

FARMING AND PROPERTY BULLETIN – AUGUST 2021



Sustainable Farming Incentive – Deadline Extension

DEFRA have announced that the deadline for Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pilot applications has been extended from the original deadline of 31st August 2021 to 30th September 2021. Farmers who have been invited to apply for the scheme following initial expressions of interest will now have until this date to apply for the pilot scheme.

Environment Agency – Organic manure spreading regulations

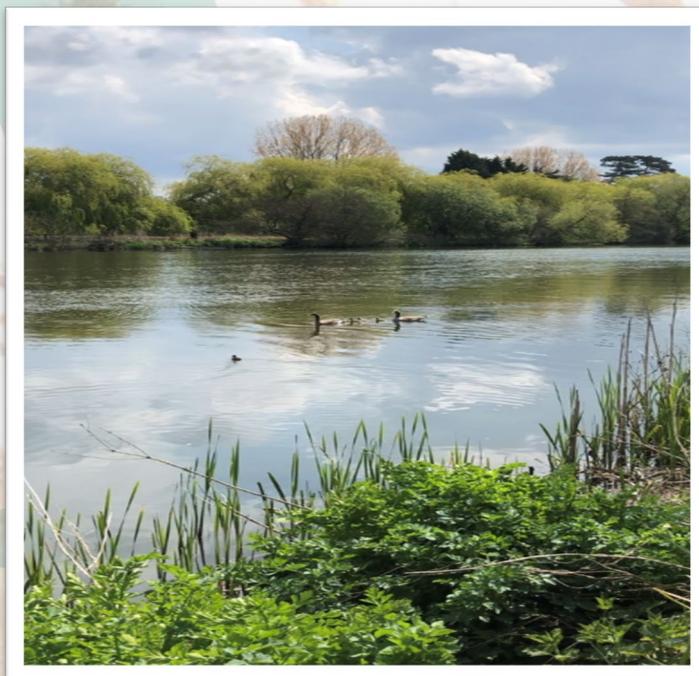
The Environment Agency have recently published a new regulatory position statement (RPS 252) which outlines the requirements for spreading organic manure on agricultural land in England. The statement summarises that application of organic manure should not exceed the needs of the soil or crop on the land nor give rise to diffuse pollution risks if farmers are to meet the 'Farming rules for Water'. However, by following the conditions of the RPS, farmers can plan to exceed the needs of the soil and crop through spreading manure where pollution risks are not caused and where storage facilities for the organic manure are not available either on or off site.

Catchment Sensitive Farming – Programme Extension

DEFRA announced in early August that the Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) programme which it runs in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency will be extended. This extension will allow all UK farmers to apply by March 2023 rather than just those within high water quality priority areas who were previously eligible, which only included around 40% of the UK land area.

The annual funding from the program has been increased from £16.6m in 2021/21 to £30m and will allow for additional Natural England advisors. The programme offers tailored on farm advice, training and support whilst preparing grant and environmental scheme applications to aim to assist farmers to reduce water and air pollution as a result of their farming practices.

CSF training is carried out in various forms including workshops, farm walks and demonstrations covering topics including manure and nutrient management, soil health and management and silage and slurry regulations amongst other things. By emailing CSF.southeasthames@naturalengland.org.uk, the current training available in the region can be determined.



England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO)

As of the 9th June 2021, a new woodland creation grant has become available to land owners, tenants and occupiers in England. The scheme is administered by the Forestry Commission and funded by the Nature for Climate Fund having been set up with the aim of helping to reach the UK target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 through the increased woodland planting. The grant aims to ensure that woodland is suitably and sustainably planted, with the local geography and the occupiers' objectives in mind whilst also aiding the national target. The grant offers finance to cover the following aspects of woodland creation:

- *Capital items and activities*
- *Annual maintenance payments*
- *Contributions to infrastructure costs*
- *Optional additional contributions*

The EWCO can provide up to £8500 per hectare for capital items and up to £200 per hectare per year for annual maintenance. Additional contributions will depend on public goods provided.

New schemes must have a minimum woodland creation area of 1 hectare with each individual parcel of new woodland on the holding having a minimum area of 0.1 hectares. Woodland creation can either be carried out by planting new trees or through natural regeneration. Blocks of woodland must be at least 20 metres wide unless they are riparian woodland (next to a watercourse) in which case they can be 10 metres wide. The grant cannot be used on any parcels which are currently classified as woodland.

The scheme is competitive and will be awarded on a first come first serve basis. Similar to previous environmental schemes, a points system is used when applying for the grant. Applications scoring higher in the points system (more likely to receive the grant) will achieve more of the EWCO priorities:

- *Combatting climate change through carbon storage*
- *Using private finance to support woodland creation*
- *Nature recovery and woodland habitat creation*
- *Improving water quality*
- *Planting riparian buffers and cooling watercourses*
- *Encouraging ammonia capture*
- *Increasing public access to woodlands*



Land areas within this new scheme will still be able to be claimed upon for Basic Payment purposes however the scheme cannot be used in conjunction with other environmental schemes such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. With the introduction of new environmental schemes following the phasing out of BPS in the UK, the EWCO ensures that should applicants wish to break from the scheme at any point throughout the duration to switch to an alternative scheme, this can be done without penalty.

Applications can be made for the EWCO year-round and are estimated to take around 12 – 20 weeks for a decision to be made. It is therefore advised that applications be made **no later than October** to ensure that new tree planting can be carried out that winter. It is worth noting that any works which were initiated prior to an agreement commencement date cannot be paid for by the grant. The EWCO can be used in conjunction with the Woodland Creation Planning Grant (WCPG) where the scale of the scheme is 5 hectares or over.