Forestry Commission

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NATURAL ENGLAND

Countryside Stewardship:

New CS Offers for Wildlife
Arable Offer

Applicant guidance
Option descriptions and prescriptions

Applies to all New CS Offers for Wildlife: Arable Offer agreements commencing on 1 January 2019

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List of revisions since first publication

Section	Page(s)	Revisions	Revision date
Options AB1, AB4, AB5, AB6, AB8, AB9, AB11, SW1 and WT2	5, 8, 10, 13, 15, 18, 21, 27 and 30	Confirmation that, from 1 January 2019, these options cannot be used on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas declared for the Basic Payment Scheme.	June 2018

1 Introduction

Basic Requirements of the **Arable Offer: (applicants choose a minimum of 3 options from a total of 11)**

- The applicant's land must be registered on the Rural Payments service to the Single Business Identifier (SBI) submitting the application. Land use for the year of application must be recorded as arable or temporary grassland. Permanent grassland can be included but only hedgerow options can be located on those fields. The 11 options are divided into 3 categories in the table below. Applicants must pick at least one option from each category.

- The minimum number of options in the 5 year agreement is therefore 3. Applicants can select as many options as they wish and can enter more than 3% of their land into the package.

Category 1. Nectar and pollen sources for insect pollinators and insect-rich foraging for birds (select at least one, minimum 1% or 1 ha per 100 ha of farmed land included in the agreement, no maximum)		
Option	**Option title**	**Payment rate**
AB1	Nectar flower mix	£511
AB8	Flower-rich margins and plots	£539

Category 2. Winter food for seed-eating birds (applicants MUST select this option, minimum 2% or 2 ha per 100 ha farmed land included in the agreement, no maximum)		
Option	**Option title**	**Payment rate**
AB9	Winter bird food	£640

Category 3. Additional resources & habitats (select at least one, no minimum or maximum, apart from individual option requirements)		
Option	**Option title**	**Payment rate**
AB4	Skylark plots	£18 (£9 per plot, min. 2 plots per ha).
AB5	Nesting plots for lapwing and stone curlew	£524
AB6	Enhanced overwinter stubble	£436
AB11	Cultivated areas for arable plants	£532
AB12	Supplementary winter feeding for farmland birds	£632 per tonne for every 2 ha of AB9
SW1	4m to 6m buffer strip on cultivated land	£353
WT2	Buffering in-field ponds and ditches on arable land	£501
BE3	Management of hedgerows	£8/100m

2 Option Guidance and Prescription sets

Introduction to the Arable Offer

Option Guidance:
Countryside Stewardship offers a range of options for managing your land.
This document describes those available through the Arable Offer
These can be applied for in different combinations to create an agreement.

Each description is broken down into sections covering:

- Payment rate
- Where it can and cannot be used (eligibility)
- How it will benefit the environment
- Requirements, including keeping records
- Advice and suggestions for how to carry it out

Prescriptions:
All eligibility Rules and Prescriptions are mandatory

Nectar flower mix (AB1)

£511 per ha

Where to use this option

Whole or part parcel
Rotational
Only on:

- arable land
- temporary grass
- bush orchards

Where this option cannot be used

- where evidence or records exist for important arable plants (Plantlife IAPA classification 4 and above – see Appendix II, page 19 - **www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/important-arable-plant-areas**). These records can either be historic (within the last 40 years) or from recent arable plant survey results
- on organic land or on land in conversion to organic status
- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment

It provides areas of flowering plants to boost essential food sources for beneficial pollinators.
If successful there will be:

- an abundant supply of pollen and nectar-rich flowers between early and late summer
- pollinating insects such as bumblebees, solitary bees, butterflies and hoverflies using the flowers

REQUIREMENTS

- establish a mix of at least 4 nectar-rich plants and at least 2 perennials from the list in the "What to sow" section
- establish the mix in blocks or strips between 15 March and 30 April or 15 July and 30 August
- rotationally cut 50% of the plot area each year between 15 April and 31 May – do not cut the same area in successive years
- cut the whole area between 15 September and 30 March, removing or shredding cuttings to avoid patches of dead material developing

Do not:

- graze between 15 March and 31 August

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- seed invoices
- field operations at the parcel level, including associated invoices
- stock records to show grazing activity on parcels

On your annual claim you will be asked to declare that you haven't carried out any activities prohibited by the option requirements.

