).
- construct tracks, roads, yards, hardstanding or any new structures on habitat land, except simple bridges to allow creek crossing, without prior approval. Please note: the construction of simple bridges to allow creek crossing is not allowed within coastal saltmarsh within a Designated Site (e.g. SAC, SSSI). The normal process of applying to NRW for consent via a notice of intent will be required.

Management recommendations

- maintain the saltmarsh by extensive grazing with livestock, including cattle grazing where possible, and exclude grazing when necessary to achieve the aims (above). See recommended stocking densities in Table 2 at the end of this annex
- in the mid and upper marsh encourage, create or maintain:
    - a diverse sward with a range of herbaceous species able to flower and produce seed
    - a range of vegetation structures including both fine mosaics or larger patches of tall / short vegetation

Potential derogations

- derogations for sward height could be considered if there are high levels of wild geese grazing on the marsh producing a very short turf over a wide area
- ungrazed saltmarsh should not, generally, be grazed if it has been left un-grazed for over 20-30 years
- ungrazed saltmarsh is acceptable where it forms part of a recognised formal management plan designed to achieve beneficial environmental outcomes
- ungrazed areas of saltmarsh is acceptable where access by livestock has become impractical, or a risk to livestock, for example where access is not possible due to creeks

2. Coastal sand dune and shingle beach

Description

Sand dunes are natural coastal landforms and ecosystems located above the high tide mark. They form where a beach is big enough to allow the sand to dry out between tides and onshore winds are strong enough to blow the sand inland.

Dunes are naturally dynamic systems which constantly change in response to rain, wind and sand supply. Since they can only form in locations where environmental conditions are suitable, they cover a relatively small total area in Wales.

Shingle habitats can vary from bare and mobile in high energy coastal areas to stable and vegetated where the shingle has become stable allowing plants to colonise over successive years. Shingle vegetation should remain unmodified allowing the substrate to move when conditions allow.

Aim

The aim is to predominantly manage sand dunes through grazing, which maintains a mixed sward height where a variety of native plant species, including flowering herbs, are frequent, agricultural species such as ryegrass are absent or at low cover and where native plants, animals and fungi can thrive.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain the quality of sand dune and shingle habitats.

All sand dune systems are different, however, there should be a range of dune types from the strandline at the seaward edge, changing in a mosaic of mobile dunes through to semi-fixed dunes with dune grasslands and where conditions allow, damp dune slacks (hollows).

Dunes towards the back of the system, away from the shoreline, may become more static and be colonised by plants such as heather. To deliver higher quality habitat, aim to achieve at least 10% bare ground / sand / pebbles and not allow trees or scrub to spread.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- maintain a sward with a range of heights, including both short (below 5 cm) and tall (above 15 cm) areas

Do not

- graze shingle beach
- plant any new trees or shrubs
- allow the area to be poached (gateways, feeding and watering areas are acceptable provided that poached and bare areas are less than 5% cover)
- cut or top rushes or other undesirable vegetation species

- permit scrub to spread
- control or attempt to control rabbits within sand dunes and shingle beaches
- remove sand or any other aggregate material from sand dunes or shingle
- carry out dune remobilisation work (including re-profiling).
- re-profile the shingle structure, including any ridges
- use or permit vehicles or craft for sporting or recreational activities
- create sea defences or coast protection works without approval from the relevant competent authority

Management recommendations

a) Sand dunes

- see recommended stocking densities at Table 2.
- manage by grazing with cattle and or ponies (sheep should ideally only be used in winter) to maintain a varied sward height
- in wet hollows (dune slacks) maintain a biodiverse sward with less than 70% cover of grasses
- mowing can be used when grazing is not an option for practical reasons or used to encourage stock into a previously un-grazed area. Cut material should be removed off-site

b) Sand dunes and shingle beach

- allow natural and dynamic coastal changes, such as changes due to storms or windblow
- consider contingency planning to access shingle areas by vehicles in case required under emergency circumstances

Potential derogations

- To permit any of the ‘do nots’ for health and safety, and human and animal welfare reasons.

3. Lowland and coastal heath

Description

Lowland heath is characterised by dwarf shrubs such as heather which cover over 25% of the ground. It is generally a product of light grazing and, sometimes, controlled burning, on poor soils, and may occur as dry heath on mineral soil (with heather and bell heather) or wet heath (with cross-leaved heath and Sphagnum mosses) on shallow peat. It provides habitat for a range of plants, birds, reptiles and invertebrates adapted to these poor soils, rough vegetation and varied structure.

Coastal heaths are normally found within a zone which can be up to 500 m from the sea in exposed locations, and as a result of salt spray, they support coastal species such as spring squill amongst the heather.

Aim

The aim is to manage and maintain dwarf shrub cover, with a varied age / height structure across the landscape, so leaf litter (dead grass material) will not form extensive patches and is less than 50% cover overall. Where Sphagnum (bog moss) is present, there will be frequent patches covering at least 5% of the ground.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain a range of micro-habitats including small patches of bare ground, rock outcrops, grass, scrub, bracken, flush, etc.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- remove livestock if conditions become too wet to prevent poaching and compaction.
- maintain heather, bell heather, cross-leaved heath or western gorse so that it will collectively make up over 25% of ground cover.
- ensure bare ground is present and makes up no more than 10% of the ground area and is scattered around the site.

Do not

- plant trees
- permit scrub, brambles or trees to spread (see Table 1 Undesirable vegetation control in Section H).)
- allow the area to be poached (gateways, feeding and watering areas may be acceptable provided that poached and bare areas are less than 5% cover)
- burn areas of flush, coastal or wet heath
- graze between 1 November and 31 March on wet peatlands:
    - where wet peatland forms part of a larger parcel and stock cannot be excluded, the overall stocking rate should be reduced to ensure that the wet peatland is not over grazed or poached

- where wet peatland is enclosed or forms the majority of the parcel, stock should be excluded

Management recommendations

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2.
- scrub / tree growth to be maintained at less than 5% of ground cover (not including tree growth on crags or rock outcrops which is more difficult to manage)
- graze to create a varied structure of dwarf shrubs (heather, cross-leaved heath, etc). The dwarf-shrubs should ideally vary in age from young to old and degenerate
- graze cattle and ponies instead of or in conjunction with sheep to maintain the balance of dwarf shrubs and reduce leaf litter
- mowing of firebreaks, to control planned burns of dry heath and to safeguard from accidental fires or arson, is an acceptable form of management. See **Heather and grass burning code**
- cutting dry heath, providing it is part of an ongoing 10-year rotation, is acceptable management. See Heather & Grass Burning Code for Wales 2008
- The burning, mowing of firebreaks or cutting of areas of dry heath is not allowed within a Designated site e.g. Special Area for Conservation (SAC) or SSSI without prior approval. The normal process of applying to NRW for SSSI consent via a notice of intent will be required.
- rolling, bruising or cutting bracken is acceptable management

Potential derogations

- To permit any of the ‘do nots’ for health and safety or human and animal welfare reasons.

4. Enclosed wetland (bog, fen, flush/mire) and marshy grassland

Description

Bog, fen, and mire communities comprise a range of wetland habitats, such as lowland raised bogs, blanket bogs, reedbeds and swamp communities, over deep peat (generally more than 40 cm). They also include flushes, which can occur on shallow peats between 5 – 40 cm, or on non-peaty soils.

Marshy grassland occurs on shallow peats or non-peaty soils and comprises a variety of native marshland plant species. Rushes and purple moor-grass (*Molinia*) are often the main dominant species, along with a variety of sedges, herbs, and grasses, which provide habitat for a range of native wildlife, including marsh fritillary butterfly.

Aim

The aim is to manage these habitats through grazing to maintain a mixed sward height where a variety of native plant species are frequent and able to flower and produce seed, rushes and purple moor-grass are not overly dominant, and where native animals (including invertebrates) can thrive.

Bog, fen and mire communities should be managed for dwarf shrub cover, with a varied age / height structure and combination of native heather species, sedges, rushes, bog-mosses and swamp vegetation growing in standing water.

Unimproved grasslands enclosed within the same parcel as bog, fen and mire wetland communities should be managed in line with that habitat. These habitats will be managed so that dead matter / leaf litter (dead material) will not form extensive patches and is below 20% cover overall.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain a variety of enclosed wetland and marshy grassland habitats, and to maintain a range of micro-habitats, including small patches of bare ground, rock outcrops, scrub and bracken.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- remove livestock if conditions become so wet that widespread poaching and compaction is occurring
- achieve areas of marshy grassland with a varied sward height where, during the summer period (1 June to 30 August), at least 75% of the grassland (excluding rushes) is between 10 cm and 50 cm

Do not

- plant any new trees on enclosed wetland.

- plant any new trees on marshy grassland without prior approval from Welsh Government.
- allow the field to be poached (poaching around gateways, feeding and watering areas is acceptable provided that poached and bare areas are less than 10% cover overall).
- cut or top more than 30% of soft rush or undesirable vegetation species on marshy grassland in any one-year (see Table 1 Undesirable vegetation control at Section H). A record of cutting or topping rushes or other undesirable vegetation species should be recorded in your activity diary.
- permit scrub to spread.
- graze enclosed wetland (bog, fen, mire) between 1 November and 31 March. A record of stock movement on and off should be recorded in your activity diary in support of meeting this requirement.

Management recommendations

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2.
- maintain a varied vegetation structure with open patches, where species such as heather, sedges and western gorse are no higher than knee height and dwarf shrubs vary from young to old and degenerate
- the taller components (i.e. taller grasses, sedges and rushes) should not cover more than 75% of the ground
- water levels on areas of bog should lie close to the surface all year round to support ongoing peat accumulation
- bog moss (Sphagnum) should make up at least 10% of ground cover on shallow peat
- invasive native species (e.g. bracken) should not cover more than 5% of the area
- other invasive species (e.g. Rhododendron, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed) should not be present

a) Enclosed wetland - lowland bogs, fens and flush / mire

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2.
- graze the habitat with cattle, ponies or sheep to:
    - limit the spread of scrub
    - prevent taller grasses (including Molinia), rushes and sedges from becoming overly dominant; and,
    - maintain or improve the balance of smaller sedges and wetland herbs and mosses
- where area has more than 50% Purple Moor Grass (Molinia) graze from 1 April to 31 October between 0.30 LU/ha - 0.20 LU/ha

- wetlands with an already mixed cover of layers and species will only require very light grazing, with no grazing in winter
- aim for a varied vegetation structure with frequent open patches no higher than knee height

b) Marshy grassland

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2.
- hay meadow management can be used as an alternative to pasture management – follow timings of cutting and aftermath grazing under 'Enclosed semi-natural dry grassland – hay meadow'. Cut material should be removed from the grassland.
  You are not permitted to manage areas of Marshy grassland as a hay meadow on a Designated Site without valid SSSI consent from NRW.

