

FARMING

Staying in the know on greening

Basic Payment Scheme – greening rules for England.

Hugh Townsend explains



WHAT is greening?

In England, there are a number of rules that must be followed to claim BPS. For some, these include a set of three rules intended to promote sustainability and environmental preservation. These are known as the “greening” rules, and are outlined below.

Crop diversification

This rule states that the larger a claimant’s area of arable land, the greater the variety of crops they must grow. Note that temporary grass and fallow areas qualify as arable land, but other types of agricultural land such as permanent grassland and permanent crops do not. Generally, if an applicant manages 10 ha or less of arable land they can grow only a single crop; if they manage 10 to 30 ha of arable land they must grow at least two crops with no single crop covering more than 75% of the total

arable area, and if they manage more than 30 ha of arable land they must grow at least three different crops with no one crop covering more than 75%, and no two crops covering more than 95%, of the total arable area.

If fields are left fallow to meet crop diversification rules, the fallow land cannot be ploughed (except for weed control), or sown, grazed or fertilised (except for some specific purposes related to agri-environmental schemes).

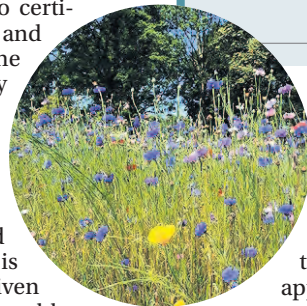
Exemptions apply to certified organic farms and farms where 75% of the total area is, either any or a mix of permanent and temporary grassland and crops grown in water, or any or a mix of permanent grassland, fallow land and legumes. A farm is also exempt for a given claim year if its entire arable area is planted with different crops to the previous year and at least 50% of its arable area was not declared in the previous year.

Ecological focus areas

This rule obliges most claimants controlling more than 15 ha of arable land to manage a number of envi-

EFA WEIGHTINGS

Feature	Weighting
Buffer strips and field margins	9m2 of EFA per metre of buffer
Catch Crops	0.3m2 of EFA per m2 of crop
Cover Crops	0.3m2 of EFA per m2 of crop
Nitrogen fixing crops	1m2 of EFA per m2 of crop
Fallow land	1m2 of EFA per m2 of fallow
Hedges and lines of trees	10m2 of EFA per metre of hedge or trees (if managing both sides) or 5m2 (if managing one side only)



ronmentally beneficial features in proportion to their total arable area. These features are called ecological focus areas (EFAs). In total, for non-exempt applicants, EFAs must equate to 5% of the holding’s total arable area, but each feature is weighted so 1 ha of feature area does not necessarily equate to 1 ha of EFA. The features available and their weighting is shown in the panel above.

For example, suppose if you have 200 ha of arable land. To claim the full BPS, you must have an equiva-

lent of 10 ha of EFA features – 5% of the arable area. You might achieve this with:

- 2000m of buffer strips x9 = 1.8 ha
- 3000m of hedges x10 = 3 ha
- 5.2 ha nitrogen fixing crops x1 = 5.2ha

A total of 10 ha ecological focus areas.

Each feature has its own management rules if it is to be used as an EFA. For example, EFA cover crops must include at least one cereal and non-cereal crop from a list provided by the RPA. We advise claimants to familiarise themselves with management guidance to avoid a penalty.

Exemptions to the EFA rule apply to certified organic farms and those

with 75% of land in permanent and/or temporary grass and/or crops grown in water, or 75% of land in permanent grass and/or legumes and/or fallow.

Permanent Grassland

If England’s total permanent grassland as a proportion of agricultural land falls by more than 5%, BPS claimants who have ploughed up permanent grass fields in the past may be required to return them to grass. If this applies, claimants will be notified by the RPA in writing. Applicants with grassland under Natura 2,000 regulation may not ever plough up their grassland – the EU provides a tool for checking if this applies to you, available at <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/>

A failure to comply with greening obligations could cost a proportion of your payment, and you may be subject to a penalty, so it is critical that these rules are followed. If in doubt we recommend seeking professional guidance as the RPA updates its rules from year to year.

■ **Hugh Townsend, FRICS, FIAV, FCI Arb. is the land agent/surveyor expert of the WMN Farming supplement and he may be contacted on 01392 823935 or htownsend@townsendcharteredurveyors.co.uk.**