You should also be aware that at the start of each claim year, a percentage of agreement holders will be asked to take and submit the following photographic records:

- photographs of the established mixture

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right location

The Plantlife Important Arable Plant Areas (IAPA) handbook referenced above scores individual species; if there are records of plants which score 4 or above this option cannot be used on that location.

Use lower-yielding areas with a sunny aspect, facing south or south-southwest.

Avoid planting under overhanging trees, next to tall hedges or on land facing north or east.

Leave access to surrounding crops to allow for management.

Block and plot sizes

Use wide margins and big blocks between 0.25ha and 0.5ha. This lets insects move to safety when fields are being sprayed.

Spacing five 0.5ha patches evenly within 100ha meets the food needs of many pollinators.

What to sow

The seed mix used should contain both short-term nectar rich and perennial wildflower plants, such as:

- early and late flowering red clovers
- alsike clover
- sainfoin
- birdsfoot trefoil
- black knapweed
- musk mallow

Sow at 12kg per ha to provide enough plants.

Avoid short-term mixes that do not include knapweed or mallow as they will not supply pollinators with long-term food sources for years 4 and 5 of the agreement.

When to sow

Establish the mix in spring or autumn of year 1 of the agreement.

Stopping sowing by September avoids slug and frost damage, as this tends to happen more often in later sown mixes.

How to sow

Sow by broadcasting seeds rather than drilling, when the soil is warm and moist. Use a ring roll before and after sowing. Check regularly for slug damage.

Management

Cut emerging flowers and weeds at least twice in year 1, and up to 4 times if necessary where the soil is particularly fertile. Regular cutting prevents weeds smothering the slow-growing flowers so all sown species are established successfully.

Plots may be grazed between 1 September and 14 March, but (as set out in the Mid Tier Manual section 6.2.1 General management requirements) make sure that no poaching or soil compaction by livestock takes place. Supplementary feeding could result in poaching and soil compaction, so should be avoided.

Remember that nectar plots should be kept until at least 31 December in year 5 of the agreement.

Further information

Order the 'Growing farm wildlife' DVD from Natural England which gives a step-by-step approach to sowing nectar flower mixtures.

AB1	Nectar Flower Mix
Aim	To provide areas of flowering plants that will boost the availability of essential food sources for butterflies, bumblebees and other pollinators.
Eligibility Rules	
E52	Arable land, temporary grassland and bush orchards.
E146	This option must not be used where evidence or records exist for important arable plants (Plantlife IAPA classification 4 and above). These can either be historic (within the last 40 years) or from recent arable plant survey results.
E226	This option must not be used on organic parcels or land in conversion.
Prescriptions	
P149	Establish a mixture of at least four nectar-rich plants and at least two perennials from the list in the "How to carry out this option" section. Establish in blocks and/or strips between 15 March and 30 April or 15 July and 30 August.
P152	Rotationally cut 50% of the plot area each year between 15 April and 31 May. Do not cut the same area in successive years.
P154	Cut the whole area between 15 September and 30 March, removing or shredding cuttings to avoid patches of dead material developing.
P155	Do not graze between 15 March and 31 August.
P706	Keep a monthly record of stock numbers grazing on parcels in this option. Make the record available on request.

Skylark plots (AB4)

£18 (£9 per plot minimum 2 plots per ha)

Where to use this option

Rotational
Only:

- on arable land
- on temporary grassland
- in winter cereal fields with an open aspect of more than 5ha

Where this option cannot be used

- In parcels bounded by tree lines or adjacent to woods, unless the parcel is larger than 10ha
- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment

It provides skylarks with suitable access to nesting habitats in winter cereal crops throughout their breeding season.

If successful there will be:

- plots providing access into the growing cereal during the spring and summer
- skylarks holding territory and singing over the fields of winter cereals where the plots are located and, ideally, landing in the plots themselves
- increased numbers of singing skylarks across the farm

REQUIREMENTS

- create fallow plots at least 3m wide and with a minimum area of 16 square metres in winter cereal fields
- space plots across the field at a minimum density of 2 plots per ha, making sure they are located away from tramlines, boundaries and margins to minimise nest predation

Keeping records

You should be aware that at the start of each claim year, a percentage of agreement holders will be asked to take and submit the following photographic records:

- photographs of the plots

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right location

This option works best in large, open winter cereal fields, preferably where skylarks are present or have been in the past. Avoid fields that are bordered by trees or next to woods as this increases the risks of predator attack.

