

More than 2,000 farmers respond to Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot

More than 2,000 farmers have responded to Defra's call for applicants for the pilot of the Sustainable Farming Incentive, due to start in October 2021.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive is the next step in the Government's landmark plans to reward farmers and land managers for sustainable farming practices that enhance the environment. It is one of three new schemes that will help to deliver on the 25 Year Environment Plan and carbon net zero targets.

2,178 farmers responded to the Expressions of Interest that opened in March. Successful candidates will be contacted by the end of May and will be asked to develop their applications from June, leading to the first pilot agreements going live from October 2021. Interest came from a diverse range of farms and regions in England which will ensure good nationwide coverage when the pilot is implemented.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive is the first of three new environmental schemes to be piloted and co-designed. Further information on the other two schemes, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery, will be shared later this year. These schemes will operate together and pay for actions to support sustainable farming practices alongside profitable food production, improve animal health and welfare, improve environmental outcomes, and reduce carbon emissions. They will create habitats for nature recovery and make landscape-scale changes such as establishing new woodland and other ecosystem services, providing key means to deliver against our 25 Year Environment Plan goals and carbon net zero targets.

Farming Minister Victoria Prentis said:

"We want farmers to manage their businesses in a way that achieves profitable food production and the recovery of nature.

"It is great to see so many farmers wanting to get involved in the Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot scheme. We want to design our future policies in conjunction with farmers across England to ensure that they are as straightforward and effective as possible."

Defra is working in partnership with the [Rural Payments Agency to deliver the pilot](#), which will gather ongoing information from horticulture, dairy, pig, poultry and grazing livestock farms across England. Participants will take part in a range of activities, providing rapid feedback on their experience of all aspects of the pilot. This will ensure the scheme is tested, fully workable and user-friendly once fully rolled out from 2024.

In the first phase of the pilot, participants will be able to select from an initial set of eight standards to build their own agreements. The standards

will promote cleaner air and water, and guard against environmental risks such as climate change and flooding. Within each standard there are three levels for participants to choose from – Introductory, Intermediate and Advanced. Each level is more challenging, and more rewarding, than the previous level and delivers greater environmental benefits.

Although the window for farmers to express an interest in joining the first phase of the Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot is now closed, there will be more opportunities to participate in future phases of the pilot. Farmers will also be able to join the progressive roll-out of early Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme from next year.