Potential Derogations

- Any deviation from the requirements above

5. Enclosed semi-natural dry grassland (acid, neutral, calcareous, and calaminarian grasslands)

Description

This habitat includes a range of acid, neutral, calcareous, or calaminarian (associated with former metal mine workings) grasslands, which are mostly enclosed, semi-improved or unimproved.

Each of these grasslands have a suite of less agriculturally productive grasses and wildflower assemblages, determined by soil conditions y. They occur across a range of aspects and altitudes, from up to the limit of enclosure down to the coast. Where they occur above the upper limit of enclosure, they should be managed under habitat classification 6. Upland open habitats.

You can choose, on an annual basis, which of the following two management approaches you will undertake.

a) Managed as grazed pasture

Aim

The aim is to maintain the grassland by grazing, to achieve a varied sward height where a variety of native plant species are frequent and able to flower and produce seed, and where native plants, animals and fungi can thrive

Depending on the grassland type, the sward will include a minimum of three indicator herbs, such as common bird's-foot trefoil, black knapweed, wild thyme, mouse eared hawkweed, tormentil and heath bedstraw, as well as grasses, such as meadow foxtail, crested dog's-tail and sheep's fescue.

Agricultural species such as rye-grass and white clover should be absent or at low cover overall. In the medium to long term, coarse / tall grasses will not dominate, apart from in patches covering no more than 5% of the grassland, and dead material will not form extensive patches and is less than 10% cover overall.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain the grassland by grazing.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- remove livestock if conditions become too wet, to prevent any more than 5% poaching and compaction
- graze to achieve a varied sward height where at least 75% of the grassland is between 5 cm and 20 cm between 15 May and 31 August
- achieve a sward height where 75% of the grassland is between 2 cm and 10 cm between 1 September and 31 October
- ensure bare soil will make up no more than 5% of the ground area, scattered around the field.

In Designated SPAs) where chough is a feature, there is a variation to meeting the summer sward height requirement and a replacement requirement that 70% of the sward height should be 3cm or lower between 15 May and 31 August.

The relevant SPAs are:

- Castlemartin Coast
- Craig yr Aderyn (Bird's Rock)
- Glannau Aberdaron ac Ynys Enlli/ Aberdaron Coast and Bardsey Island
- Glannau Ynys Gybi/ Holy Island Coast
- Mynydd Cilau, Trwyn y Wylfa ac Ynysoedd Sant Tudwal
- Ramsey and St David's Peninsula Coast
- . Skomer, Skokholm and the seas off Pembrokeshire/Sgomer, Sgogwm a Moroedd Penfro

The Chough SPA layer on the SFS map available on your RPW Online account shows the areas where these requirements apply.

Do not

- apply any inorganic or organic fertilisers such as farmyard manure, slurry, sewage sludge, chicken manure or fish meal
- plant any new trees without prior approval from the Welsh Government.
- Tree planting within a designated site is not permitted. The normal process of applying to NRW for SSSI consent via a notice of intent will be required.
- allow the field to be poached (localised poaching around gateways, feeding and watering areas is acceptable provided that poached and bare areas make up less than 5% cover overall)
- apply lime on acid, calcareous or calaminarian grassland
- cut or top more than 30% of soft rush or other undesirable vegetation species in any one-year (see Table 1 Undesirable vegetation control at Section H). A record of cutting or topping rushes or other undesirable vegetation species should be recorded in your activity diary.
- permit scrub or bracken to spread

Management recommendations

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2.
- ideally graze neutral or coastal grassland with cattle or horses rather than sheep

- apply lime if desired and necessary to maintain a soil pH of between 5.5 and 6.5 on neutral grasslands

Potential derogations

- In the event of prolonged periods of adverse weather such as drought, frozen ground and snow cover, we may issue derogations on sward height.
- It may be possible to request a variation of maximum height requirements where a specific graze and rest approach is being employed. You will be asked to maintain an Activity Diary in support of this approach.

b) Managed as hay meadow

Aim

The aim is to achieve a varied sward height where a variety of native plant species (including flowering herbs) are frequent, and where native plants, animals and fungi can thrive.

Depending on the grassland type, the sward will include a minimum of three indicator herbs, such as common bird's-foot trefoil, black knapweed, wild thyme, mouse eared hawkweed, tormentil and heath bedstraw, as well as grasses, such as meadow foxtail, crested dog's-tail and sheep's fescue.

Bare soil will make up no more than 5% of the ground area, scattered around the field.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain the grassland by cutting, removing the hay and grazing the aftermath growth.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- achieve a sward height where 75% of the grassland is above 5 cm if spring grazing, from 1 March
- remove livestock by 15 May. You should record the date livestock are removed from the haymeadow in your Activity Diary.
- cut and remove a hay crop once every year between 7 July and 30 September (it is acceptable to make hay or haylage but not silage). You should record cutting dates and the date a hay crop is removed in your Activity Diary.

  Please note: Where field parcels are located within the Important Curlew Areas (ICA) constraint layer, you must not take a hay cut until 15 July at the earliest. These areas are referred to as Breeding Waders and this information will be available on the SFS map on RPW Online.

- achieve a sward height after cutting where 75% of the grassland is between 2 cm and 10 cm until 31 October
- remove livestock if conditions become too wet, to prevent poaching and compaction

Do not

- apply any inorganic or organic fertilisers such as slurry, sewage sludge, chicken manure or fish meal, except, if desired, a light dressing of farmyard manure (no more than 6t/ha per year, or 12t/ha every other year. (See Sustainable Farming Scheme - Universal Layer: UA5 Habitat Maintenance Enclosed Semi-natural dry grassland – habitat description for further information on determining soil type by species present). You should record the application of farmyard manure in your Activity Diary
- plant any new trees without prior approval from the Welsh Government. Tree planting within a Designated site (or SSSI) is not permitted. The normal process of applying to NRW for SSSI consent via a notice of intent will be required.
- allow the field to be poached (localised poaching around gateways, feeding and watering areas is acceptable provided that poached and bare areas make up less than 5% cover overall)
- apply lime on acid, calcareous or calaminarian grassland
- permit scrub or bracken to spread (see Table 1 Undesirable vegetation control at Section H).
- graze the aftermath until at least four weeks after the hay cut. You should record grazing dates in your Activity Diary.

Management recommendations

- turn hay/haylage at least twice before removal
- apply lime if necessary and desirable to maintain a soil pH of between 5.5 and 6.5 on neutral grasslands
- ideally graze neutral grasslands with cattle or horses rather than just sheep

Potential derogations

- In the event of prolonged periods of adverse weather such as drought, we may issue derogations on hay cutting and sward height.
- It may be possible to take as silage if the crop is harvested in September and has gone to seed.

- It may be possible to request a variation of maximum height requirements where a specific graze and rest approach is being employed. You will be asked to maintain an activity diary in support of this approach.

6. Upland open habitats

Description

Upland (land above the upper limit of enclosure) may comprise a mixture of habitats including heath, bog, grassland, streams and lakes.

Habitat type is determined by the underlying terrain, soil type, groundwater, drainage, slope, aspect and altitude. The habitats ~~should predominantly~~ reflect these natural factors, as modified by low to medium grazing levels and without agricultural improvement, such as ploughing, reseeding or addition of artificial fertilisers.

Aim

The aim is to maintain a mosaic of habitats on unenclosed land with a varied vegetation structure with open patches, with species such as heather, sedges and western gorse.

Dwarf shrubs such as heather should vary from young to old and where 75% of the areas of wet and dry grassland have a diverse sward height between 5 and 50 cm during the summer months.

On areas of bog, water levels should lie close to the surface all year round to support ongoing peat accumulation. Where Sphagnum moss is present, maintain frequent patches of at least 5% of ground cover.

Upland (land above the upper limit of enclosure) may comprise a mixture of habitats including heath, bog, grassland, woodland, streams and lakes. The habitats should predominantly reflect these natural factors, as modified by low to medium grazing levels and without agricultural improvement, such as ploughing, reseeding or addition of artificial fertilisers.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain the mosaic of habitats.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- record livestock type, numbers and movements in a stocking diary and make it available for inspection if requested.
- manage the habitats through appropriate grazing, avoiding widespread undergrazing or overgrazing
- graze with a minimum level of 0.04 LU/ha between 1 April and 30 September
- graze with a maximum level of 0.2 LU/ha between 1 October and 31 March. Note that the maximum rate will not be suitable for many habitats and will cause over grazing if applied to peatlands and any habitat with dwarf shrubs such as heather.
  See Table 3 Stocking density guidance for Upland open habitats.

- ensure that the level of grazing does not reduce the area of dwarf shrubs (heather, bilberry, etc) where present.
- remove livestock if conditions become too wet, to prevent significant poaching and compaction. Poaching limited to areas around gateways is acceptable
- adhere to the **Heather and grass burning code** (2008)

Do not

- plant any new trees without prior approval from the Welsh Government.
- Tree planting within a designated site is not permitted. The normal process of applying to NRW for SSSI consent via a notice of intent will be required.
- cut or top more than 30% of rush or weed species in any one-year (see Table 1 Undesirable vegetation control at Section H). A record of cutting or topping rushes or other undesirable vegetation species should be recorded in your activity diary.

Management recommendations

- graze with cattle and / or ponies in preference to or in conjunction with sheep
- minimise grazing between 1 October and 31 March. Low level pony grazing may be acceptable during these dates
- rolling, bruising or cutting bracken is acceptable
- remove self-seeded conifers and Rhododendron
- mowing of firebreaks, to control planned burns of dry heath and to safeguard from accidental fires or arson, is acceptable.

7. Dense bracken

Description

Dense bracken is characterised by the virtual complete absence of any other plant species, forming a thick, deep layer of dead material during autumn and winter and tall impenetrable stands during the summer.

Dense bracken has low environmental and agricultural value. It is associated with undesirable and damaging impacts including wildfire. Bracken can harbour parasitic ticks as well as making agricultural operations such as stock gathering more problematic.

Aim

The long-term aim is either to enhance and restore dense bracken stands to an alternative more valuable semi-natural grassland habitat type (e.g. enclosed semi-natural grassland, unenclosed unimproved grassland or mosaic) using a hierarchy of bracken management and control activities (e.g. rolling, bruising, mowing, cattle and / or pony grazing). Alternatively, subject to a woodland creation plan and bracken control programme, the area could be suitable for tree planting.

