

[Countryside Stewardship scheme opens for 2023 agreements](#)

Farmers and land managers are being encouraged to apply for [Countryside Stewardship](#) (CS) agreements to reward them for their efforts to protect and improve their natural environment as the new scheme opens for applications today (8 February).

Countryside Stewardship gives farmers the opportunity to be paid for environmental work alongside sustainable food production, from restoring wildlife habitats and creating woodlands to managing flood risks.

Farmers in Countryside Stewardship will be well placed to enter the new [Local Nature Recovery scheme](#) – one of the three new environmental land management schemes, which will be fully introduced by 2024. Local Nature Recovery scheme will include the best parts of CS, as well as new elements.

Farming Minister Victoria Prentis said:

I see Countryside Stewardship as a bridge to Local Nature Recovery and I urge farmers to get involved. We have increased payment rates by 30%, and made improvements to the scheme.

We want to incentivise farmers to enhance the natural environment alongside sustainable food production – from restoring wildlife habitats and woodland management, to preserving the character of our beautiful countryside.

Since January this year, Defra has increased Countryside Stewardship rates by an average of 30% and, following close work with industry, changes have been made to broaden the scheme and make it easier to apply.

Simplifications have included introducing online applications for the Mid Tier Scheme to make the process simpler, allowing application for CS Capital Grants to be made all year round giving farmers more time to apply, and changes to a number of management options which will help increase environmental benefits.

Rural Payments Agency Chief Executive Paul Caldwell said:

The 2023 Countryside Stewardship scheme is a key mechanism to support farmers and land managers through the transition period. It will leave them well positioned to enter new schemes in the coming years, and will support them in the creation of a more sustainable future for their agricultural land and woodlands.

Farmers and land managers who are new to taking on environmental work or with expired or expiring Environmental Stewardship agreements can apply for:

- Higher Tier: These are five or 10-year agreements to manage complex land in environmentally significant sites, commons or woodlands which require support from Natural England or the Forestry Commission
- Mid Tier: Five-year agreements offering a range of options for continued land management such as the management of species-rich grassland, and for specific environmental works such as installing fencing
- Wildlife Offers: To help farmers and land managers protect wildlife and preserve the natural environment. They include the Arable Offer, the Lowland Grazing Offer, the Mixed Farming Offer and the Upland Offer
- Capital Grants: For specific environmental works on land, covering hedgerows, trees, orchards and to improve air and water quality. Capital items include activities such as fencing installation and tree planting
- Woodland support: To help manage and protect woodland

[Apply for Countryside Stewardship.](#)