

£2.5 million extra funding for farmers working together on environmental projects

A fourth national round of the popular Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund is today (5 August) opening for applications.

Groups of farmers and landowners will be able to bid for a share of the £2.5 million fund until 4 October. It is expected to support approximately 40 new facilitation groups to deliver large-scale environment improvement in their area over the next three years.

Improvements could include natural flood prevention, enhancing wildlife habitats or planting more trees.

To apply, groups must submit plans showing how they will work together and share knowledge to protect and enhance their local environment, in line with their local Countryside Stewardship priorities.

Successful facilitation groups will also offer invaluable training, support and advice to potential Countryside Stewardship applicants for agreements starting in 2021.

One example of a group already benefiting from this scheme is the Wyre Forest Facilitation Fund, which joined in 2015. Since then the group has grown to include 70 farms spanning 5,138 hectares. Over the past year, the group has delivered 18 training events focusing on upskilling other farmers on woodland restoration and creation, hedgerow and tree planting and natural flood management.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

We know that more can be achieved by trying to coordinate a landscape scale approach to creating habitats and supporting wildlife.

This fund helps support local clusters of farmers to come together to promote similar interventions and options so that the management on each farm helps to complement a wider effort and we can achieve critical mass as we strive to support wildlife in our countryside.

RPA Chief Executive Paul Caldwell said:

Today's announcement means that more farmers will have the opportunity to benefit from this funding and deliver long-term improvements for the environment, working with other local farmers.

With this funding, facilitators will be able to amplify the benefits brought by the Countryside Stewardship schemes, as well as reaping the rewards for farmers, land managers and our rural communities.

Through three national rounds and one flood-focused round, we have committed £7.8 million of funding to 98 facilitation groups established since 2015 across England. The groups have supported and endorsed 1,200 new Countryside Stewardship agreements, coordinating action to make positive environmental impact in their local areas.

See [the main Facilitation Fund page](#) for more information and how to apply.