



## SUSTAINABLE FARMING INCENTIVE AND MAIZE GROWING AUGUST 2022 - BY JOHN MORGAN

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) is the base layer of the governments Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). The rolling application window opened on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022 meaning that you can now apply at any time. Most farms that claim Basic Payment will be eligible to apply for an SFI agreement.

The Standard for Arable and Horticultural Soils, and the two Levels available for SFI in 2022 are listed below with the annual payment rates.

Standard	Level	Payment	
Arable and horticultural soils	Introductory	£22/hectare	More standards and levels are being announced in the next three years until all the standards will be available in 2025. If you apply in 2022 you will be able to add the newly announced standards to your
	Intermediate	£40/hectare	

agreement, as well as increase levels and add land each year.

Agreements are on a field-by-field basis so you can choose which land you enter into the scheme which will run for three years with payments quarterly in arrears.

Details of the what you have to do to achieve each standard are given in this link: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/a-summary-of-the-sfi-in-2022> and a summary of the standards is given below.

To be eligible for the Standard land must be registered with the Rural Land Registry with an eligible 'land cover' and/or is an eligible 'land type'

The Arable and Horticultural Soils Standard will apply to most maize ground.

### **Arable and Horticultural Soils Introductory level – £22 per hectare/per year**

Requirments;

- test soil organic matter
- undertake a soil assessment and produce a soil management plan.
- At least 70% of land in the standard must have a green cover over the winter months (Dec-Feb) this can include any kind of green cover, including autumn sown crops and weedy stubbles
- Add organic matter to 1/3 of the land in the standard each year this can include any kind of organic matter, including sown green cover crops

### **Arable and Horticultural Soils Intermediate level – £40 per hectare/per year**

Requirements;

- As above plus:
- At least 70% of land in the standard must have green cover over the winter months (Dec-Feb) this must include land with multi-species green cover – covering at least 20% of total land in this level of the standard

- Add organic matter to 1/3 of the land in the standard each year this will include multi-species green cover grown under the cover crop requirement above, plus the rest made up of other ways to add organic matter as per the introductory level

What actions will I have to take?

**Action 1** - Complete a soil assessment and produce a soil management plan for all the parcels entered into the standard within the first 12 months or your agreement unless you already have a plan, based on soil assessment, which you can use. Information on your soil and your management plan will be sought at some point. While trying not to be too prescriptive DEFRA guidance suggests the requirement to:

- assess soil type, texture, structure, and biology
- assess risks to your soil including:
  - Runoff or soil erosion risks
  - Wind erosion
  - Nitrogen leaching
- identify historic features

**Action 2** – Test the soil in all the fields included in the Standard for organic matter (SOM) within 5 years. You can use previously taken samples as long as they were taken within the last five years. You should take samples within the first year of the agreement.

**Action 3** – Add Organic Matter via sown green cover crops, multi-species cover or imported organic material. The cover crop options vary between standards as outlined above. Our belief is that undersown cover crops will meet the requirements. You should not add organic matter to peaty soils to reduce the risk of speeding up peat decomposition. All the land included in the standard must have had organic material added to it at least once in your 3-year agreement.

**Action 4** – Winter, well established, green cover is required in both introductory and intermediate levels on 70% of the land. At least 20% of land entered into the intermediate standard must have a multispecies cover crop involving 2 or more species from the brassica, legume, grass/cereal and herb plant families. For the introductory level the green cover could be natural weed or a sown green cover. A well-established cover is where there is leafy vegetation is sufficiently grown to protect the soil from the start of December. The green cover can be grazed, as long as it remains established over the winter, and used to meet Action 3 requirements.

### **How to Apply**

Farms claiming BPS **without** an existing agri-environment agreement can sign into the Rural Payments service now to apply for SFI on eligible land outside a common.

Farms claiming BPS **with** an existing agri-environment agreement or wanting to apply for common land need to contact the RPA to register your interest ([ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk) using 'Apply early for SFI' as the email subject and including your SBI or call RPA on 03000 200 301).