

## Herbal Leys

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Funding is offered for converting fields from arable use (including maize growing) to a herbal ley, for up to 4 years. This measure could be used for whole fields or areas of fields.

### Payment rate:

An annual payment rate of:

- £600/ha/year for fields in the High Priority Area
- £350/ha/year for fields in the Wider Safeguard Zone

### Length of scheme

- Minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 4, details subject to agreement with your Wessex Water adviser

### Benefits

- Improve and maintain the soil's structure, Increase soil carbon, biology, and fertility which will in turn lead to better water drainage and holding capacity in the soil
- This option could be used as a soil conditioning break crop option in a field where compaction or poor soil structure is an issue. This could help alleviate issues such as waterlogging, run-off and soil erosion.
- Potentially help deal with problematic grass weeds

### Eligible areas

- This scheme is available on all arable fields within the Safeguard Zone and have been in arable production (including maize) for at least 3 years.
- This scheme can be applied to whole fields or parts of fields to square them up or take out unproductive/in-efficient areas
- Up to 20ha of land per farm business can be entered into the scheme.

### Non – eligible areas

- Fields which already have herbal leys funded by other schemes (such as Countryside Stewardship, Sustainable Farming Incentive, Biodiversity Net Gain or nutrient neutrality) are not eligible.
- Do not use this measure on fields that have already been taken out of arable production
- Areas of land to be used for vehicular access
- Land outside of the Safeguard Zone

## Requirements

### **Establishment:**

- The herbal ley must be established in either the spring or the autumn. Do not leave ground bare, over winter, either look to establish a cover crop after harvest (there is a funding option for this) and then sow the herbal ley in spring. Alternatively, you can look to establish your herbal ley after harvest but please ensure varieties selected are suitable for autumn drilling and establishment.
- Assess whether there are any issues of soil compaction and, if necessary, plan appropriate timely cultivations such as subsoiling to resolve these before establishing the new sward.
- If there is a heavy weed burden, spray with a herbicide such as glyphosate before cultivation.
- Broadcast or drill seed into a firm, consolidated and clean seedbed of pH 6.0-8.0 and then roll at least once, ideally twice, to ensure good seed to soil contact, moisture retention and to reduce movement of slugs within the soil profile. An adequate level of ley establishment by the onset of the first winter is required (i.e. approx. 80% groundcover by 1<sup>st</sup> December).
- Sow the species mix specified in the project agreement. General requirements will be:
  - Establish a sward of at least three grass species (e.g. perennial ryegrass, meadow fescue, festulolium, cocksfoot or timothy), three legumes (e.g. red clover, white clover, alsike clover, sweet clover, lucerne, sainfoin or birdsfoot trefoil) and two herbs/forbs (e.g. chicory, ribgrass, plantain, yarrow or burnet) at a seed rate of between 25 and 35 kg/ha, depending on species mix. Match the choice of species to the soil type, e.g. do not grow cocksfoot or sainfoin on heavier soils.
  - Sow by **10th September 2024** or by **31st May 2025**. If spring established then a cover crop must be grown over the preceding winter.
- You must establish and maintain the herbal leys with a mixture of grasses, legumes, and herbs.
- Grazing and Mowing: Summer grazing by cattle or sheep are permitted, as well as cuts for hay/silage, if there is sufficient greenage left to allow regrowth.
- Graze and top in a manner that will allow full regrowth, while the land is in the scheme.
- Surplus production from herbal leys can be made into silage but from year 2 onwards avoid cutting silage after July as chicory stems can become woody.
- Summer grazing by livestock is permitted between 15th March and 15th October inclusive (i.e. 7 months).
- Winter grazing is not permitted between 16th October and 14th March inclusive.

### **Manure use:**

- A farmyard manure application of up to 25t/ha is permitted before drilling the herbal ley.
- Applications of organic manures are permitted between 1st March and 30th August.
- Manure application rates are limited to either one application of up to 25t/ha of farmyard manure per year or two applications of cattle slurry per year, each of up to 30m<sup>3</sup>/ha per application.
- Slurry must only be applied using low emission spreading equipment, and preferably by shallow injection.

***Fertiliser and lime use:***

- Applications of artificial nitrogen fertiliser are not permitted.
- Maintenance applications of phosphorus and potash fertiliser are permitted, as per the AHDB Nutrient Management Guide (RB209). No more fertiliser should be applied than is required to maintain soil P and K indices of 2.
- Nutrients applied in manure and grazing deposits must be taken into account when planning fertiliser applications.
- Applications of lime are permitted.

***Pesticide use:***

- Pesticide applications are not permitted, except for spot-spraying of injurious weeds, so any problem weeds should be controlled before establishment of the herbal ley.

***Returning to arable production***

- Destruction of the herbal ley is only permitted in the Spring, when the risk of nitrate leaching is lowest.
- Establish the following Spring crop as soon as possible after destruction of the herbal ley.

***Application process***

- Please fill out the expression of interest form, stating an approximate area of land you wish to enter into the scheme.
- Upon submitting the Expression of interest form, your Catchment Adviser will be in contact with you to discuss the scheme further.
- Once the scheme and area is agreed a formal contract will be drawn up between the Farmer and Wessex Water.

***Record keeping, validation and data collection***

- In entering the scheme, you are agreeing to allow a Wessex Water adviser to visit land in a scheme for visual inspection before, during and after the implementation of the scheme.
- In entering the scheme a Wessex Water catchment adviser may request farm records from you demonstrating fertiliser rates, the change in cropping, stocking rates etc.
- In entering the scheme Wessex Water may carry out soil sampling, porous pots, grain samples and crop tissue samples for nutrient analysis. Any data collected will be shared with the farmer. Wessex Water will store data on an internal Wessex Water database and may be used to contribute to a larger aggregated and anonymised data set.

***Payment terms***

- Payment will be made annually.
- To claim payment for the scheme your Wessex Water adviser will request you to send an invoice to be sent directly to them.
- Wessex Water payment terms are end of the month plus 30 days
- The invoice should be submitted between the 1st – 31st January to guarantee payment by 31st March.
- You may be required by the Wessex Water payments team to be registered as “suppliers” to Wessex Water Services Limited, please ensure paperwork is filled out and returned