For the purposes of this habitat classification, dense bracken should comprise 40% to 100% of the area where it occurs (adjacent habitats with little or no bracken should not be included in the dense bracken habitat category). The bracken will be tall and dense, restricting any stock movements to paths only. There will be a deep accumulation of litter, and the bracken could be impenetrable.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain the habitat in an unimproved state.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)

Do not

- apply any herbicides, insecticides or any other pesticides (except for spot / weed wipe treatment of invasive non-native species, injurious weeds or as part of an agreed bracken control programme) (see Table 5 Undesirable vegetation control at the end of this annex)
- carry out burn management of dense bracken. Creating firebreaks to reduce wildfire risk is acceptable – see the technical guidance in the **Heather and grass burning code** (2008).

Management recommendations

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2
- include heavy livestock (cattle, ponies) as a component of a grazing regime

- graze in the early spring (March to May) using heavy stock (cattle or ponies) to help reduce the dominance of bracken
- carry out a programme of bracken management and control activities (e.g. rolling, bruising, mowing)
- follow guidance on Pearl-bordered Fritillary habitat awareness. Wales Office | Butterfly Conservation. The Pearl-bordered Fritillary is a rare butterfly often found in areas of open bracken
- establish firebreaks for wildfire prevention and risk reduction, especially on high risk and susceptible sites with a history of fire, or where there is a burning management plan

Potential derogations

- To permit any of the ‘do nots’ for health and safety, and human and animal welfare reasons.

8. Traditional orchards

Description

Traditional orchards are similar to wood-pasture and defined by their structure rather than vegetation type. They are groups of fruit and nut trees planted on vigorous rootstocks at low densities in permanent grassland and managed in a low intensity way. There are many regional variations including apple, pear, cherry, plum, damson and walnut orchards.

Prime traditional orchard habitat consists of grazed grassland with fruit trees of varying age structure, with an abundance of standing and fallen dead and decaying wood.

Aim

The aim is to maintain the grassland to retain or encourage species typical of neutral grassland. Maintain the characteristic features of less intensively managed orchards such as dead wood and rot holes in the trees, which can support mosses, lichens and fungi as well as invertebrates, birds and mammals. Safeguard traditional varieties of fruit tree, especially those local to the area.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain the habitat by ensuring that coarse / tall grasses do not dominate, apart from in patches. Encourage the maintenance and / or development of a diverse habitat and landscape feature comprising standard fruit trees, species-rich grassland and traditional field boundaries.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- manage the grassland using:
    - low intensity grazing so that mature trees are not debarked, and the sward remains above 5 cm over 90% of the area, or
    - by cutting and removing between two and four times per year
- retain all the existing fruit trees, unless they are diseased or may cause harm
- prevent damage to trees from livestock or machinery
- retain all deadwood in the orchard (unless it is diseased)

Do not

- prune out mistletoe (sustainable harvesting is acceptable)
- use any inorganic fertilisers in accordance with the Universal Code. Where taking a hay cut, well-rotted farmyard manure (stored for at least twelve months) may be applied at a rate of no more than 6 t/ha per year, or 12t/ha every other year. No other organic fertilisers including slurry, sewage sludge, chicken manure and fish meal are acceptable. A record of using farmyard manure should be recorded in your activity diary.

- use tar oil washes as these reduce the wildlife value of the orchard

Management recommendations

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2
- graze at levels to avoid bare ground around the base of trees
- manage trees with the minimum of chemical inputs
- if maintaining the grassland by cutting, aim to cut at a frequency that allows plants in the sward to flower but does not allow coarse tussocky grasses or brambles to spread. The cut material must be removed after cutting
- apply lime if necessary to maintain a soil pH of between 5.5 and 6.5
- seasonally prune the fruit trees where necessary to maintain a reasonable level of health and productivity and to prevent trees becoming vulnerable to windthrow
- stack any fallen dead wood or pruned timber in a semi-shaded location within the orchard. Only diseased wood may be removed or burnt

Potential derogations

- To permit any of the ‘do nots’ for health and safety, and human and animal welfare reasons.

9. Scrub (including scattered and less dense bracken)

Description

Scrub is vegetation dominated by shrubs and may be a developing or climax habitat. The woody species involved are diverse, but the commonest species are likely to include blackthorn, hawthorn, European gorse, elder, bramble and willow.

Streamside corridors created under previous schemes, may develop into areas of scrub, and later woodland, and fall into this category.

Scattered and less dense bracken with a ground layer is a valuable habitat for a suite of fritillary butterfly species and provides a good habitat for nesting birds and cover for the movement of other birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles. It allows free access to livestock (not restricted to paths only) with no or limited decaying bracken litter, with grass and other vegetation growing through and beneath the bracken fronds.

Aim

The aim of management is to maintain the ground layer and prevent further closure of the bracken canopy. The ground layer should contain flowering plants that provide nectar and pollen resources in spring.

Over time, scattered and less dense bracken will be maintained to retain its open nature with a vegetated understorey. The development of tall, dense bracken where stock movements are restricted to paths only should be avoided. Deep bracken litter, preventing little or no other species of vegetation penetrating and growing through the litter, will not be accumulating or is reducing.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain well-managed scrub, which supports a range of wildlife providing nectar, seeds, fruits, shelter and nest sites for invertebrates, birds, and mammals as well as providing shade and shelter to livestock. It also offers suitable habitat for many flowering plants. Scrub of varied age, species and structure supports the widest range of wildlife.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- retain all existing areas of native scrub on coastal slopes, riverbanks, sand dunes, limestone cliffs, valley bottoms and in the uplands.
- cutting to prevent the spread of scrub is acceptable

Do not

- apply any herbicides, insecticides or any other pesticides; except for spot/weed wipe treatment of invasive non-native species injurious weeds or as part of an agreed bracken control programme (see Table 1 Undesirable vegetation control at Section H). A record of spot treatments should be recorded in your activity diary.

- carry out burn management of scrub. Creating firebreaks to reduce wildfire risk is acceptable – see the technical guidance in the **Heather and grass burning code** (2008).

Management recommendations

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2.
- if scrub areas are grazed, graze at a rate not exceeding that set for the underlying grassland type
- if the scrub is currently un-grazed, including for streamside corridors, maintain this management
- maintain and retain all standard trees scattered through the scrub
- allow regeneration of trees / scrub naturally if there are gaps within the scrub
- where grazing bracken, stock exclusively with cattle and/or horses/ponies equines, or as part of mixed stocking regime (particularly March-May) to encourage crushing and bruising of bracken to maintain or expand its open nature
- follow guidance on Pearl-bordered Fritillary habitat awareness. The Pearl-bordered Fritillary is a rare butterfly often found in areas of bracken

Potential derogations

- To remove scrub permanently to benefit historic or archaeological features.
- To remove scrub where it is spreading into a habitat of higher conservation priority, such as enclosed semi-natural dry grassland or lowland and coastal heath.

10. Wood pasture

Description

Wood pastures are usually the products of historic land management systems and represent a vegetation structure, rather than being a particular plant community. Typically, this structure consists of large, open-grown trees at various densities, in a matrix of grazed grassland, heathland and/or woodland.

Wood pastures are usually defined as having a tree canopy cover of less than 30% that occurs as scattered individual trees. Trees may be clumped to produce a higher cover than 30% locally.

There should be a minimum of 6 trees per ha scattered across the site. Many of the existing trees are of open grown character, with wide, deep crowns and short trunks.

Also included in this habitat classification are areas of ffridd (mid and north Wales) or coedcae (south Wales) which occur at the lowland - upland interface.

Aim

The aims for the ground layer will depend on the vegetation present as this may include grassland, heathland, peatland, scrub, or bracken.

This habitat is particularly important for invertebrates that live in dead wood, lichens and several bird species, and management should aim to deliver the resources necessary for these species to thrive.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain successful wood pasture by maintaining the tree population and maintaining or improving the condition of the ground vegetation.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- retain existing scattered trees and scrub
- retain all deadwood whether standing or on the ground, unless they are a safety hazard
- ensure mature trees are not debarked by livestock and there is limited bare ground around the base of trees (fewer than 10% of trees have bare ground around their base)

Do not

- allow the field to be poached (localised poaching around gateways, feeding and watering areas is acceptable provided that poached and bare areas are less than 5% cover overall)
- plant any new trees without approval from the Welsh Government.

Management recommendations

- see recommended stocking densities in Table 2.
- graze with cattle or ponies as the preferred livestock on sites with a high proportion of heathland and / or bracken
- where the ground vegetation consists of dense bracken, grazing in the early spring (March to May) using heavy stock (cattle or ponies) can help to reduce the dominance of bracken
- retain existing scrub unless it is spreading to cover greater than 20% of the site area, as a proportion of scrub is beneficial to provide flowers and fruit
- on sites dominated by dense bracken (where there is no ground flora) it is accepted that grazing may not be possible
- consider allowing the site to naturally regenerate into woodland if there is a high level of tree colonisation in a site otherwise dominated by bracken that is very difficult / impossible to graze
- cutting or topping are acceptable, where there is particularly extensive invasion by bracken, soft rush or other undesirable vegetation species (see Table 5 Undesirable vegetation control at the end of this annex)
- chain harrowing to break up dense patches of bracken litter is acceptable
- low density infill tree planting to arrive at less than 30% overall tree canopy cover is acceptable

Potential derogations

- To permit any of the ‘do nots’ for health and safety, and human and animal welfare reasons.

11. Permanent wildlife ponds

Description

Wildlife ponds are defined as open water features up to one hectare (1 ha) in size whose primary function is to benefit nature. Where an existing pond has a fenced-out buffer area, the whole enclosed area (including buffer and open water) will be included and covered by the action.

This does not include watercourses (moving water) e.g. flowing ditches, streams and rivers; or features whose primary function is water storage for farming operations i.e. irrigation ponds, storage reservoirs, hydro tanks, sole sources of water for livestock. Furthermore, online ponds (those connected directly to water courses) are not in scope of the management of permanent wildlife ponds action.

Protected species such as otter, water vole and great crested newt may be present in ponds. You are responsible for identifying the presence of such species and ensuring that works are not detrimental to any protected species present.

Aim

The aim is to halt the loss of these important features from the Welsh landscape.

Existing ponds and surrounding buffers should be managed to maximise their biodiversity value. Ponds completely silted up with no open water and/or heavily vegetated or shaded by shrubs may be suitable for restoration under Optional Actions.

