

Overwinter Cover Crops

This scheme aims to grow a fast-growing overwinter cover crop on land that would otherwise be left bare overwinter ahead of a spring crops. Cover crops are known to reduce nutrient leaching. Cover crops also have multiple benefits such as improving soil health and biodiversity.

Payment rate

A one off payment rate of:

- After Combinable Crops:
 - Cover Crops sown **before 31st August** £150/ha
 - Cover Crops sown **from 1st September** £100/ha
 - £25/ha bonus if over 80% ground cover is achieved by December 2024
- After Maize:
 - Cover Crops sown **before 30th September** £150/ha
 - Cover Crops sown **from 1st October** £100/ha
 - £25/ha bonus if over 80% ground cover is achieved by December 2024

Length of scheme

- August/ September 2024 – January/March 2025

Benefits

- Capture residual post-harvest Nitrogen and reduce leaching
- Provide soil cover over winter and reduce run off
- Diverse cover crop species mix build soil structure and add organic matter

Eligible areas

- Arable fields within the Safeguard Zone
- Up to 100ha of land per farm business can be entered into the scheme.

Non – Eligible areas

- Cover Crops options which are funded by any other scheme (such as Countryside Stewardship, Sustainable Farming Incentive, Biodiversity Net Gain or nutrient neutrality) are not eligible.
- Forage crops grown for grazing (such as stubble turnips or kale) and cash crops grown to be harvested (such as oilseed rape or lucerne) are not eligible
- Land outside of the Safeguard Zone catchment.

Scheme requirements

Establishment:

- 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

Cover crop species:

- A mix or a single species (excluding forage crops for grazing) may be used, but crops should be suitable for autumn sowing, fast growing and mainly frost tolerant to provide adequate ground cover overwinter
- Brassicas such as oil radish and mustard may be used as the main species. If sown as a single species:
 - The minimum seed rate of oil radish should be 10kg/ha if August sown and 15kg/ha if September sown.
 - Mustard should be sown at 7.5kg/ha if drilled and 10kg/ha if broadcast.
- Cereals such as oats and rye may be used as the main species. The minimum seed rate should be 80kg/ha if cereals are used as the main or only cover crop species.
- Other species such as phacelia, linseed, sunflowers, and buckwheat may also be included in the mix. The seed rate of a mix of cover crop species should be sufficient to provide dense ground cover within a few weeks of establishment.
- Legumes, including vetches and clover can be included in mixes, as long as they do not form more than 20% of the mixture. If you are unsure, please contact your Wessex Water Adviser.
- See '**Species guidance list for Winter 2024/25**' for more details on suitable cover crop species to 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 2025

Restrictions:

- Do not apply starter fertiliser or organic manure to the cover crop either before or after drilling
- Do not graze the cover crop during the term of the agreement

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)

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.

Application process

- Complete the [online application form](#) – filling out farm details, field details and expected drilling times.
- Submitting an online application is not confirmation of funding.
- Once you have submitted your online application, it will be reviewed by a Wessex Water catchment adviser.
- If your application is successful a contract will be issued for signing between the farmer and Wessex Water.

Record keeping, validation and data collection

- In entering the scheme, you are agreeing to allow a Wessex Water adviser to visit land in a scheme for visual inspection before, during and after the implementation of the scheme.
- In entering the scheme a Wessex Water catchment adviser may request farm records from you demonstrating fertiliser rates, the change in cropping, stocking rates etc.
- In entering the scheme Wessex Water may carry out soil sampling, porous pots, grain samples and crop tissue samples for nutrient analysis. Any data collected will be shared with the farmer. Wessex Water will store data on an internal Wessex Water database and may be used to contribute to a larger aggregated and anonymised data set.

Payment terms

- Payment will be made annually.
- To claim payment for the scheme your Wessex Water adviser will request you to send an invoice to be sent directly to them.
- Wessex Water payment terms are end of the month plus 30 days
- The invoice should be submitted between the 1st – 31st January to guarantee payment by 31st March.
- You 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