
Cover crop funding –

Conditions and advice for Winter 2020/21

1. Introduction

The primary aim of cover crops procured through this scheme is to benefit water quality namely nitrate leaching reduction but also sediment retention. Cropping options that maximise these reductions are incentivised through the EnTrade auction design such as the species choice and crucially the sowing date. A wide number of options are available which allow growers to tailor options to their farms providing additional agronomic and biodiversity benefits.

2. Key information

2.1 Payment and verification

Funding through this cover crop scheme can be applied/bid for via a reverse auction hosted on the EnTrade platform.

This approach awards growers that optimise the water quality benefits of their practices. More details on how a reverse auction works are available through the EnTrade website and the scheme information included in this pack.

For successful bids invoicing will be directed through the EnTrade platform.

Payments will be made to growers by **31st March 2021**. Full payment will be dependent upon the grower fulfilling all the conditions set out in this document and those in the contract which is issued following a successful bid. If any conditions are not achieved due to factors outside the growers control (such as adverse weather) then payment may still be made at the discretion of Affinity Water and Cambridge Water.

Catchment Advisers will contact the farmer to view funded cover crops around key dates (i.e. *October/November* to ensure that cover crops have established, and again in *January / March* to ensure that no destruction or grazing of the crop has taken place before then).

An app which allows growers to self-assess their cover crops is available for the scheme and can be downloaded onto your smart phone.

2.2 Eligibility

All fields within the defined scheme area will be considered for funding. Acceptance of fields that may straddle the boundary will be at the discretion of the catchment advisors.

The following **will not be funded** under this scheme in 2020/21:

- Cover crops that **do not meet the conditions** set out in this document
- Cover crops that are being grown as part of a farm's **Ecological Focus Area** for the Basic Payment Scheme.
- Cover crops on areas of over-winter stubble that are currently in an **Entry Level or Higher Level Stewardship** (ELS/HLS) scheme.
- Cover crops that are required as part of a **Countryside Stewardship** agreement
- **Stubble turnips or other forage crops** as (i) they have a commercial value and (ii) these crops could be grazed at high risk times of the year resulting in increased nitrate leaching

2.3 What sort of cover crops will be funded, and at what seed rates?

Funding will be paid for cover crops providing at least 75% of the mix is from the 'Approved species list for Winter 2020/21'. The remaining 25% of the mix can contain other species of the growers choice.

Advice: Select cover crop varieties, species and mixes that are known to reduce nitrate leaching most effectively, that are suited to your soils and rotation, and that will provide any additional benefits being sought (e.g. weed suppression, prevention of soil erosion etc).

2.4 How and when should I apply?

Eligible farmers in the target area will receive a letter introducing the scheme, how to register on EnTrade and how to bid for funding. Bids can be placed and revised throughout the live auction due to run between the **3rd of June to the 17th June 2020**. Although last year FWAG East advisors were able to visit farmers to provide advice and support, due to Covid-19 restrictions this will all be done by phone and e-mail. If you would like a phone call to discuss your options, please see the contact details below.

2.5 When do cover crops need to be established by, and how?

Establish the cover crop as soon as possible after harvest of the previous crop and as close to the date bid in the auction as practicably possible:

- Cover crops that follow **a combinable crop** should be established before **15th September**
- Cover crops that follow **maize** should be established before **15th October**

All funded cover crops should achieve a minimum of 80% groundcover by 1st December.

Advice: Earlier maturing main crop varieties (e.g. the winter wheat or forage maize that the cover crop follows) will help to achieve timely cover crop establishment

Advice: Discuss choice of drilling method with your agronomist / adviser. Less soil disturbance will result in less mineralisation of soil nitrogen which should reduce the risk of nitrate leaching, although a small amount of soil disturbance can aid cover crop establishment.

2.6 When can the cover crops be destroyed?

Do not destroy the cover crop **before 15th January** if the following crop is combinable, or **before 1st March** if the following crop is maize, *except in certain circumstances*. Please speak to your Catchment Adviser for further information.

Advice: Reduced cultivations for the following crop should result in reduced nitrate leaching. If the field is to be ploughed or cultivated then it is recommended that this should not be before late February / early March, after which time the highest nitrate leaching risk period should have passed.

2.7 Is cutting and/or grazing of cover crops permitted?

A light grazing of the cover crop may be permitted from **1st February** (whatever the following crop), but only with the agreement of your Catchment Adviser.

Cutting the cover crop for silage later in the spring is also permitted.

2.8 Is starter fertiliser or manure for the cover crop permitted?

Do **not** apply any starter fertiliser or organic manure to the cover crop either before or after drilling.

2.9 Do I need to reduce nitrogen fertiliser rates for the following spring crop?

Any nitrogen supplied by the cover crop should be taken into account when applying nitrogen to following crops.

Advice: A general rule of thumb is that nitrogen fertiliser applications to spring crops such as spring barley and maize could be reduced by 25-30 kgN/ha if they follow a cover crop.

3. For more information

For more information please contact:

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