Minimise attacks on nests from predators by placing plots:

- away from tramlines (choosing a middle spot between two sets of tramlines works best)
- at least 50m from field boundaries and margins

How to establish skylark plots

Create plots either:

- by turning off the drill during sowing to leave an unsown plot, or
- by sowing the crop as normal and spraying with herbicide to create the plot by 31 December

Managing the plots

After drilling, the plots can be managed with the same treatments as the remainder of the field.

There is no need to keep the plots weed-free but spot-treating with herbicide in April will help skylarks to access their nesting sites.

Mechanical weeding of crops containing skylark plots will destroy any nests present and is not recommended.

AB4	Skylark Plots
Aim	To provide suitable access to nesting habitat for skylarks in winter cereal crops throughout their breeding season.
Eligibility Rules	
E3	This option can only be located on arable land or temporary grassland.
E231	This option can only be located in parcels more than 5 ha in area with an open aspect to be drilled with winter cereals.
E232	This option must not be located in parcels bounded by tree lines or adjacent to woods, unless the field is greater than 10 ha.
Prescriptions	
P168	Create fallow plots at least 3 m wide and with a minimum area of 16 m^2 in winter cereal fields.
P170	Space plots across the field at a minimum density of two plots per ha located away from tramlines, field boundaries and margins in order to minimise nest predation.

Nesting plots for lapwing (and in Higher Tier, stone curlew) (AB5)

£524 per ha

Where to use this option

Whole or part parcel
Rotational
Only on:

- arable land
- temporary grassland

Where this option cannot be used

- on parcels that are at risk of soil erosion or runoff as identified in the Farm Environment Record (FER)
- on historic or archaeological features identified in your HEFER or FER
- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment

It provides nesting sites for lapwing on arable land. The plots can also benefit other declining farmland birds, brown hare and some important arable plants.

If successful there will be:

- lapwing using plots for nesting and raising their young
- other farmland birds, brown hare and arable plants on the plot areas

REQUIREMENTS

- create individual plots that are a minimum of 1ha and a maximum of 5ha in size, in fields which must be a minimum of 5ha (or 10ha if woodland forms at least a quarter of the field boundary)
- plots may be in a fixed location in or rotated around eligible fields
- create the cultivated plots by 20 March
- plots must be at least 100m away from woods, in-field and hedgerow trees, buildings, overhead power-lines, main roads and public rights of way, and at least 200m away from wind turbines
- Where natural regeneration covers more than 70% of the plot by 30 April, restore suitable bare-ground nesting habitat making sure first that no nesting birds are present on the plots. retain cultivated areas until 31 July

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- field operations at the parcel level, including associated invoices

You should also be aware that at the start of each claim year, a percentage of agreement holders will be asked to take and submit the following photographic records:

- photographs of the plots

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right location
Research shows that plots should be located:

- on level or slightly sloping ground
- next to extensively managed grassland where lapwings can feed their chicks
- on arable fields of at least 5ha, or 10ha if woodland forms at least a quarter of the field boundary
- away from waterlogged areas or land with weeds such as black-grass, wild oats or sterile brome
- at least 100m away from woods, in-field and hedgerow trees, buildings, overhead power-lines, main roads and public rights of way
- at least 200m away from wind turbines

This option can be used in a sequence with basic overwinter stubble to provide a continuity of habitat for species such as skylark and corn bunting.

How to establish the plots

Plots can be established by cultivation or spraying to create the fallow.

On heavier soils, plots can be ploughed the previous autumn and allowed to weather down to provide suitable nesting conditions in early spring.

Managing the plots

Machinery carrying out day to day farm operations such as spraying and fertilising can travel over these plots provided that the machinery keeps to the tramlines and is switched off when doing so.

Plots and plot tramlines should be checked for signs of nests prior to such travel taking place.

Nesting plots for stone curlews

There are specific areas in England where stone curlews are the target farmland bird for nesting plots. These plots and their specific management requirements will be available under Higher Tier.

