

Making the most of limited funding available for farming

Hugh Townsend, FRICS, FAAV, FCI Arb, is an expert land agent/surveyor who writes a regular column for the *Western Morning News* farming section



OVER the past few years, the level of Government support for agriculture in England has undergone a series of important changes.

Looking back, with Single Farm Payments and the Basic Payment Scheme, every year, without fail, from 2005 to 2023, eligible farmers and landowners received area-based Government support for keeping land in an agricultural condition. For 18 consecutive years, around 97% of the total agricultural land in England claimed these payments.

Such consistency provided a safety net for farmers and landowners – a buffer against the unexpected and uncontrollable. Ironically, it is these two words that perhaps most aptly describe Government support since 2023, the final year of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

The table accompanying this article shows a selection of different forms of Government funding from the last six years – with green indicating when each scheme was open to applications, and red when they were closed.

This is not a comprehensive selection, but should cover the more widely available schemes for the average farmer or landowner.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive

(SFI) remains the primary source of Government funding, and the 2026 application windows, in June and September, will be a key calendar date for those not currently holding an agreement.

An SFI agreement can be invaluable to a holding as payment rates can begin to approach old BPS levels. However, getting SFI to work for your farm business is much trickier.

Where BPS was paid in return for keeping the land in agricultural condition and meeting certain cross-compliance and greening requirements, SFI falls under the ‘public money for public goods’ era of Government support and so a greater level of input is expected from landowners in return for payments. Actions benefit the environment whilst still farming it.

This does not, however, mean that by default an SFI agreement will detract from the profitability of a holding, it simply means that care and consideration need to be put into designing the right SFI scheme for your land.

The best scheme for one holding will not suit its neighbour. A good SFI set-up will take a range of factors into account; not just the physical characteristics of the land or the

chosen primary enterprise, but also variables such as willingness to participate, what alternative sources of funding may be available, and future plans for the land.

The multi-faceted nature of SFI, especially when compared to BPS, has led many to believe that ‘their’ holding is not compatible with SFI and that ultimately this has caused a lack of engagement with the scheme. Take for example, 2024; Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier was no longer open to new applications, SFI was consistently open to new applications, and this was the first year in which BPS payments were not to be received. The area of land under an agri-environment scheme was 5.5 million hectares. In 2023, 9.1 million hectares received BPS payments. The transition from BPS to SFI saw a 3.6 million hectare decrease in the land area which funding directly attached to it.

It has almost been a couple of

years since this juncture, and many landowners now know what it is like to be stranded without any area-based funding. With limited funding available and many looking to apply, make sure you have a professionally curated scheme prepared well in advance of the 2026 application windows.

■ Hugh Townsend can be contacted by telephone on 01392 823935 or by email via htownsend@townsendcharteredsurveyors.co.uk

Scheme	Scheme years	2021				2022				2023				2024				2025				2026			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Single Farm Payments & Basic Payment Scheme	2005-2023																								
Environmental Stewardship	2005 - 2014																								
Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier	2016 - 2023																								
Countryside Stewardship Higher-Tier	2016 - present																								
Capital Grants	2016 - present																								
Farm Equipment and technology Fund	2021 - present																								
Sustainable Farming Incentive	2021 - present																								

Notes:

- 2026 is the last time the FETF will run in its current form.
- Animal Health and Welfare Grant is not included but is ending in 2027.
- Does not include - woodland grants, delinked payments, research and innovation funding.

= Open to applications

= Closed to applications

= Invitation only

NFU urges Defra to ensure waste crime stays top priority



> **National Farmers' Union (NFU) Vice-President Robyn Munt**

NFU/Island Echo

IN a response to the Government's Waste Crime Action Plan, announced last month by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), National Farmers' Union (NFU) Vice-President Robyn Munt said: "It is reassuring to see the Government recognising waste crime as a serious, criminal offence and taking meaningful steps to crack down on this illegal activity."

"There were 1.26 million recorded incidents of fly-tipping in England last year," Ms Munt, an Isle of Wight farmer, added.

"From the elderly Hertfordshire farmer who faced a £40,000 clean-up bill following 200 tonnes of rubbish dumped on his land, to the Lincolnshire farmers who were victims of waste-dumping from the illegal drugs trade, waste crime is not just a blight on our countryside but an unjust and costly burden on the farmers and growers who care for it," she declared.

Fly-tippers could be forced into "clean-up squads" to tidy up mess in the areas where they have illegally

WMN REPORTER
wmnnewsdesk@reachplc.com

dumped waste, under the new Government plans.

Councils will also be given new powers to seize money directly from fly-tippers to fund clean-up operations, Defra has said.

The measures form part of the Government's Waste Crime Action Plan, and were brought in as the latest figures show fly-tipping on public land rose 9% last year to record highs, with people carrying out "brazen" acts of illegal waste dumping in streets and other spots.

Under the proposals, councils would get powers to issue fly-tippers with "conditional cautions", instead of being taken to court, which could see offenders complete up to 20 hours of unpaid work to clean up streets, parks and the places where they were caught dumping rubbish.

Currently, fly-tippers can only be punished after being convicted, with fines, or community or even prison sentences, officials said, with the new plans aiming to speed up

enforcement, clamp down on illegal waste dumping and restore pride in communities.

Ms Munt said: "Increased funding, 'clean up squads' and a firm commitment to tackling waste crime at its source will help ensure perpetrators are held accountable and made to cover the cost of the damage they are causing."

"This is a vital step to deter criminal behaviour, protect our environment and prevent the victims of the crime from having to pay the penalty," she added.

"However, success doesn't just depend on greater powers. We've seen local authorities, which were given powers to seize and crush vehicles involved in fly-tipping, struggle to do so due to a lack of capacity."

"We urge the Environment Agency to use this £45 million of funding to ensure it is properly resourced and equipped to strengthen its enforcement against waste crime, and we are calling for a simplified reporting system to better capture data of waste crime on private land."