These requirements are designed to help you maintain ponds to support a diverse range of freshwater species (plants and animals) and are important stepping-stones between freshwater habitats.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- maintain a proportion of the pond as open water*, i.e. prevent the excessive build-up of silt, or drying out through vegetation establishment. Any desilting work and tree / scrub clearance must be carried out between 15 October and 15 January to avoid damage to breeding invertebrates, amphibians and birds. A record of work carried out should be recorded in your activity diary.
- when removing excessive silt or vegetation to maintain open water, clear a maximum of one third of the pond area in any one year. This to allow populations of invertebrates and amphibians that may be present in the silt to escape and survive amongst the remaining undisturbed areas
- where a pond is heavily shaded, coppice a proportion of young trees and / or scrub on the south side of the pond to allow light to reach the water surface. If undertaking tree / shrub coppicing, ensure that felling cuts are 15cm above the ground level

- where present, maintain fenced out pond buffers in a stock-excluded condition
- ensure ponds and their banksides are not damaged through unfettered livestock trampling / poaching. The use of existing livestock drinking bays is acceptable

Do not

- plant any new trees without prior approval from Welsh Government.
  Tree planting within a designated site is not permitted. The normal process of applying to NRW for SSSI consent via a notice of intent will be required.
- apply inputs of any kind within a 10 m buffer of the pond's bankside.
- allow uncontrolled access to livestock resulting in excessive trampling of the pond banks. Drinking bays may be acceptable (see above)
- release fish or other animals into the pond
- release any ornamental or aquatic plants into the pond, as many such plants are invasive
- *use machinery within 5m of water's edge and avoid any damage to bank and riparian vegetation where water voles are present
- *undertake any scrub removal or dredging if there is evidence of otters or a potential otter holt present in the pond or bank
- over-deepen the pond or create steep banks. Wildlife ponds do not need to be any deeper than 1m and should have gently sloping banks
- sow any seed inside the pond's fenced buffer area. Allow any such area to vegetate through natural colonisation only

Management recommendations

- where fencing is a component of a pond it may need to be maintained or repaired to prevent livestock having unfettered access to the pond's bankside
- where maintaining fencing, consider the use of a four-season fencing arrangement
- drinking bays may be used where they have been historically in place and still required
- some ponds naturally dry up during summer months; such ponds do not require over-deepening

Potential derogations

- Where evidence that water vole or otter holt are present, maintaining a proportion of the pond as open water will be relaxed to avoid disturbance by heavy machinery.

12. Newly created habitat areas on improved land

Description

Work undertaken to establish positive management for habitat on agriculturally improved or formerly afforested land may initially not meet the habitat descriptions listed above i.e. the land is not identifiable as habitat.

However, we expect this will change over time, so as the habitat develops it will move from newly created habitat classification into the most appropriate habitat classification.

We recognise the positive actions taken and accept land being managed as habitat as equivalent to the other broad habitat classifications. Such land is eligible for the related habitat maintenance payment and will contribute to the 10% habitat requirement.

This guidance is split into four different requirements depending upon the intention of the management.

i) New streamside corridors

This can include any existing fenced out streamside corridors created under previous schemes, or otherwise, where the area is predominantly improved grassland and not yet reverted to a semi-natural habitat type.

Aim

To allow the development of a diverse habitat and the growth of native trees and shrubs alongside stream sides. This will provide cover for wildlife which use the watercourse and enhance the quality of water by intercepting sediment and inputs from surrounding farmland.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- assess the area annually and change the habitat classification on your SAF in the Habitat Baseline Review once it meets the criteria of the appropriate habitats, such as scrub.
- maintain stock proof fencing. In areas prone to flooding, it is recommended that semi-permanent electric fencing may be more appropriate than permanent post and wire fencing
- allow natural dynamic river processes such as erosion and deposition to occur

Do not

- graze the area
- cut or top vegetation except to control injurious weed species
- remove fallen wood in or adjacent to the channel (unless there is a justified risk of the material causing a blockage)

- install bank protection unless required to protect essential infrastructure e.g. pipes, bridges, roads
- use for vehicle activities or as a track. The use of existing crossing points for field activities is acceptable.

Potential derogations

- livestock could be allowed occasional or seasonal access to the riparian zone in situations where light grazing may be beneficial e.g. to manage Himalayan Balsam. The timing and extent of livestock access would require prior approval
- in areas that support water vole, extensive woody riparian vegetation is undesirable. Management to prevent the development of extensive shrub and tree cover may be required, subject to the advice of an ecologist

ii) Newly restored peat

This can include peatland restoration sites on improved land supported by initiatives such as the NRW administered National Peatland Action Plan (NPAP).

Aim

To provide support and appropriate management for areas where peatland restoration has taken place on peatland modified to agriculturally improved land, or previously afforested land, which will result in protecting the peatland ecosystem and its developing biodiversity as well as supporting water retention and reducing carbon emissions from degraded peatland.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- assess the area annually and change the habitat classification on the SAF in the Habitat Baseline Review once it meets the criteria of the appropriate habitats.
- manage land in newly created habitat according to the specific advice received from NPAP, or the expected long term habitat classifications, for example as enclosed wetland or upland open habitats.

Potential derogations

- where the land is so waterlogged that it is not possible to safely graze the site, the measurable outcomes do not apply. The restrictions would continue to apply to all areas of enclosed wetland, whether grazed or not
- where restoration activities have created significant areas of bare ground, restrictions on bare ground would not apply.

iii) No input grassland from previous schemes

This can include improved grassland ‘land managed as habitat’ (previously categorised under Option 15 in Glastir Entry / Advanced).

Aim

This management will support the continuation of the grasslands as they develop into more species-rich habitats.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- assess the area annually and change the habitat classification on your SAF in the Habitat Baseline Review once it meets the criteria of the appropriate habitats
- manage land in newly created habitat according to the expected long term habitat classification with the additional requirement of no inputs, for example as Enclosed semi-natural dry grassland (grazed and hay meadow management options)

iv) Any other improved or previously afforested land which is under habitat creation management

Aim

This management will support the continuation of the development of semi-natural habitats.

Requirements

- adhere to the Universal Code (see Section H)
- assess area annually and change the habitat classification on your SAF once it meets the criteria of the appropriate habitats
- manage land in newly created habitat according to the expected long term habitat classification with the additional requirement of no inputs

Potential derogations

- There could be additional derogations required here depending on the starting land cover and the target habitat. For example, the restrictions on bare ground would not be appropriate for previously afforested land.

Table 2: Recommended stocking densities

This is a summary of the recommended stocking rates for each habitat classification. They are for guidance only and should be read in conjunction with the management aims, requirements and outcomes above. See Table 3 below for habitat classification 6 ‘Upland open habitats’.

Habitat classification	Specific habitats that can or will be present within the habitat classification	Recommended maximum stocking rates
1. Coastal saltmarsh	Coastal saltmarsh	0.4 LU/ha between 1 March and 15 July Up to 1.0 LU/ha for the rest of the year
2. Coastal sand dune and shingle beach	2a) Sand dune	0.1 - 0.3 LU/ha/yr
	2b) Shingle beach	No grazing
3. Lowland and coastal heath	Lowland and coastal heath	0.2 - 0.5 LU/ha 1 April - 30 June 0.1 - 0.25 LU/ha 1 July - 31 October 0 - 0.1 LU/ha 1 November - 31 March
4. Enclosed wetland (bog, fen, flush / mire) and Marshy grassland	4a) Lowland bogs, fens and flush / mire	More than 50% Purple moor grass (Molinia): 0.20 - 0.30 LU/ha 1 April – 31 October Less than 50% Purple moor grass (Molinia): 0.01

		- 0.05 LU/ha 1 April – 31 October
	4b) Marshy grassland	0.2 - 0.4 LU/ha/yr
5. Enclosed semi-natural dry grassland (acid, neutral, calcareous, calaminarian)	acid grassland	0.2 - 0.4 LU/ha/yr
	calcareous grassland	0.25 - 0.4 LU/ha/yr
	neutral grassland	0.5 - 0.7 LU/ha/yr
	calaminarian grassland	0.25 - 0.4 LU/ha/yr
6. Upland open habitats	See Table 3 below	
7. Traditional orchards	Traditional orchards	0.75 LU/ha/yr
8. Dense bracken	Dense bracken	0.1 LU/ha/yr
9. Scrub	Scrub (including scattered and less dense bracken)	See applicable underlying habitat recommended maximum
10. Wood pasture	Wood pasture	See applicable underlying habitat recommended maximum
11. Permanent wildlife ponds	Permanent wildlife ponds	Manage any livestock access to prevent bankside damage
12. Newly created habitat areas	New streamside corridor	No grazing

	Restored peat	Graze as per site specific recommendations
	No input grassland	See applicable underlying habitat recommended maximum
	Other improved or previously afforested land under habitat creation management	See applicable underlying habitat recommended maximum

Table 3: Stocking guidance for 6. Upland open habitats

These are the recommended stocking rates for each habitat type that may be found within the upland open habitats classifications. They are for guidance only.

However, you will need to follow these specific stock rates, whilst also ensuring there is no overgrazing of more sensitive habitat types.

- minimum overall stocking rate of0.04 LU/ha for 1 April – 30 September, and
- maximum overall stocking rate of 0.2 LU/ha for 1 October – 31 March.

Habitat classification	Specific habitats that can or will be present within the habitat classification	Recommended maximum stocking rates
6. Upland open habitats	Upland acid grassland	0.3 - 0.5 LU/ha/yr
	Montane heath	0.02 - 0.03 LU/ha/yr
	Wet heath	0.05 - 0.10 LU/ha/yr
	Dry heath	0.10 - 0.15 LU/ha/yr
	Flush (wet hollows)	Up to 0.05 LU/ha/yr
	Peatland (can comprise one or more of blanket bog, wet heath and flush)	Up to 0.05 LU/ha/yr, or Up to 0.02 LU/ha/yr where restoration has taken place
	Calcareous grassland	0.25 - 0.4 LU/ha/yr
	Scrub (including scattered and less dense bracken)	See applicable underlying habitat recommended maximum grazing rates

	Woodland	Up to 0.02 LU/ha/yr

Table 4: Standard Livestock Units (LUs)

These Livestock Units can be used to calculate stocking numbers for each habitat classification based on the stocking rates in the tables above.

Livestock	Livestock Units (LU)
Yearling	0.09
Ewe / ram lamb	0.09
Ewe with lamb at foot	0.15
Dry ewes (including in-lamb ewes)	0.12
Rams	0.12
Goats	0.12
Cattle up to 6 months	0.00
Cattle 6 to 24 months	0.6
Cattle over 24 months	1.0
Horses	1.0
Ponies	0.5
Foals	0.00

Annex 3: UA6 Temporary habitat creation on improved land – requirements of habitat creation options

The detailed requirements and guidance for each of the individual temporary habitat types are set out below.