AB5	Nesting plots for lapwing
Aim	To provide nesting sites for lapwing on arable land. The plots can also benefit other declining farmland birds, brown hare and some important arable plants.
Eligibility Rules	
E2	This option must not be located on parcels at risk of soil erosion or run-off (as identified in your FER).
E3	This option can only be located on arable land or temporary grassland
E4	This option must not be located on historic or archaeological features.
Prescriptions	
P173	Create individual plots that are a minimum of 1ha and a maximum of 5 ha in size, in a fixed location in or rotated around fields which must be a minimum of 5 ha (or 10 ha if woodland forms at least a quarter of the field boundary). Plots must be at least 100 m away from woods, in-field and hedgerow trees, buildings, overhead power lines, main roads and public rights of way and at least 200 m away from wind turbines.
P174	Create the cultivated plots by 20 March.
P175	Restore suitable bare ground nesting habitat where natural regeneration covers more than 70% of the plot area by 30 April, provided no nesting birds are present.
P176	Retain cultivated areas until 31 July.

Enhanced overwinter stubble (AB6)

£436 per ha

Where to use this option

Whole or part parcel
Rotational
Only on stubble that follows the harvest of:

- cereals (not maize)
- oilseed rape
- linseed

Where this option cannot be used

- On parcels at risk of soil erosion or runoff, as identified on the Farm Environment Record (FER)
- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment

It provides important winter food sources for seed-eating birds, spring and summer foraging and nesting habitat for other farmland birds and undisturbed habitat for other farmland wildlife including many pollinators.

If successful there will be:

- naturally occurring arable plants providing seed and forage during winter, spring and summer
- farmland birds and pollinating insects using the winter stubble and spring fallow area
- only low populations of blackgrass plants in the late spring that need targeted spraying

REQUIREMENTS

- retain the stubble and any subsequent regeneration until 31 July of the following year after harvest
- return the stubble to the farm rotation from 1 August each year

Do not:

- use pre-harvest desiccants
- apply fertilisers or manures to the stubble
- apply lime to the stubble
- apply pesticides to the stubble, except herbicides to control problem grass weeds by spraying the affected area from 15 May
- top or graze

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- field operations at the parcel level, including associated invoices
- location of option submitted with your annual claim

On your annual claim you will be asked to declare that you haven't carried out any activities prohibited by the option requirements.

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right location

This option can be used on most soil types but ideally choose a location with:

- low levels of blackgrass or without a thistle problem as this avoids the need to spray after 15 May and lets arable flora set seed in late spring to early summer
- arable plants in the soil seedbank, which provide natural insect-rich habitats for foraging farmland birds

Block sizes or plots

Spread enhanced stubble widely across the farm to help connect farmland wildlife with other farm habitats, and to provide some benefits for blackgrass control later in the season.

Make sure this option is planned into the farm rotation by selecting enough appropriately sized fields with a low blackgrass burden.

Rotational management

Remember that the stubble should be in place from harvest until at least 31 December in year 5 of the agreement, after which time it can be returned to the rotation.

AB6	Enhanced winter stubble
Aim	To provide important winter food sources for seed-eating birds, spring and summer foraging and nesting habitat for other farmland birds and undisturbed habitat for other farmland wildlife including many pollinators.
Eligibility Rules	
E1	Only stubble that follows the harvest of the following combinable crops is eligible: cereals (not maize), oilseed rape or linseed.
E2	This option must not be located on parcels at risk of soil erosion or run-off (as identified in your FER).
Prescriptions	
P19	Do not top or graze.
P20	Retain the stubble and any subsequent regeneration must be retained until 31 July of the following year after harvest. From 1 August the stubble can be returned to the farm rotation.
P23	Do not apply any pesticides to the stubble, except herbicides to control problem grass weeds by spraying the affected area from 15 May.
P707	Submit an annual return to confirm that no stock have grazed agreement land under this option.
P720	Do not apply any pre-harvest desiccants.
P721	Do not apply any fertilisers or manures to the stubble.
P722	Do not apply any lime to the stubble.

Flower-rich margins and plots (AB8)

£539 per ha

Where to use this option

Whole or part parcel
Only on:

- arable land
- temporary grassland
- bush orchards

Where this option cannot be used

- where evidence or records exist for important arable plants (Plantlife IAPA classification 4 and above – see Appendix II, page 19 - **www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/important-arable-plant-areas**). These records can either be historic (within the last 40 years) or from recent arable plant survey results
- adjacent to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or other botanically valuable sites as identified on the Environmental Information Map
- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment

Flower-rich grass margins or plots provide important habitat and foraging sites for invertebrates (including wild pollinators) and birds.

