

[News story: Plastic bag sales in 'big seven' supermarkets down 86% since 5p charge](#)

Plastic bag sales in England's 'big seven' supermarkets have dropped by 86% since the Government introduced its 5p plastic bag charge in 2015, helping to tackle the devastating impact of plastic waste on our environment.

[New figures](#) reveal customers of the country's biggest supermarkets bought nearly a quarter fewer plastic bags last year compared to 2016/17 – a decrease of nearly 300 million bags.

This is equivalent to just 19 bags per person in England, compared to 140 bags since the government introduced a 5p charge in 2015 – a dramatic reduction of 86%.

Welcoming today's figures, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

These figures demonstrate the collective impact we can make to help the environment by making simple changes to our daily routines. We want businesses to continue to look at what they can do to help improve our environment to leave it in a better state than we found it.

It is only by working together we will reverse the rising tide of plastic waste finding its way into our rivers, seas and oceans and the catastrophic impact this is having on our marine environment.

Plastic bags have a significant impact on the environment. Government scientists believe plastic in the sea is set to treble in a decade unless marine litter is curbed – with one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals dying every year from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

A recent study by Cefas revealed since the 5p charge on plastic bags was introduced, which has taken over 9 billion plastic bags out of circulation, there has been an estimated 50% reduction in plastic bag marine litter.

Thomas Maes, Marine Litter Scientist at Cefas said:

Every plastic bag not purchased is one which will not end up in our sea, damaging habitats or harming marine life. Since efforts from across Europe came into effect, including the UK's 5p charge, we have observed a sharp decline in the percentage of plastic bags captured by fishing nets on our trawl surveys of the seafloor around the UK as compared to 2010.

It is encouraging to see the efforts to reduce plastic bag usage by all of society, whether the public, industry, NGOs or government. These figures show that by working together we can tackle the marine litter problem by reducing, reusing and recycling.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting our seas, oceans and marine life. The Government has recently announced a range of measures to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste including a [world-leading ban on microbeads](#) and proposals to extend the 5p plastic bag charge and explore plastic free aisles in supermarkets.

Earlier this year we announced our intention to [ban the sale of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds](#), plans for a [deposit return scheme](#) to increase recycling rates of drinks bottles and cans, and launched a [call for evidence](#) on using the tax system or charges to address single-use plastic waste.

Today's figures also reveal that for 2017/18 5p plastic bag sales contributed nearly £60m toward charities and other good causes.

Background

1. The seven biggest retailers in the UK are Asda, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury, The Co-operative Group, Tesco and Waitrose.
2. The figure that plastic in the sea is set to treble is taken from the [Future of the Sea](#) report.
3. The statistic that there has been an estimated 50% reduction in plastic bag marine litter since the 5p plastic bag charge was introduced in 2015 is from Cefas's [Below the Surface](#) report.

[Guidance: Code of Good Agricultural Practice for reducing ammonia emissions](#)

This information explains the practical steps farmers, growers, land managers, advisors and contractors in England can take to minimise ammonia emissions from farms. Recommended measures include ways of storing and applying organic manures, ways of applying fertilisers, and modifications to livestock diet and housing.

By following these practical steps farmers will help to reduce emissions of ammonia. This is a key air pollutant that can have significant effects on both human health and the environment. Some of the measures can also save farmers money by retaining nitrogen and getting more value from fertiliser.

This information has been written by Defra in collaboration with the farming industry.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

Air Quality and Industrial Emissions Team

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

2 Marsham Street

Westminster

London

SW1P 4DF

ammonia@defra.gsi.gov.uk

[News story: New guide for farmers to help reduce air pollution from ammonia](#)

Updated: We have added the animated video produced to support the launch of the COGAP to reduce emissions of ammonia from agriculture.

A new guide published today sets out the steps farmers, advisors and contractors can take to reduce ammonia emissions and help improve air quality.

Our [Clean Air Strategy](#) highlights that agriculture is responsible for 88% of UK emissions of ammonia gas, which 'over-fertilises' natural habitats with nitrogen and combines with other pollutants to produce fine Particulate Matter pollution which is harmful to human health.

The [Code of Good Agricultural Practice \(COGAP\) for Reducing Ammonia Emissions](#) sets out simple steps all farmers can take to reduce ammonia emissions, such as using a nutrient management plan to calculate fertiliser application rates.

It also includes more significant changes to slurry storage, spreading equipment and infrastructure, alongside innovative techniques such as slurry and digestate acidification and separation.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Air pollution is not just an urban issue and with 88% of ammonia emissions coming from farming, the government is taking concerted action.

With clear new guidance and financial support we will help farmers across the country to take action, reduce emissions and help improve air quality.

In addition to the new guidance, Defra is providing a package of financial and technical advice to help farmers reduce their emissions.

Defra is investing £3 million over the next three years to fund a specialist team of experts who will offer support, advice and guidance on the most effective ways to reduce emissions from ammonia on their land.

It will fund demonstrations of the latest low-emission spreading equipment and one-to-one advice on reducing ammonia emissions which will be available from Catchment Sensitive Farming officers by the end of this year.

A video has also been produced by Defra to support the launch of the COGAP. [Ammonia emissions from agriculture video](#)

The RDPE Countryside Productivity scheme is currently offering 40% grants towards much of the manure management equipment recommended in the COGAP to reduce ammonia emissions. This includes low-emission spreading equipment, slurry and digestate storage bags, digestate processing equipment and mild acidification equipment. Farmers in priority catchments for reducing water pollution may also be eligible for grants towards covers for slurry stores and lagoons under the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

The voluntary code has been written by Defra in collaboration with the National Farmers Union (NFU), the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and the Agricultural Industries Confederation.