1. Fallow crop margins

Given suitable management, arable plants can reappear from the seed bank, even in places where they have not been seen for several years. Some of these arable plants are amongst the rarest of our native plant species and can themselves be important food sources for insects and farmland birds.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- fallow crop margin can be rotated annually
- this option must be situated next to cereals, oil seed rape, linseed or roots
- This can apply to autumn and spring sown crops
- establish a fallow margin annually at least three metres wide before 15 May (cereals, linseed and oil seed rape), or 1 July (roots). Margins established after 15 May must be recorded using a secondary crop code.
- The requirements for the fallow crop margin finish when the adjoining crop is harvested or grazed. A record of establishment should be recorded in your activity diary.
- cultivate a seed bed annually and allow the margin to regenerate naturally

Do not:

- graze or apply any nutrients.
- use pesticides or mechanical weed control, except to spot treat and control injurious weeds or invasive non-native species such as spear thistle, creeping thistle, curled dock, broad–leaved dock, ragwort, Japanese knotweed, rhododendron, Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed. A record of spot spraying should be recorded in your activity diary.

2. Unfertilised, unsprayed and unharvested cereal or linseed headlands

Cereal and linseed headlands left unharvested can provide valuable feed and shelter to insects, farmland birds and mammals, such as brown hare.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- the headland can be rotated annually
- this headland can be located next to autumn and spring sown crops
- this option is available on a cereal crop which has been established by 15 May. Margins established after 15 May must be recorded using a secondary crop code. A record of the establishment of the cereal crop should be recorded in your activity diary.
- you must leave a minimum 3m wide cereal or linseed headland along the edge of the crop which must be left unfertilised, unsprayed and unharvested
- unharvested headland to be retained and un-grazed until 15 February in the following year. A record of grazing and/or cultivation should be recorded in your activity diary.

3. Fixed rough grass margin on arable land

Rough grass margins located next to arable crops can provide valuable shelter and breeding sites for invertebrates, farmland birds and small mammals. If located downslope from cultivated areas, these margins can also help intercept sediment.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- this fixed rough grass margin must be retained in the same location for a minimum of three continuous years or for the duration of your participation in the SFS - Universal Layer if shorter.
- this margin can be located next to autumn and spring sown crops
- Establish a grass margin at least three metres wide adjacent to a cereal, oil seed rape, linseed crop (by 15 May) or root crop (by 1 July) Margins established after 15 May must be recorded using a secondary crop code. A record of establishment should be recorded in your activity diary.
- it is acceptable to have a grass ley as the adjacent crop for a maximum of two years in five as part of a crop rotation
- grass must be cut in the first year but not before 1 August. The date on which the margin is cut should be recorded in your activity diary.
- after the first year, the area may be mowed (no more than 50% at any one time), but no more than once every three years. A record of mowing should be recorded in your activity diary.
- a mixture consisting of 15% tussock-forming grasses and the rest as fine-leaved grasses must be sown. Grass must be sown at 15kg/ha in autumn or 21kg/ha in spring. Tussock forming grasses include: cocksfoot, timothy, Yorkshire fog. Fine-leaved grasses include: red fescue, sheep's fescue, creeping fescue, rough-stalked meadow grass, smooth-stalked meadow grass, common bent, creeping bent, velvet bent, sweet vernal grass, crested dog's tail, meadow foxtail. **Rye grass must not be included in the mixture.**

Do not:

- graze or apply any nutrients

- Use pesticides, except to spot treat and control injurious weeds such as spear thistle, creeping thistle, curled dock, broad–leaved dock, ragwort; or invasive non-native species such as Japanese knotweed, rhododendron, Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed. A record of spot spraying should be recorded in your activity diary.

4. Rotational rough grass margin on arable land

Rough grass margins located next to arable crops can provide valuable shelter and breeding sites for invertebrates, farmland birds and small mammals. If located downslope from cultivated areas, these margins can also help intercept sediment.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- this margin can be located next to autumn and spring sown crops
- establish a grass margin at least 3m wide adjacent to a cereal, oil seed rape, linseed crop (by 15 May) or root crop (by 1 July). Margins established after 15 May must be recorded using a secondary crop code. A record of establishment should be recorded in your activity diary.
- if the margin is retained in the same location, grass must be cut in the first year but not before 1 August. The date on which the margin is cut should be recorded in your activity diary.
- if the margin is retained in the same location, after the first year, the area may be mowed (no more than 50% at any one time), but no more than once every three years. A record of mowing should be recorded in your activity diary.
- if the margin is rotated no cutting / mowing is permitted
- a mixture consisting of 15% tussock-forming grasses and the rest as fine-leaved grasses must be sown. Grass must be sown at 15kg/ha in autumn or 21kg/ha in spring. Tussock forming grasses include: cocksfoot, timothy, Yorkshire fog. Fine-leaved grasses include: red fescue, sheep's fescue, creeping fescue, rough-stalked meadow grass, smooth-stalked meadow grass, common bent, creeping bent, velvet bent, sweet vernal grass, crested dog's tail, meadow foxtail. **Rye grass must not be included in the mixture**.
- the requirements for the margin finish when the adjoining crop is harvested, but only if the margin is rotated.

Do not:

- graze or apply any nutrients
- use pesticides except to spot treat and control injurious weeds such as spear thistle, creeping thistle, curled dock, broad–leaved dock, ragwort, or invasive non-native species such as Japanese knotweed, rhododendron, Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed. A record of spot spraying should be recorded in your activity diary.

5. Unsprayed spring sown cereal and protein crop mix with stubbles retained

An unsprayed cereal and protein mix can provide a valuable seed and nectar source for wildlife throughout the growing season, with the remaining stubbles still providing cover and foraging habitat throughout the winter.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- establish an unsprayed, spring-sown cereal / protein crop mix with stubble retained until 15 February in the following year.
- sow between 1 March and 15 May. A record of establishment should be recorded in your activity diary.
- can be established through ploughing, traditional cultivations and drilling, minimum tillage or direct drilling.
- eligible crops include barley, wheat, oats, triticale, rye / field beans, peas, lupins or vetches.
- seed mixture should comprise 50% cereal and 50% protein seed by weight.
- only use certified seed at the recommended seed rate and retain labels / invoices as supporting evidence at inspection.
- the utilisation of the crop and earliest harvest date must be considered when selecting the crops and varieties.
- you may rectify any immediate deficiencies identified in P, K and pH levels prior to establishment.
- can be harvested as grain, crimped, and stored using an additive or ensiled as forage (within a silage pit or as baled silage)

Do not

- plough or cultivate land before 1 March. A record of ploughing or cultivation should be recorded in your activity diary.
- undersow the crop
- use pesticides or mechanical weeding once the crop is established. Fungicides can be used if applied to the seed before sowing.
- Desiccate the crop prior to harvesting
- harvest before 1 August, or until 14 weeks after sowing, whichever is the latest. A record of harvesting should be recorded in your activity diary. graze before 15 February in the following year.

6. Retain cereal winter stubbles

To provide a source of food for native seed-eating farmland birds to survive over the winter, such as tree sparrow, linnet, yellowhammer and grey partridge. Winter stubbles will also increase structural diversity in the farmed landscape, supporting invertebrates and increasing water penetration.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- winter stubbles must follow a cereal crop
- winter stubbles can be rotated annually
- remove straw within 2 weeks of harvest and allow the natural regeneration of grasses and broadleaved plants
- maize, sorghum and undersown stubbles are not acceptable
- You should keep a record of cereal harvest, cutting, ploughing, cultivation or direct drilling in your activity diary.

Do not:

- use pesticides unless to spot treat and control injurious weeds or invasive non-native species. Herbicides may be used from 15 February.
- cut vegetation after harvest before the 15 February
- apply slurry between harvest and 15 February
- store manure on the area
- supplementary feed on the area
- plough, cultivate or direct drill before 1 March
- graze until 15 February in the following year

7. Wildlife cover crop on improved land

Cover crops can provide cover for a range of farmland birds and small mammals and provide an invaluable food source through autumn and winter. They also provide a valuable habitat for a range of invertebrates, particularly pollinating insects.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- wildlife cover crop can be rotated or fixed as appropriate
- cultivate a seed bed at least three metres wide and establish a crop before 15 May. A record of establishment should be recorded in your activity diary.
- establish as a block in a field or margin along the edge of a field
- the seed mix must be a commercially available multi-species wildlife / game cover crop suitable and appropriate for the location. Retain labels and invoices as supporting evidence at inspection.
- if herbicide use is required as part of Integrated Pest Management, desiccant may be used to spray off vegetation prior to sowing, but otherwise there must be no use of herbicides except to spot treat injurious weeds such as spear thistle, creeping thistle, curled dock, broad–leaved dock, ragwort; or invasive non-native species such as Japanese knotweed or Himalayan balsam.
- re-sow any area of failed crop

Do not:

- undersow the crop
- sow maize
- graze or cut before 15 March in the following year. A record of grazing or cutting should be recorded in your activity diary.
- use insecticides
- apply fungicides after crop establishment
- apply molluscicides unless direct drilled along with the seed.

8. Unsprayed, unfertilized and uncultivated buffer adjacent to existing habitat (including open water) on improved grassland

Wide grassland strips can provide valuable buffers between more intensively managed areas of the farm and adjacent habitats. The buffer can intercept sediment, nutrients and sprays to reduce negative impacts on habitat areas and can provide shelter and feeding opportunities for wildlife in their own right.

Requirements:

- provide a grass buffer of at least 12m and up to a maximum of 20m.
- the buffer can be located next to any existing habitat, hedgerows or water courses. You do not need to have management control of the adjacent features.
- the buffer must be unfertilised, unsprayed (with herbicides or pesticides) and uncultivated
- Grazing and cutting is permitted

9. Mixed leys on improved land (also referred to as multi-species or herbal leys) with closed period

Mixed leys provide multiple benefits. They provide a valuable habitat for a range of invertebrates, particularly pollinating insects when allowed to flower. They also provide a more resilient pasture, with a range of deeper-rooted species able to reach moisture during dry periods and providing mixed forage for livestock.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- establish a mixed ley, comprising minimum five grass species, three legume species and three herb species
- minimum seed rate 25 kg / ha
- maximum Ryegrass content 6 kg / ha
- maximum other grass seed content 9 kg / ha (maximum total grass seed content 15 kg / ha)
- only use certified seed at the recommended seed rate and retain labels and invoices as supporting evidence at inspection
- it can be established as a whole field or as a margin along the edge of a field
- mixed ley to be retained for three years, or for the duration of participation if shorter and / or to meet the scheme requirement for 10% habitat on your holding.
- ensure there is a minimum area available for pollinating insects and other wildlife by allowing a six-week continuous closed period from grazing or mowing between 1 May – 31 July. A closed period will apply on a parcel-by-parcel basis. If only a part parcel is required to meet the 10% threshold the closed period will only apply to that area.
- You should keep geo-tagged photographs showing evidence of areas and periods left uncut / ungrazed.
- you may rectify any immediate deficiencies identified in P, K and pH levels prior to establishment
- sow between 15 April and 15 September
- crop can be established through ploughing, traditional cultivations and drilling, minimum tillage or direct drilling
- mix the seed in the hopper immediately before sowing a seed mix to stop an uneven spread of crops

- seed can be broadcast or drilled, but no deeper than 1cm
- roll after sowing to retain moisture
- if using minimum tillage or direct drilling, the use of an appropriate, approved herbicide to spray off an existing grass sward is required. (This requirement not applicable for farmers certified as organic)
- maintain a 1m grass buffer strip adjacent to a hedge, earth bank or watercourse.
- established sward to be managed to maintain sward diversity, to encourage the flowering and seeding of the mixed ley and to avoid poaching

Do not:

- plough or cultivate land before 1 March
- use Plant Protection Products (PPPs) once the ley is established, other than to spot treat or weed-wipe injurious weeds or invasive non-native species, soft and hard rush, nettles or bracken.
- use inorganic fertilisers containing nitrogen following establishment until the following spring. We recommended that nitrogen fertiliser use is avoided to achieve maximum agronomic and environmental benefits from the mixed ley

A record of all field activity, including sowing dates, fertiliser and pesticide applications, and grazing and mowing dates should be recorded in your activity diary.