If successful, there will be:

- an abundant supply of pollen and nectar-rich flowers throughout the summer
- pollinating and beneficial insects including bumblebees, solitary bees, butterflies and hoverflies using these flowers
- farmland birds such as yellowhammers foraging within or on the edges of the margins and plots
- annual production of flowers for the length of the agreement

REQUIREMENTS

- establish a flower-rich margin or plot between 15 March and 31 May or 15 July and 15 October based on the mixture specified in the "What to sow" section
- If plant growth is more than 15cm in height before 31 March, cut it (and remove if dense) to achieve a plant height of between 5cm and 10cm from 1 April. cut (and remove if dense) or graze 90% of the area between 15 August and 31 October to leave a plant height of between 10cm and 20cm - leave 10% of the area uncut or ungrazed

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- seed invoices
- field operations at the parcel level, including associated invoices
- stock records to show grazing activity on parcels

You should also be aware that at the start of each claim year, a percentage of agreement holders will be asked to take and submit the following photographic records:

- photographs of the margin or plot

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right location

The Plantlife Important Arable Plant Areas (IAPA) handbook referenced above scores individual species; if there are records of plants which score 4 or above this option cannot be used on that location.

This option cannot be used adjacent to SSSIs or other botanically valuable sites, so avoid fields (or parts of fields) in such locations, as there is potential for contamination of natural plant communities with the sown species.

Use lower yielding areas if they have a sunny aspect, or face south or south-southwest. Avoid planting under overhanging trees, next to tall hedges or on land facing north or east. Leave access to surrounding crops to allow for management.

Block and plot sizes

Wide margins and big blocks let insects move to safety when fields are being sprayed. Spacing 5 patches of 0.5ha evenly within 100ha meets the food needs of many pollinators.

What to sow

The seed mix should contain both grasses and perennial flowering plants, such as:

- slender red fescue
- sorrel
- sheep's fescue
- bird's-foot trefoil
- smooth-stalked meadow grass
- ribwort plantain
- smaller cat's-tail
- yellow rattle
- crested dog's-tail
- self heal
- common bent
- yarrow
- sweet vernal grass
- wild carrot
- black knapweed
- lady's bedstraw
- meadow buttercup
- ox-eye daisy

Sow at 20kg per ha to provide enough plants when the mixture is established.

Existing flower-rich plots and margins

Use existing suitable flower-rich plots or margins instead of re-sowing, provided they offer a variety of flowers that deliver a rich supply of pollen and nectar during the summer.

When to sow

To meet option requirements, establish the mix in spring or autumn of year 1 of the agreement.

Controlling weeds

Top emerging flowers and weeds at least 3 times in year 1 for spring sowings and at least twice in year 2 for autumn sowings. Regular topping prevents weeds smothering the slow-growing flowers so that all sown species establish successfully and toppings can be left.

Before the beginning of April each year make sure vegetation is short enough to allow flower species to grow without competition from dominant grasses. Cutting and removing summer growth between 15 August and 31 October will help reduce soil fertility, boosting flower numbers in subsequent years.

Always leave 10% of the option area uncut or ungrazed to provide overwinter nesting and safe refuges for pollinators and other invertebrates.

Remember to retain flower-rich margins and plots until at least 31 December in year 5 of the agreement.

AB8	Flower-rich margins and plots
Aim	To create flower-rich margins or plots which provide important habitat and foraging sites for invertebrates (including wild pollinators) and birds.
Eligibility Rules	
E52	Arable land, temporary grassland and bush orchards.
E146	This option must not be used where evidence or records exist for important arable plants (Plantlife IAPA classification 4 and above). These records can either be historic (within the last 40 years), or from recent arable plant survey results.
E148	This option must not be used adjacent to SSSIs or other botanically valuable sites as identified on the FER.
Prescriptions	
P156	Establish a flower-rich margin or plot between 15 March to 31 May or 15 July to 15 October based on the mixture specified in the "How to carry out this option" section.
P158	Cut plant growth (and remove if dense) if it is more than 15 cm in height before 31 March, to achieve a plant height of between 5 and 10 cm.
P159	Cut (and remove if dense) or graze 90% of the area between 15 August and 31 October to leave a plant height of between 10 cm and 20 cm. Leave 10% of the area uncut or ungrazed.
P706	Keep a monthly record of stock numbers grazing on parcels in this option. Make the record available on request.

