

Grassland management for the environment and your farm business



This guide supports the CFE 7-point plan to support the environmental management on a grassland farm, which can be downloaded from the CFE website (see [Conservation management advice for your livestock business](#)).

1. Be productive alongside the environment

There are many pressures on grassland farmers, low and variable incomes from milk and meat production will inevitably force many to seek to reduce costs by improving production from grass and forage and reducing purchased feeds. This is not necessarily detrimental to environmental outcomes, especially with some careful but simple management steps. Farmers are already expected to follow best practice for producing food and the pressure is on to increase efficiency even more.

Best practice, including all environmental measures that are taken on-farm, voluntarily, or as part of an existing or future scheme, should be at the core of good farm management.

With increasing pressures, it can be tempting to apply fertiliser to low input permanent pasture, or plough out field corners and low production parts of the farm to increase grass output and reduce feed costs. However, there are often improvements that can be made on productive areas of the farm that will have a bigger impact on the business than removing the relatively small areas that are already in environmental measures.

Efficient production, the retention of environmental measures and voluntary action on the environmental issues can all work hand-in-hand. *For example, dealing with soil compaction will improve grassland output and reduce risks to water quality. Reviewing and tightening Nutrient Management Plans, ensuring the right amount of each nutrient applied, will save on fertiliser costs and reduce nutrient surpluses.*

2. Retain land in environmental measures. Look after established habitats.

Once management practices are changed and environmental measures are lost, this can take many years to re-build again. It is therefore important that measures are maintained wherever possible.

By retaining environmental features from expiring Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship agreements, the farm business could be in a stronger position to successfully gain a mid-tier Countryside Stewardship agreement.

Environmental measures will always be important and it is vital that farmers continue to demonstrate best practice on environmental issues so that CFE can demonstrate these voluntary actions to government and wider industry.

3. Implement best practice on farm - The top steps

Look to extend and enhance your management of the farmed environment wherever possible. Don't forget the core principals outlined in Conservation management advice for your livestock business. Below are the priority areas that are worth considering:

Protecting and improving water quality

- Establish and manage buffer strips besides vulnerable water courses

- Fence along water courses to ensure that stock are not pushing soil sediment and manure into water
- Check for soil compaction in fields next to water courses and using managements such as spike aeration and sward lifting to relieve compaction, rejuvenate soils and reduce the risk of run-off.

Improved management of pesticides and herbicides

To apply pesticides the operator must hold a 'specified certificate' such as the Certificate of Competence issued by City & Guilds NPTC or Lantra.

- [Use an Integrated Pest Management plan](#)
- Take advice from a BASIS registered adviser
- When applying ensure spray cannot reach water or environmental features.
- Only use approved products
- Regularly test sprayer, check for drips and leaks, wash down after use and park under cover.
- Take care when filling and thoroughly rinse and drain containers

Maize Management

Good maize management will help to achieve acceptable yields and quality without incurring any potential risks to water quality.

Consider implementing [CFE Voluntary Measure 3](#). Plant an early maturing maize crop and harvest as early as possible. If conditions allow, remove compaction before planting a winter cover crop or the next crop. A green cover may be established by undersowing the crop with a grass or clover-based mix

Planting on flat and gentle slopes where possible and on fields away from watercourses. Before planting, consider sensitive habitats, property and roads where there is a risk of runoff. Light surface cultivations such as harrowing or chisel ploughing of the topsoil post-harvest to remove surface capping will have a big impact on reducing the risks of nutrient and soil loss from maize fields to water.

Nutrient Management Plan

A working Nutrient Management Plan is a simple and effective voluntary measure. Please see the CFE's guide [Nutrient Management for your farm business](#) for more information.

Appropriate slurry and manure storage and ground application is essential for effective grassland management. Ensure plans for slurry storage are considered and included to enable the optimal use of slurry. For more information on slurry and manure management, please see Tried and Tested nutrient management literature and guidance. Click here for [Tried and Tested nutrient management plan](#) and [Think Manures?](#)

Manage your soil

Well managed and biologically active soils are fundamental to well managed grassland. Soils with a good structure, organic matter content and diverse soil biology will help to reduce the risk of erosion, compaction and nutrient loss.

- Know your soil. Test soil for nutrient content and pH levels. Assess soil structure.
- Make changes to soil management if required.

Please see the CFE's guide to '[soil management for your farm business](#)' and website www.cfeonline.org.uk/campaign-themes/soils/ for more information.