Previously established mixed leys

Mixed leys established as part of the Growing for the Environment scheme in 2024 or 2025, are acceptable to be used as temporary habitat for the first years of SFS - Universal Layer as herbal ley is regarded as a temporary habitat for the first three years.

Herbal leys established in 2024 and 2025 outside of the Welsh Government scheme would also be acceptable, provided the requirements of UA6 have been met. You must retain seed labels and related invoices and any other supporting evidence of the activity.

10. Late cut improved grasslands

When managed for a late cut, agriculturally improved grasslands can provide valuable nesting habitat for ground nesting birds, and shelter for other species such as brown hare. Cutting later in the year allows nesting birds time to complete brooding, and for chicks to fledge. This action is important for birds like curlew, which are threatened with extinction in Wales. This is applicable to a grass ley only and not a multi species ley.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- available on whole parcels that will be shut out for silage or hay only
- do not graze, cut, mow, harrow, roll, top or undertake any other mechanical operations between 6 May and 15 July. A record of these activities should be recorded in your activity diary.

11. Improved grassland allowed to set seed

Allowing improved grasslands to set seed and remain uncut or ungrazed over winter will provide winter food for seed eating birds. The absence of a seed supply over winter is a major factor in rapidly declining farmland bird populations.

Requirements:

- available on improved land only
- available on whole parcels, or part parcels with strips at least 12m wide
- do not cut or graze from 1 June to 28 February. A record of cutting or grazing should be recorded in your activity diary.

Annex 4: Crop Codes

Table 1: SFS Universal Crop Codes Eligibility Table

If you are claiming schemes other than the SFS - Universal Layer you will need to refer to the 2026 Single Application Rules for crop code eligibility, when it becomes available on 2 March 2026.

The following crop codes are new for SFS – Universal Layer. You will need to consider these crop codes when completing the Field Data Section on your SAF 2026, and amend where necessary.

MA7 - Mazie under sown

Maize with an under sown crop, typically grass or clover.

PD2 - Ponds – eligible for SFS up to 1ha or less

Pond(s) not exceeding one hectare in size.

ML1 - Mixed Leys (also referred to as multi-species or herbal leys)

Temporary grassland comprising a diverse mixture of grasses, legumes, and herbs which meets the requirements of UA6: Temporary Habitat.

UM1 - Unsprayed Spring Sown Cereal and Protein Crop Mix

Spring-sown mixture of cereal and protein crops which meets the requirements of UA6: Temporary Habitat.

WB1 - Wildlife Cover Crop

Commercially available multi-species wildlife / game which meets the requirements of UA6: Temporary Habitat.

Annex 4: Table 1: Crop/Land Description	Crop Code	SFS Universal Eligible
Apple	AP4	Yes
Arable crop – mixed	MC3	Yes
Artichokes	AR2	Yes
Asparagus	AS1	Yes
Aubergine	AU1	Yes
Bamboo	BA2	Yes
Barley – spring sown	BA5	Yes
Barley – winter sown	BA4	Yes
Basil	BA6	Yes
Beans – field – spring sown	BN4	Yes
Beans – field – winter sown	BN5	Yes
Beans – green	BN2	Yes
Beans – mung	BE11	Yes
Beans – soya	BN3	Yes
Beets/Mangolds	BT1	Yes
Bilberries/Cranberries	BS2	Yes
Blackberries/Loganberries/ Raspberries	BS1	Yes
Black Medicks	ME6	Yes
Borage	BO1	Yes
Bracken – group	ZZ20	Yes
Bracken – scattered	YY21	Yes
Buckwheat	BU1	Yes
Cabbages and other brassicas – spring sown	CA21	Yes
Cabbages and other brassicas – winter sown	CA22	Yes
Camelina	CA18	Yes
Canary seed / Reed Canary Grass	CY1	Yes
Carrots	CA20	Yes
Celeriac	CE2	Yes
Chicory	CH5	Yes

Annex 4: Table 1: Crop/Land Description	Crop Code	SFS Universal Eligible
Chilli	CI1	Yes
Chilli - Tree	CT1	Yes
Clover	CL4	Yes
Clover – sweet	CL3	Yes
Comfrey	CO5	Yes
Coppice – short rotation	CO4	Yes
Crambe	CR2	Yes
Cress – salad	CR4	Yes
Cress – water	CR5	Yes
Cucumbers	CU1	Yes
Daffodils	DA1	Yes
Dill	DL1	Yes
Edible thistle	TH1	Yes
Evening Primrose	EV1	Yes
Fallow – natural regeneration	FA3	Yes
Fallow – grass sown	FA4	Yes
Fallow – sown wildlife cover	FA5	Yes
Fennel	FE2	Yes
Fenugreek	FE1	Yes
Field corners or woodland edge - stock excluded – not eligible for BPS	GC3	Yes
Field Corners or Woodland Edge - stock excluded by a management agreement	GC3B	Yes
Field Margins	FM1	Yes
Forage Rape	RA9	Yes
Gooseberries/Redcurrants/ Blackcurrants/Whitecurrants	BS3	Yes
Grapes	GR7	Yes
Grass - stock excluded - not eligible for BPS	GR9	Yes
Grass - stock excluded by a management agreement	GR9B	Yes
Grass – permanent – over 5 years	GR2	Yes
Grass – permanent – resown in last 12 months	GR8	Yes
Grass – temporary – under 5 years	GR1	Yes
Heather	HE9	Yes

Annex 4: Table 1: Crop/Land Description	Crop Code	SFS Universal Eligible
Heathlands - stock excluded - not eligible for BPS	HE6	Yes
Heathlands - stock excluded by a management agreement	HE6B	Yes
Heathlands – grazed	HE7	Yes
Hemp	HE2	Yes
Herbage seed	HE8	Yes
Hops	HO1	Yes
Horseradish	RA4	Yes
Lavender	LA1	Yes
Lentils	LE1	Yes
Lettuce	LE3	Yes
Linseed/Linola – spring sown	LI4	Yes
Linseed/Linola – winter sown	LI5	Yes
Lucerne	LU2	Yes
Lupins – sweet	LU1	Yes
Maize/Sweetcorn	MA6	Yes
Maize under sown	MA7	Yes
Marrows/Pumpkins/Squash/ Courgette	MA5	Yes
Melons	ME3	Yes
Melons – Water	ME5	Yes
Millet	MI1	Yes
Miscanthus	MI5	Yes
Mixed Leys (also referred to as multi-species or herbal leys	ML1	Yes
Mixed production horticulture	MP1	Yes
Mushrooms	MU2	Yes
Mustard	MU3	Yes
Mustard – brown	MU5	Yes
Nitrogen fixing crops – mixed	MN1	Yes
Nursery – trees – ornamentals	NU11	Yes
Nuts – chestnuts	NU2	Yes
Nuts – hazel/cob	NU5	Yes
Nuts – pistachios	PI1	Yes
Nuts – walnuts	NU4	Yes

Annex 4: Table 1: Crop/Land Description	Crop Code	SFS Universal Eligible
Oats – spring sown	OA5	Yes
Oats – winter sown	OA4	Yes
Oilseed rape – spring sown	RA8	Yes
Oilseed rape – winter sown	RA7	Yes
Onions/Leeks/Shallots/Garlic	ON2	Yes
Orchard – mixed	OR3	Yes
Oregano	OR2	Yes
Osiers	OS1	Yes
Parsley	PA1	Yes
Parsnips	PA2	Yes
Pears	PE10	Yes
Peas – chickpeas	PE3	Yes
Peas (vining and other) – spring sown	PS2	Yes
Peas (vining and other) – winter sown	PS3	Yes
Pepper	PP1	Yes
Plantains	PL3	Yes
Plums/Greengages/Cherries/ Almonds	PL2	Yes
Pond buffer zone – stock excluded - not eligible for BPS	GC2	Yes
Pond Buffer Zone – stock excluded by a management	GC2B	Yes
Ponds – eligible for BPS	PD1	Yes
Ponds – eligible for SFS up to 1ha	PD2	Yes
Potato – sweet	PO2	Yes
Potatoes	PO1	Yes
Radishes	RA2	Yes
Reed beds/swamps - stock excluded - not eligible for BPS	RE3	Yes
Reed Beds / Swamps - stock excluded by a management agreement	RE3B	Yes
Reeds	RE1	Yes
Rhubarb	RH1	Yes
Rocket	RO2	Yes
Roses	RO1	Yes

Annex 4: Table 1: Crop/Land Description	Crop Code	SFS Universal Eligible
Rushes	RU1	Yes
Rye – (including Meslin) – spring sown	RY4	Yes
Rye – (including Meslin) – winter sown	RY5	Yes
Saffron	SA1	Yes
Sage	SA9	Yes
Sain Foin	SF1	Yes
Salsify	SA3	Yes
Saltmarshes – grazed	SM2	Yes
Saltmarshes - stock excluded – not eligible for BPS	SM1	Yes
Saltmarshes - stock excluded by a management agreement	SM1B	Yes
Sand Dunes	SD1	Yes
Scorzonera	SC1	Yes
Scree/rock outcrops/boulders/sand – group	ZZ40	Yes
Scree/rock outcrops/boulders/sand – scattered	YY41	Yes
Scrub/gorse/briar – group	ZZ22	Yes
Scrub/gorse/briar – scattered	YY23	Yes
Scrub/gorse/briar - stock excluded - not eligible for BPS	GS1	Yes
Scrub/Gorse/Briar – stock excluded by a management Agreement	GS1B	Yes
Scrub/gorse/briar – stock excluded – not eligible for BPS	GS2	Yes
Siam Pumpkin	SP7	Yes
Sorghum	SO3	Yes
Spelt Wheat – spring sown	SP8	Yes
Spelt Wheat – winter sown	SP9	Yes
Spinach	SP3	Yes
Squash – Banana	SQ1	Yes
Squash - Butternut	SQ2	Yes
Squash – Japanese Pie	SQ3	Yes
Strawberries	ST1	Yes