Winter bird food (AB9)

£640 per ha

Where to use this option

Whole or part parcel
Rotational
Only on:

- arable land
- temporary grassland
- bush orchards

Where this option cannot be used

- On organic parcels or land in conversion
- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment

It provides important food resources for farmland birds, especially in autumn and winter.
If successful there will be:

- an abundant and available supply of small seeds during the autumn and winter months
- farmland birds eating the seeds from October and beneficial insects including bumblebees, solitary bees, butterflies and hoverflies using the flowers during the summer

REQUIREMENTS

- between 1 March and 15 June, establish a seed mix of cereals, brassicas and other plants which produce small edible seeds to meet the autumn, winter and spring food needs of the following farmland birds where one or more is targeted in the area:
    - grey partridge
    - turtle dove
    - tree sparrow
    - cirl bunting
    - corn bunting
- blocks or strips must be at least 6m wide and a minimum of 0.4ha in size - the maximum individual plot size is 5ha
- re-establish the mix using plants from the "What to sow" section if the first mixture fails to establish
- maintain seed production by re-establishing every year for annual mixtures and every 2 years where mixtures have plants that deliver feed over 2 winters

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- seed invoices
- field operations at the parcel level, including associated invoices

You should also be aware that at the start of each claim year, a percentage of agreement holders will be asked to take and submit the following photographic records:

- photographs of the blocks or strips

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right location

Use this option on most areas of the farm, but mixtures work best in sunny locations and on fertile sites.

Avoid planting underneath overhanging trees or next to shading woodland, as this leads to poorer establishment, growth and seed production.

Winter bird food mixes should be placed next to a field edge but can extend into the field. Leave access to surrounding crops to allow for management.

Block and plot sizes

Creating wider and bigger areas of winter bird food allows more seeds to remain undiscovered for longer, which extends their value well into winter. It also reduces the edge effect from adjacent land, such as fertiliser or pesticide drift.

Smaller areas tend to suffer from birds eating all the food within a short time.

What to sow

Sow plants that offer a spread of seed across the late autumn and winter.

Annual mixtures should include species like barley, triticale, quinoa, linseed, millet, mustard, fodder radish and sunflower. Include kale in 2-year mixtures. The mixture should cover a range of crop groups to minimise any pest and disease risks.

No single species should make up more than 70% by weight of the mix.

The following plants do not produce small seeds, as required, and so are not permitted:

- maize
- canary grass
- tick beans
- sweet clover
- giant sorghum
- artichokes

When and how to sow

Establish the plot between 1 March and 15 June, but ideally between mid-March and early June.

Create a fine and firm seedbed with seed sown at a depth between 1.5cm and 2.5cm. Moisture and warmth will help any brassicas establish quickly to protect against flea beetle damage.

Managing the option

Nitrogen applied at a minimum of 50kg per ha will create sufficient growth to smother annual weeds and produce plenty of seed. Herbicides can be used in some winter bird food mixes; check with a BASIS-qualified agronomist.

Rotate this option to a new site of clean ground if weed problems start to build up.

Remember that winter bird food should be in place until at least 31 December in year 5 of the agreement.

AB9	Winter bird food
Aim	To provide important food resources for farmland birds, especially in autumn and winter.
Eligibility Rules	
E52	Arable land, temporary grassland and bush orchards
E226	This option is not available on organic parcels or land in organic conversion.
Prescriptions	
P217	Blocks and/or strips must be at least 6 m wide and a minimum of 0.4ha in size. The maximum individual plot size is 5ha.
P218	Where the chosen mixture fails to establish, you must re-establish it using one of the re-establishment mixtures specified in the option guidance.
P1237	Establish a seed mix of cereals, brassicas and other plants producing small edible seeds between 1 March and 15 June to meet the autumn, winter and spring food needs of the following farmland birds if they are targeted in your area: grey partridge, tree sparrow, corn bunting, turtle dove, cirl bunting.
P1242	To maintain seed production, re-establish every year for annual mixtures and every two years where mixtures include plants that deliver feed over two winters.