Contributions have also been made by other organisations including ADAS, the British Egg Council, the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers, the Environment Agency, Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF), the National Association of Agricultural Contractors, Natural England, Plantlife and the Tenant Farmers Association.

The guide includes information on how to reduce emissions when:

- storing organic manure
- applying organic manure
- applying manufactured nitrogen fertiliser
- feeding livestock
- housing livestock

NFU environment forum chairman Mark Pope said:

The NFU welcomes the launch of the Code of Good Agricultural

Practice for Reducing Ammonia Emissions. The code contains a variety of measures to reduce ammonia emissions on farm, which in many instances provide multiple benefits to the environment and resource efficiency.

Farmers have recognised there is a need to reduce their ammonia emissions and the sector has made improvements with levels dropping by 10% in the past 30 years. However, further reductions are required from the industry in order to meet targets set under the Government's Clean Air Strategy. We urge Defra to continue to offer farmers guidance on this issue alongside targeted financial support where necessary.

Robert Sheasby, chief executive of the Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC), which represents companies delivering both inputs and advice to farmers said:

We are pleased to note that the new code recognises the importance of professional advisers in guiding farm practice. Those on the Feed Adviser Register and FACTS Qualified Advisers are already undertaking additional training that will update some 4,500 professionals on the code's requirements.

By delivering advice tailored to the needs of individual farms, their crops and livestock, we will make a significant contribution to meeting Defra's ambition for productivity and ammonia mitigation.

Jill Hewitt, Technical Consultant at the National Association of Agricultural Contractors added:

Spreading manures, slurry and digestate waste has become a predominantly contractor operation and the NAAC welcomes new guidance to help farmers and contractors make decisions about the best way to apply waste to land to maximise nutrient content, and minimise air pollution.

Nigel Penlington, Head of Environment and Buildings at the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board said:

There is increasing pressure on farmers to control ammonia so we welcome this as a first step to help raise awareness and provide simple, practical steps to make a difference on the farm, improve the image of farming and its environmental performance and, at the same time, save farmers money and provide some benefits to the health and welfare of livestock and crop health.

Open consultation: Energy Performance Certificates in buildings: call for evidence

Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) are a widely used measure of the energy performance of buildings, both in the residential and commercial sectors, and are a key tool in promoting energy efficiency improvements to buildings.

We're seeking evidence on how EPCs currently perform against 3 attributes:

- quality
- availability
- encouraging action to improve energy efficiency

We also outline suggestions for improvement, many of which have been advocated by businesses and industry representatives. The list of suggestions is not exhaustive, and inclusion or exclusion should not be taken as an indication of government policy. Additional ideas are welcome, as are views about the relative impact of the ideas listed, and how they might be implemented to best effect.

We would like to hear from:

- building owners and occupiers in both the domestic and non-domestic sectors
- estate agents and others involved in the sale or lease of buildings
- all parts of the energy efficiency products supply chain – EPC assessors, accreditation bodies, software providers and enforcement bodies
- anyone else who regularly uses EPCs

Press release: £45 million investment in rural broadband

Rural businesses and communities are set to benefit from improved broadband access as part of a £45 million boost by the government.

The new funding for the government's [Rural Broadband Infrastructure Scheme](#) adds to the £30 million investment announced last year, increasing the total

pot of funding available to £75 million.

The money will be made available through grants to local authorities that have already applied for funding, in areas where broadband services at speeds of 30Mbps or faster are not available or planned. The funding will be used to support full fibre wherever possible.

It follows the launch of the Government's [Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review](#) this week which outlined plans to prioritise hard-to-reach rural areas for roll out of full fibre connectivity.

Visiting North York Moors National Park today, Lord Gardiner will announce that North Yorkshire is one of the local authorities to receive funding through the scheme with a grant offer of over £11 million.

Rural Affairs Minister Lord Gardiner said:

I am delighted to announce today that North Yorkshire has been awarded a grant of £11 million towards improving its broadband infrastructure.

Rural areas should not be left behind in the connectivity slow lane, missing out on the opportunities high speed broadband can bring. The funding made available through the Rural Broadband Infrastructure Scheme champions our countryside communities and businesses by opening up access to broadband of at least 30 Megabits per second, in some of the most hard to reach areas.

The increased funding for the Rural Broadband Infrastructure Scheme follows a positive response and a high number of applications from local authorities. It is part of planned investment of at least £3.5 billion into our rural economies by 2020, supporting the quarter of businesses in the UK which are based in the countryside.

The scheme is delivered by the Rural Payments Agency and supports those rural areas which are not currently scheduled to receive broadband as part of commercial delivery plans or under the Government's [Superfast Broadband Programme](#), which expects to give access to superfast broadband to around 97% of UK premises over the next few years.

With nearly a fifth of people living in the countryside, it is important that the needs of rural communities are heard loud and clear across government. In addition to driving forward high speed internet, the government is championing housing availability and supporting job creation.

Lord Gardiner is today visiting the North York Moors National Park as part of National Parks Week where he will also meet a number of young workers and apprentices. North York Moors supported 120 apprentices through its Apprenticeship Programme, amounting to over 50,000 working days.