Annex 4: Table 1: Crop/Land Description	Crop Code	SFS Universal Eligible
Streamside corridor – stock excluded – not BPS eligible	SC2	Yes
Streamside Corridors - stock excluded by a management agreement	SC2B	Yes
Sunflower seed	SU2	Yes
Swedes	SW4	Yes
Tobacco	TO1	Yes
Tomatoes	TO2	Yes
Tracks – grazed	GT1	Yes
Trees with a tree preservation order	TP8	Yes
Trefoils	TR5	Yes
Trefoils – Common Birdsfoot	TR9	Yes
Triticale – spring sown	TC4	Yes
Triticale – winter sown	TC3	Yes
Tulips	TU4	Yes
Turnips/Typhon/Colza	TU5	Yes
Vetches	VE3	Yes
Unsprayed Spring Sown Cereal and Protein Crop Mix	UM1	Yes
Wildlife Cover Crop	WB1	Yes
Wheat – spring sown	WT2	Yes
Wheat – winter sown	WT1	Yes
Woad	WO1	Yes
Woodland – coniferous – group	ZZ10	Yes
Woodland – broadleaf – group	ZZ11	Yes
Woodland – coniferous – scattered	YY14	Yes

Annex 4: Table 1: Crop/Land Description	Crop Code	SFS Universal Eligible
Woodland – broadleaf – scattered	YY15	Yes
Woodland – trunks and stumps	YY16	Yes
Woodland – broadleaf – stock excluded by a management agreement	BW1	Yes
Woodland – coniferous – stock excluded by a management agreement	CW1	Yes
Woodland – coniferous – stock excluded – ineligible for BPS	TR2	Yes
Woodland – broadleaf – stock excluded – ineligible for BPS	WS1	Yes
Yam	YA1	Yes

Annex 4: Table 2:

Permanent features ineligible for SFS Universal.

If you are claiming schemes other than the SFS - Universal Layer you will need to refer to the 2026 Single Application Rules booklet for crop code eligibility when it becomes available on 2 March 2026.

Annex xx: Table 3: **Crop/Land Description**	**Crop Code**	**SFS Universal Eligible**
Ponds – ineligible	ZZ30	No
Rivers and streams	ZZ31	No
Buildings/yards	ZZ89	No
Hardstandings	ZZ92	No
Roads	ZZ94	No
Tracks – ungrazed	ZZ97	No
Non-agricultural activities	NO1	No
Temporary unusable area	TT99	No

Annex 5: Declaring and Deducting Ineligible Features

Ineligible features are non-grazeable or non cropable areas within a field parcel. They include man-made constructions such as buildings, hardstandings, ungrazeable tracks and water features.

Non-agricultural areas such as gardens, solar panels, caravan parks and riding arenas should also be declared on the SAF with the appropriate crop code (NO1) as these are ineligible.

These ineligible features must be declared on the SAF against the relevant code and the ineligible area deducted from the total area of the field parcel. A full list of ineligible features are available at Annex 4 of this booklet.

How do I identify and calculate the Ineligible Features?

You need to identify and declare all the ineligible features for each field parcel you declare on your SAF in hectares.

To calculate the area of a feature in hectares you should measure the length and width in metres, multiply them together and divide by 10,000 m² (the area of 1 hectare).

For example, a building measuring 10 m x 10 m = 100 m². Dividing by 10,000 m² = 0.01 hectares.

Areas can only be declared to 2 decimal places and therefore all calculations should be rounded up or down to the nearest number, e.g. 0.005 hectares should be rounded up to 0.01 hectares, whilst 0.014 hectares should be rounded down to 0.01 hectares.

SFS Map

On RPW Online you can use the mapping tool and aerial photography to help you identify and calculate the ineligible features within your field.

The following guidance explains how to identify, calculate and declare each type of ineligible feature within each land parcel.

Man made features

What is a man made feature?

A man-made feature is a ‘structure that has been constructed rather than occurring naturally’, such as buildings, hardstandings, ungrazed tracks and roads. A full list of man-made features is available at Annex 4 of this booklet.

How do you calculate the area of man-made and non-agriculture features?

• Identify the man-made feature within the field parcel and

• measure the features length and width.

Example: a building of 20 m by 10 m equals 200 m² and should be declared as 0.02 hectares, a track of 100 m by 3 m is 300 m² and should be declared as 0.03 hectares.

• If there are more than one of the same type of feature in the field you must add together the area of each separate feature.

Example: a field contains two buildings, one measured as 0.01 hectares and one measured as 0.02 hectares. The total area for buildings should therefore be added together and a total area of 0.03 hectares (0.01 hectares + 0.02 hectares) is calculated for buildings.

• If the total area calculated for the individual feature(s) is 0.01 hectares or greater, select the appropriate code at Annex XX of this booklet and declare the area calculated for the feature against the field parcel

• these areas should be declared and deducted from the total field size.

What if the area of the individual man-made feature is less than 0.01 ha?

If the area of an individual man-made feature is calculated to be less than 0.01 hectares and there are no other man-made features in the field parcel, that feature is deemed insignificant and does not need to be declared.

However, if there are many of the same features in the field, e.g. pig sheds, a whole parcel assessment should be carried out and the area of all these individual features should be added together.

If there is more than one type of ineligible feature in the field parcel, and when these areas are added together they come to 0.01 hectares or more, the total area for all these features should be declared on the SAF set against the main feature.

Example: a field parcel contains a building with an area of 0.004 hectares, a hardstanding with an area of 0.004 hectares and a track of 0.003 hectares. A total declared area of 0.01 hectares (0.004 hectares + 0.004 hectares + 0.003 hectares = 0.011 hectares) should be declared against code ZZ89.

Water features

What is a water feature?

Water features are naturally occurring streams, rivers (0.01 hectares or greater) and ponds (over 1 hectare). A full list of water features is available at Annex 2 in this booklet.

How do you calculate the area of water features?

• Identify the water features within the field parcel; i.e. all river and streams (0.01 hectares or greater) and ponds (over 1 hectare)

• measure the features length and width.

Example: a river of 55 metres long by an average of 6 metres wide equals 330 m² and should be declared as 0.03 hectares for rivers and streams.

• If there are more than one of these features in the field you must add together the area of each separate feature.

Example: a field contains two rivers, one measured as 0.01 hectares and one measured as 0.02 hectares. The total area for rivers and streams should therefore be added together and a total area of 0.03 hectares (0.01 hectares + 0.02 hectares) is calculated for rivers and streams.

• If the total area calculated for the individual feature(s) is 0.01 hectares or greater, select the appropriate code at Annex xx of this booklet (ZZ30 for ponds (over 1 Ha), ZZ31 for rivers/streams) and declare the area calculated for the feature against the field parcel

• these areas should be declared and deducted from the total field size.

What if the area of the individual water features is less than 0.01ha?

If the area of an individual water feature is calculated to be less than 0.01 hectares and there are no other water features in the field parcel, that feature is deemed insignificant and does not need to be declared.

However, if there are many of the same water features in the field, e.g. a number of streams and a river, a whole parcel assessment should be carried out and the area of all these individual features should be added together.

Annex 6: Key Dates

Date	Event
31 December 2025	SFS Map available
1 January 2026	Start of the SFS year.
1 January 2026	SFS Regulatory Baseline requirements begin for 2026.
12 January 2026	Manage My Land available
2 March 2026	SAF 2026 available.
4 March 2026	Registering for Farming Connect via RPW Online opens
1 April 2026	FARMDATA + available
20 April 2026	A SAF submission reminder Broadcast Message will be issued week commencing 20 April 2026.
4 May 2026	A SAF submission reminder Broadcast Message will be issued week commencing 4 May 2025.
15 May 2026	Closing date for receipt of SAF 2026 without penalty.
15 May 2026	Closing date for submission of supporting documents without penalty
1 June 2026	Final day to make amendments to the land declared on the SAF 2026 (without penalty), submitted by 15 May 2026.
1 June 2026	A SAF submission reminder Broadcast Message will be issued week commencing 21June 2026.
9 June 2026	Final day for receipt of SAF 2026 (subject to late penalties). All SAFs received after 9 June will be rejected.
14 October 2026	SFS Advance Payments will commence.
11 December 2026	SFS Balance Payments will commence.
31 December 2026	Deadline for completion of all applicable Universal Actions
15 January 2027	Deadline for updating the SFS Universal Dashboard for all applicable Universal actions for 2026 Scheme year.

Annex 7: Contacts

The Welsh Government's website and the Gwlad e-newsletter contain information on the SFS, BPS and other schemes covered by the SAF.

RPW Online

Access the RPW Online service via the Welsh Government website. Alternatively, to request access to RPW Online or, if you have any queries on using the online system, please call the Customer Contact Centre on 0300 062 5004.

Farmer Enquiries – Customer Contact Centre

Your first point of contact for all telephone enquiries and email correspondence should be the Customer Contact Centre where staff are on hand to provide information and answer queries.

You can use the 'Messages' page on your RPW Online account to send an enquiry to the Customer Contact Centre. Alternatively, you can use the following contact details:

- Tel: 0300 062 5004
- PO Box address: Rural Payments Wales, PO Box 251, Caernarfon, LL55 9DA

The Customer Contact Centre opening times are as follows:

Monday to Friday: 09:00 to 16:00

Farm Liaison Service (FLS)

FLS staff will also be available to provide support and guidance on any aspects of the scheme or other current topics. FLS contact details can be found on the Welsh Government website at www.gov.wales/contact-farm-liaison-service.

Regional Offices

Our Regional Offices are open on an appointment basis only.

Caernarfon Divisional Office
Welsh Government
Victoria Dock
Caernarfon
Gwynedd
LL55 1TH

Carmarthen Divisional Office
Government Buildings
Picton Terrace
Carmarthen SA31 3BT

Llandrindod Wells Divisional Office
Welsh Government
County Hall
Spa Road East
Llandrindod Wells LD1 5LG

Aberystwyth Regional Office
Welsh Government
Rhodfa Padarn
Llanbadarn Fawr
Aberystwyth SY23 3UR

Access to RPW Offices for people with disabilities or additional needs

If you have any additional needs which you feel are not met by our facilities contact the Customer Contact Centre. Welsh Government officials will then endeavour to make arrangements to accommodate your requirements.

Welsh Government Website

For all of the latest Agricultural and Rural Affairs information, visit the Welsh Government website. By visiting the website, you can also sign up to receive the Rural Affairs e-newsletter which delivers the latest news directly to your e-mail inbox.