Cultivated areas for arable plants (AB11)

£532 per ha

Where to use this option

Whole or part parcel
Rotational
Only on arable land:

- where evidence or records exist for important arable plants (Plantlife IAPA classification 4 and above – see Appendix II, page 19 - **http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/important-arable-plant-areas**). These records can either be historic (within the last 40 years) or from recent arable plant survey results
- where arable plant records do not exist but the land is part of the Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package (see Mid Tier Manual Section 8.3)

Where this option cannot be used

- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment

It creates uncropped, cultivated areas for a wide range of scarce and declining arable plants, and provides areas of less densely vegetated ground for insects and other invertebrates, and summer foraging habitats for declining farmland birds.

If successful there will be:

- vulnerable species of arable plants germinating and completing their life cycle, which will increase their populations over time
- foraging insects such as bumblebees, solitary bees and hoverflies visiting flowers and the bare ground created
- declining farmland birds, such as grey partridge and turtle dove, foraging in the arable plant area

REQUIREMENTS

- create the fallow margins or plots annually
- cultivate in the spring between February and April or in the autumn between September and November - work the soil sufficiently to produce a fine surface across the whole area

Do not:

- disturb cultivated areas before 31 August
- apply any fertilisers or manures
- apply any lime
- use any pesticides, except for herbicides to weed-wipe or spot-treat for the control of injurious weeds, invasive non-natives, nettles or bracken

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- records at parcel level of your field operations, including any associated invoices

On your annual claim you will be asked to declare that you haven't carried out any activities prohibited by the option requirements.

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right location

Where sites have important arable plant species present or where they could be released from the seed bank (historic or local records will help identify them), this option can deliver tailored management for them. The Plantlife Important Arable Plant Areas (IAPA) handbook referenced above scores individual species: if there are records of plants which score 4 or above this option is available.

The richest areas for arable plants are at the edges of fields, adjacent to old farm tracks and boundary features, so margins up to 6m wide will work best here.

Fields with a long history of cultivation, together with old grass margins that were previously arable, should also be considered.

Some of the more common species of arable plants are good 'indicator' species and indicate the potential of an area to hold rich arable flora in the seed bank, so it is important to focus on these sites, as well as those containing the rarest species.

Managing your plots

Rotating the cultivated areas around the farm can help control and prevent a build-up of undesirable weed species.

Varying cultivation timing and depth can also help control undesirable species while providing suitable conditions for germinating arable plants in the spring and autumn.

Topping at a height of around 30cm to prevent seeding of undesirable weed species such as wild oats and creeping thistle is allowed during the growing season, as many of the desirable arable plant species are shorter than this. Where this weed burden develops on more than 40% of the area, targeted broad-spectrum herbicides can be used once annual species have set seed (normally in September).

If grass weeds become a problem, periodically (one year in 3) creating a stale autumn seedbed and cultivating in mid-March can help control them. This is particularly relevant on heavy clay sites. Ploughing can also be useful for controlling grass weeds.

Use this option as part of a sequence of arable options which can occupy the same area of land at different times of the year, such as overwinter stubbles.

AB11	Cultivated areas for arable plants
Aim	To create un-cropped cultivated areas for a wide range of scarce and declining annual arable plants, to provide areas of less densely vegetated ground ideal for insects and other invertebrates, and summer foraging habitat for declining farmland bird species.
Eligibility Rules	
E6	This option can only be located on arable land: Either: Where there is evidence or records for important arable plants (Plantlife IAPA classification 4 and above). These can either be historic (within the last 40 years), or from recent arable plant survey results. Or: As part of the farm wildlife package.
Prescriptions	
P2	Do not apply any fertilisers or manures.
P3	Do not apply any lime.
P10	Only use pesticides, including herbicides, to spot-treat or weed-wipe for the control of injurious weeds, invasive non-natives, nettles or bracken.
P15	Create the fallow margins and/or plots annually.
P16	Cultivate in the spring between February and April and/or in the autumn between September and November. Work the soil sufficiently to produce a fine surface across the whole area.
P18	Do not disturb cultivated areas before 31 August.

Supplementary winter feeding for farmland birds (AB12)

£632 per tonne for every 2 ha of winter bird food

Where to use this option

Whole or part-parcel
Rotational
Only on:

- arable land
- temporary grassland
- bush orchards

Only where a qualifying area of AB9 - Winter bird food is included in the agreement (2ha of AB9 winter bird food allows 500kg per annum of supplementary feeding, at each of two separate feeding stations)

Where this option cannot be used

On organic parcels or land in conversion

How this option will benefit the environment

It provides important food resources for farmland birds in late winter and early spring on arable and mixed farms, by supplementing crops of winter bird food when they have been depleted and before natural food sources become available in late spring.

