

Arable Reversion to No-Input Grass

Funding is offered to take whole fields or parts of fields out of arable production for up to 5 years into a no input grass ley. This scheme can be used in fields or parts of fields that suffer from low productivity, run off, erosion or waterlogging.

Payment rate

An annual payment rate of:

- £720/ha/year for fields in the High Priority Area
- £500/ha/year on fields in the Wider Safeguard Zone

Length of scheme

- Up to 5-year agreement from the month of establishment.
- Agreements can be made bespoke to suit your farming system, please speak to your Wessex Water catchment adviser.

Benefits

- The measure can be used across a whole field or in unproductive areas of a field eg: awkward corners or frequently waterlogged areas.
- Continuous ground cover over winter reduced soil run off and erosion.
- Reduced nitrate leaching.
- Lower carbon emissions from associated fertiliser use.

Eligible areas

- This scheme is available to all fields within the Safeguard Zone and have been in arable for at least 5 years.
- This scheme can be applied to whole fields or parts of fields to square them up and take out unproductive/in-efficient areas
- Up to 20ha of land per farm business can be entered into the scheme.

Non – eligible areas

- Arable Reversion options which are funded by any other scheme (such as Countryside Stewardship, Sustainable Farming Incentive, Biodiversity Net Gain or nutrient neutrality) are not eligible.
- Do not use this measure on fields that have already been taken out of arable production.
- Areas of land that are being reverted for other income streams – eg; Solar Pannels
- Areas of land to be used for vehicular access.
- Land outside of the Safeguard Zone catchment.

Scheme requirements

Establishment

- Establish a low input grass mix between 15th March – 31st May or 15th July – 15th October
- Assess whether there are any issues of soil compaction and, if necessary, plan appropriate timely cultivations such as subsoiling to resolve these before establishing the new Sward
- Aim to achieve 80% ground cover by 1st December
- Grass mix – A mixed sward of traditional hay meadow grasses, wildflowers and herbs may be included if you desire. Do not include any Italian ryegrass or Westerwold ryegrass or a high proportion of perirenal ryegrass.

Weed management

- To control weeds and ensure that a dense Sward that reduces runoff is established. In the first 12 months after establishment the field may be topped regularly
- Weed control by cultural measures – cutting and topping is the preferred method of weed management.
- Weeds may be sprayed using a selective herbicide following an assessment with the catchment adviser.

Inputs

- Applications of N, P and K are not permitted.
- Applications of organic manures are not permitted.
- Applications of lime are permitted.
- Pesticide applications are not permitted except for spot-spraying of injurious weeds, if weeds become problematic, please speak with your catchment adviser.

Returning land to arable

- Terminate the grass sward in the spring and follow with a spring crop to reduce the risk of nitrate leaching and maximise crop uptake of any fertility built up by the grass ley.

Cutting & topping

- In the first 12 months grass should be regularly cut during the growing season to encourage tillering and control weeds.
- Once fully established the grass should be cut and removed at least once a year, as this will bring the P index down.
- Grass may be cut in the autumn to tidy the field up going into the winter and encourage tillering.
- Ensure you do not set the cutting height too low. Allow at least 1 tiller/blade to be left after the cut to allow photosynthesis to continue and therefore faster regrowth, to minimise bare ground being exposed. This will normally equate to a cutting height of between 4-8cm depending on grass varieties.

Grazing

- Grazing is not permitted in this scheme

Application process

- Please fill out the expression of interest form, stating an approximate area of land you wish to enter into the scheme.
- Upon submitting the Expression of interest form, your Catchment Adviser will be in contact with you to discuss the scheme further.
- Once the scheme and area is agreed a formal contract will be drawn up 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.