Gwlad

The Gwlad e-newsletter is the Welsh Government's e-newsletter for farm and forestry businesses and all those involved with agriculture and rural Wales. It contains news stories, guidance and information in an accessible, easy-to-read format. To keep informed and up to date with all the latest agriculture news and developments in future we would encourage you to sign up to receive the Gwlad e-newsletter. You can do this at Subscribe to farming and forestry news (Gwlad).

Unacceptable Behaviour

Welsh Government officials, individuals or organisations carrying out duties on behalf of the Welsh Government (e.g. NRW, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS), Food Standards Agency (FSA), EID Cymru, Local Authorities), should not be subjected to aggressive, abusive or offensive behaviour or unreasonable demands and persistence from applicants/claimants or their representatives. This also applies to members of the Independent Appeals Panel.

A Managing Unacceptable Behaviour of Welsh Government Customers document is available on the Welsh Government website which explains what we consider unacceptable behaviour.

Unacceptable behaviour may lead to the withdrawal of payments and/or the rejection of applications or claims.

Annex 8: Additional Help and Guidance

Farm Liaison Service (FLS)

The Welsh Government's FLS is here to help you. They are committed to providing personal and practical support.

The FLS offer:

- One-to-one advice on Welsh Government agricultural policies, grants, and schemes.
- Guidance on regulatory requirements and on-farm record-keeping.
- Support during times of change or difficulty in your farming business.

Our Farm Liaison Officers (FLO) are here to listen, advise, and support you, whatever your circumstances. Your conversations with the FLO's are private and confidential. They will never share your information without your consent, except if required by law.

For more information and contact details please visit Contact the Farm Liaison Service | GOV.WALES.

Farming Connect

Farming Connect is a Welsh Government programme designed to help farm and forestry businesses improve their skills, knowledge, and profitability. Here's what it offers:

1. Advisory Service

- Independent, confidential advice tailored to your business.
- Up to 90% funding for technical and business advice.

2. Skills and Training

- Subsidised training courses (up to 80% funded).
- Topics include business planning, land management, and livestock health.
- Online learning and CPD through Storfa Sgiliau.

3. Knowledge Transfer & Innovation

- Demonstration farms and discussion groups.
- Access to research, technology updates, and benchmarking tools.

4. Mentoring & Business Development

- One-to-one mentoring and peer learning groups.
- Support for new entrants, diversification, and succession planning.

5. Specialist Support

- Help with preparing for the Sustainable Farming Scheme.
- Soil sampling, biodiversity planning, and pest management.
- Dedicated programmes for horticulture and sheep genetics.

You can find out more and register on the Farming Connect website: https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect

Or call Farming Connect Service Centre on 08456 000 813

Important: The Farming Connect service is integrating with RPW via the Gov.UK One Login service. You will be required to re-register for Farming Connect via their RPW Online Account. This registration will only be available once you have migrated to the Gov.UK One Login Service. To access Farming Connect including FARMDATA + after 1 April 2026, you must register via RPW Online.

Registration for Farming Connect via RPW Online will be available from 4 March 2026

Annex 9: Glossary of Terms

Terms	Explanation
10% habitat requirement	Farms entering the scheme must have 10% of their land managed as habitat for environmental and wildlife benefits. Additional temporary habitat can be created if there is insufficient permanent habitat.
Activity diary	A record of various habitat management practices such as sowing dates or livestock movements on habitat which farmers in the scheme will be required to maintain as evidence towards delivery of habitat maintenance and creation actions.
Agreement Holder	A person (or agent or employee) who has entered into an agreement with the Welsh Government.
Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023	Also referred to as 'the Agriculture Act': new Welsh legislation which provides Welsh Ministers with the legal powers to support agricultural activities in Wales. The act established the Sustainable Land Management objectives.
Agriculture Support Schemes (Eligibility, Enforcement and Appeals) (Wales) Regulations 2025	The regulation providing the controls and enforcement, and the operational and administrative farmwork for all agricultural support established in accordance with Agriculture Act, including SFS.
Animal Health Improvement Cycle (AHIC)	An ongoing process by which each farm business will work with their vet to proactively improve animal health.

Terms	Explanation
Area determined	The area for which all eligibility criteria or other obligations relating to the conditions for making payments have been met.
Artificiality	Farmers who artificially create the circumstances to gain advantage from any of the rules relating to the payment of SFS, including to avoid payment reductions (capping), by declaring/not declaring land under their management control will be investigated and payments may be withheld, or all claims rejected and monies paid recovered.
BACS	Bankers Automated Clearing System.
Benchmarking	A mechanism for monitoring a set of Key Performance Indicators to enable farmers to make data driven management decisions.
Claimant	A person (or agent or employee) who has applied for the SFS Universal Layer by submitting a claim on the SAF.
Competent Control Authorities (CCA)	Bodies responsible for official controls systems to verify compliance with relevant standards and requirements on behalf of the Welsh Government.
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)	An ongoing learning and development process to build skills and knowledge.
CRN	Customer Reference Number. A unique business identifier in the format A0098765.

Terms	Explanation
Crop Codes	Land use codes entered on the SAF to confirm current and future land use for the scheme year.
Derogation	A temporary exemption allowing deviation from one or more of the scheme requirements
Designated Sites	A formal designation for areas of land or water considered to have special value for wildlife or geological features. SSSI are given statutory protection through specific legislation. For example; SSSI - Site of Special Scientific Interest SPA - Special Protection Area SAC - Special Area of Conservation
Designated Site Management Plan	A management plan agreed between the farmer and NRW to improve the condition of designated sites such as SSSIs.
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations	Regulations which are used to consider the effects of projects on the environment.
FARMDATA+	An online benchmarking tool delivered through Farming Connect.
Farming Connect	A consortium of providers delivering advice and training to farmers on behalf of Welsh Government.

Terms	Explanation
Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC)	Standards forming part of the SFS Regulatory Baseline, also part of Cross Compliance for those claiming BPS or other schemes administered under Assimilated Law.
Gwlad e-newsletter	Newsletter published online by the Welsh Government.
Habitat Baseline Review (HBR)	Part of the completion of the SAF, where areas of habitat, woodland and tree canopy are confirmed for SFS.
Habitat Maintenance Payment	A single payment rate paid per hectare of permanent semi-natural habitat, managed in accordance with UA5: Habitat Maintenance, excluding habitat on common land or land used in common/shared grazing.
Habitat/Semi-natural Habitat	For the purposes of the scheme, habitat refers to the wide range of land types such as heathlands, flower rich meadows or wetlands. They each comprise a different array of plants and animals that depend on that habitat for their survival. ‘Semi-natural’ means habitats have been modified by human activity, but they still support plants and animals that occur naturally in the area.
Holding	All the land units used for agricultural or ancillary activities, managed by an applicant to the SFS - Universal Layer and situated within Wales.
Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS)	This is the base control system for land-based schemes.
Integrated Pest Management (IPM)	A holistic approach to managing pests and diseases.

Terms	Explanation
Keeper	As defined in the BCMS Cattle Handbook and the Sheep and Goat Handbook.
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	A set of measurable targets (related to the business, livestock, environment or management practices) which can be used to make data driven management decisions.
Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS)	The system used by RPW to store and analyse field parcel data.
Lease	Rental agreement or similar temporary transaction.
Manage My Land (MML)	Application available on RPW Online to inform us of land changes and new land registrations.
Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	A Welsh Government sponsored organisation responsible for advice and regulation regarding the natural resources of Wales.
Plant protection products (PPPs)	A range of chemical-based products including herbicides, pesticides and plant growth regulators.
Rural Inspectorate Wales (RIW)	A dedicated team within RPW responsible for compliance inspections.
Rural Payments Wales (RPW)	The division with the Welsh Government responsible for administering information and payments in relation to farming and land management.

Terms	Explanation
RPW Online	The Welsh Government's online system. Farmers and their Agents/Farming Unions can enrol on this system in order to submit applications, view correspondence, payments, maps etc. and to liaise with RPW.
Sale	The sale or any other definitive transfer or ownership of land; it does not include the sale of land where land is transferred to public authorities or for use in the public interest and where the transfer is carried out for non-agricultural purposes.
Section 15/16 agreement	Land management agreements established with NRW on designated sites.
Schedule of works	Part of the Designated Site Management Plan which contains a set of consented management actions to improve the condition of designated sites such as SSSIs.
SFS Regulatory Baseline	A set of existing legal requirements which apply to all SFS claimants.
SFS Universal Dashboard	An RPW Online view of the Universal Actions that will be applicable for each farm, together with the ability to update and confirm the completion of actions throughout the year.
Single Application Form (SAF)	The annual application process through which farmers apply and claim payment for area-based schemes.

Terms	Explanation
Social Value Payment	Part of the Universal Baseline Payment and reflects the social value of the Universal outcomes delivered through sustainable agriculture practices, which are not properly reflected in market practices for agricultural output, and which contribute to the statutory Sustainable Land Management objectives.
Statutory Management Requirement (SMR	Standards forming part of the SFS Regulatory Baseline, also part of Cross Compliance for those claiming BPS or other schemes administered under Assimilated Law.
Stocking Diary	A record kept of the numbers of livestock on a land parcel as required by UA5: Habitat Maintenance (Upland Open Habitats) and where livestock are turned out onto Common Land.
Storfa sgiliau	An online tool delivered through Farming Connect to administer and record ongoing learning.
Sustainable Land Management (SLM)	A holistic approach established in the Act to incorporate environmental, economic, cultural and social resources in such a way that the needs of the current generation are balanced with our obligations to future generations.
Transfer	The lease or sale or actual inheritance or anticipated inheritance of land or any other definitive transfer thereof
Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan	A plan to capture opportunities for additional tree planting or hedgerow planting on each farm via RPW Online.

Terms	Explanation
UK Forestry Standard (UKFS)	The reference standard for sustainable forest management across the UK. It applies to all woodland, regardless of who owns or manages it.
Universal Action (UA)	A set of actions which all farmers participating in the scheme need to undertake, in exchange for being paid the Universal Baseline Payment.
Universal Baseline Payment	The annual payment each farmer will receive from the Welsh Government in exchange for meeting the scheme requirements including completing the Universal Actions.
Universal Code	This sits above regulation and comprises a series of non-regulatory requirements which apply to every farmer in the scheme. It includes requirements designed to protect soil cover, biodiversity and habitats, trees, and landscape features.
Whole Farm Area	The area of all eligible land on your holding declared on the SAF.
Woodland Maintenance Payment	A single payment rate paid per hectare of woodland, managed in accordance with UA9: Woodland Maintenance, excluding woodland on common land or land used in common/shared grazing.