

RPA opens window for farm payments for 2021

The Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application window has opened today (18 March) for farmers to claim for their 2021 payments. The claim window for customers with existing Countryside Stewardship (CS) and Environmental Stewardship (ES) revenue agreements has also opened today.

Farmers are being encouraged to apply as soon as they are able, to ensure applications are submitted ahead of the deadline of 17 May.

All applicants can quickly update their personal and business information by applying through the Rural Payments service, where farmers and their agents can also view and transfer their entitlements and land parcels.

A number of simplifications have been made to the Basic Payment Scheme this year in order to reduce the burden on farmers as they focus on transitioning to the new system. This includes important changes to cross-compliance, such as an increased use of warning letters and offers of advice over farmers receiving a penalty as the default response to a breach of the rules. It was also announced earlier in 2020 that the greening requirements for BPS customers, which were complicated and historically delivered little for the environment, would be removed in 2021.

The Rural Payments Agency announced in January 2021 [its best ever performance for 2020](#).

RPA Chief Executive Paul Caldwell said:

I know how important cashflow is to rural and farming businesses. We will continue our commitment to ensuring timely payments to farmers and land managers but would urge you not to leave things until the last minute.

We will continue to build on our recent performance while preparing ourselves to supporting farmers across the country as we move towards a greener future.

Now the UK has left the EU and new applications and agreements are no longer bound by the bureaucratic Common Agricultural Policy, the Government is introducing a new system that is tailored to the interests of our farmers. It is the most significant change to farming and land management in 50 years, designed to deliver a renewed agricultural sector, producing healthy food for consumption at home and abroad, where farms can be profitable and economically sustainable.

Direct Payments will be reduced fairly, starting from this year (2021), with the money released being used to fund new grants and schemes to boost farmers' productivity and reward environmental improvements. The biggest reductions will be made to the higher payment bands. Further reductions will be applied until the last payments are made in 2027.

The savings from phasing out these payments will free up funds which will go back to farmers through the roll-out of three schemes the Government is developing to encourage environmental land management and to boost farmers' productivity. The three schemes are the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery.

Farming Minister Victoria Prentis said:

We are undertaking the biggest change to agricultural policy in half a century, tailored to the needs of our farmers. I understand that some will be feeling anxious about the future. That is why we are making changes in a gradual way, and progressively reducing Direct Payments whilst we develop our new schemes.

Farm resilience support is available to farmers throughout the first three years of the agricultural transition period, to help those most affected by the phasing out of Direct Payments. This will support the choices of individual farm enterprises, and help them plan for the future.