
Wessex Water groundwater catchment cover crop funding

Conditions and advice for Winter 2023/24

Why grow a cover crop

The aim of a cover crop is to provide green cover over the winter period in order to intercept and reduce the impact of rainfall whilst at the same time accumulating and storing Nitrogen which would otherwise be leached from the soil. The cover crop is destroyed before planting the spring crop and the stored Nitrogen can then be used by the spring crop, potentially reducing its Nitrogen fertiliser requirements.

How and when to apply

- growers can apply for cover crop funding through the Wessex Water Cover Crop Platform in May – June
- enter details for each field, including field location, field size, cover crop species and estimated drilling date – you will be shown how much you will be paid based on the information you submit
- once completed, your application will be reviewed by our advisers. Please note that at this stage a successful submission of this application is not a confirmation of funding
- if successful, your Wessex Water Catchment Adviser will be in contact with you with a formal contract to sign
- final payment will be made based on what type of cover crop was grown and when it was drilled – see validation section below

How much will I be paid?

- there is a set payment rate for every kg of N prevented from leaching, this rate is multiplied by the N savings based on the type of cover crop and when it is drilled – this is supported by multiple years of cover crop trials data
- it therefore follows that earlier drilled cover crops will have a higher payment rate

Which cover crops are eligible for funding

- all cover crops in fields located within the marked areas on the platform i.e either groundwater target areas and/or Safeguard zones, with priority given to higher risk fields that are closer to boreholes or springs
- the following will **not** be funded:
 - cover crops that **do not meet the conditions** set out in this document
 - cover crops on fields that are under over-winter stubble agreements under **Entry Level or Higher Level Stewardship** (ELS/HLS) scheme
 - cover crops that are required as part of a **Countryside Stewardship** agreement
 - **stubble turnips or other forage crops** as (i) they have a commercial value and (ii) these crops could be grazed at high-risk times of the year resulting in increased nitrate leaching

Choosing cover crops

- using the '**Species guidance list for Winter 2023/24**' select cover crop varieties, species and mixes that reduce nitrate leaching, suit your soil and rotation (note minimum seed rates to provide sufficient cover)
- grass can be used as a cover crop, and cut in the spring, but only where it will be kept for no longer than 31st May 2024

Establishing cover crops

- sow the cover crop **as soon as possible after harvest of the previous crop**, or
 - **latest** by 15th September after a combinable crop or
 - **latest** by 15th October after maize
- establish by drilling or broadcasting (less soil disturbance will result in less mineralisation of soil Nitrogen which should reduce the risk of nitrate leaching, although a small amount of soil disturbance can aid cover crop establishment)
- in the event of adverse weather conditions which impact drilling dates, Wessex Water Catchment Advisers will assess the environmental conditions and advise how this will be reflected in payment rates

Do not

- apply starter fertiliser or organic manure to the cover crop either before or after drilling
- graze the cover crop during the term of the agreement

Validation

- over the winter period your Wessex Water Catchment Adviser will be in contact with you to request information about your cover crops – actual drilling dates, areas sown and cover crop species grown.
- final payment rates are calculated on what you actually did, which may be slightly different to what you had planned when you submitted your original application.
- advisers may also wish to come out and see the cover crops, or for you to send photos after the cover crop has emerged.

Cover crop destruction

- retain the cover crop until at least **15th January** if the following crop is combinable, or until the **1st March** if the following crop is maize
- destruction can be by a variety of methods which includes by **light grazing** after the destruction date stated above, but only with prior agreement from your catchment adviser
- take into account Nitrogen returned by the cover crop when applying Nitrogen to following crops (Nitrogen fertiliser applications to spring crops such as spring barley and maize could be reduced by 25-30 kgN/ha or more if they follow a cover crop)

How to receive payment

- after submitting your actual cover crop information, you will receive confirmation of your payment claim and be requested to send an invoice
- an invoice should be submitted between 1st and 31st January 2024, for payment by 31st March 2024
- growers may be required by the Wessex Water payments team to be registered as “suppliers” to Wessex Water Services Limited, please ensure paperwork is filled out and returned

For more information please contact:

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