If successful there will be seed-eating farmland birds using the feeding areas from December to April, including:

- yellowhammer
- grey partridge
- tree sparrow
- corn bunting
- linnet
- turtle dove (seen during the spring and summer)

Target birds will be seen more frequently on the farm in the spring and there will be increased breeding success there.

REQUIREMENTS

- spread the supplementary feed mixture specified in the agreement at an average rate of 25kg on the ground, at least once a week from 1 December until 30 April, at each of two separate feeding locations
- select feeding areas that are firm and free-draining, such as farm tracks or hard standing areas, and in close proximity to enhanced overwinter stubbles, game cover or wild bird seed mixtures

Do not:

- use hoppers to supply more than 10% of the total amount of feed provided during the specified feeding period
- use tailings (small seeds and chaff removed from the harvested crop) as supplementary feed

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- details of the mixture used (weight of components and cost)
- dates of feeding
- method of feeding (hopper or spreading)
- amount of feed
- the location of the feeding areas

On your annual claim you will be asked to declare that you haven't carried out any activities prohibited by the option requirements.

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right location

When planning which feeding sites to use, make sure they can be reached regularly. This is especially important if bad weather will cause problems travelling to them during the winter.

It is important for the health of the birds benefiting from the supplementary feeding that clean and healthy feeding areas are maintained. Rotating feeding sites around the farm is very important, but each site should be near existing sown resources.

Manage how and when to supplementary feed

Having 2ha of AB9 Winter bird food in the agreement allows 1 tonne of supplementary feed to be spread each year, split equally between 2 feeding stations, so 500kg per year per feeding station. Where less than 2ha of AB9 is put into the agreement, a pro-rata amount of AB12 can be included. For example, the minimum area allowed of AB9 is 0.4ha. This would allow 200kg of AB12 to be included, spread equally between two feeding stations, so 100kg per year per feeding station.

Supplementary feeding should start before the sown winter bird food runs out. This keeps farmland birds using the areas and prevents a dip in their winter condition.

Distribute enough supplementary food to match the birds' consumption, so that seed is not left uneaten. This will ensure that a fresh supply of food is maintained, which will keep birds healthy and reduce any rodent problems. This is particularly important when ground feeding, or if hoppers are left unprotected.

Feed twice a week so that no food is left by the second day after feeding. As well as reducing rodents this will cut down on the use of the supplementary feed areas by crows and pigeons. Feed should be well spread out on the areas chosen, rather than left in piles.

Prepare to be flexible, so that if the winter period is extended through bad weather, the amount of feeding planned can be adjusted and extended for any additional days or weeks that are needed. This ensures that birds are not left with a 'hungry gap' before the natural seed resources on the farm become available.

What seed mix to use

The ideal mix should be a maximum of 70% cereal (wheat, barley, oats, triticale) and 3 or 4 of white millet, red millet, linseed, oil seed rape, canary seed, nyger seed, sunflower hearts (which can be bought in). A mix of 40% naked oats, 30% wheat, 20% millet and 10% oilseed rape has provided good results on some farms.

AB12	Supplementary winter feeding for farmland birds
Aim	This option will provide important food resources for farmland birds in late winter and early spring on arable land and mixed farms by supplementing grown winter bird food with spread seed, once the sown resources have been depleted and before natural food resources become available again in late spring.
Eligibility Rules	
E52	Arable land, temporary grassland and bush orchards.
E162	Only available when a qualifying area of sown winter bird food option is included in your agreement. 2 ha of sown winter bird food allows 500 kg per annum supplementary feeding, at each of two separate feeding stations.
E226	This option is not available on organic parcels or land in organic conversion.
Prescriptions	
P413	Spread the supplementary feed mixture specified in your agreement at an average rate of 25 kg on the ground at least once a week from 1 December until 30 April, at each of two separate feeding locations.
P414	Do not use hoppers to supply more than 10% of the total amount of feed provided during the specified feeding period.
P415	Do not use tailings (small seeds and chaff removed from the harvested crop) as supplementary feed.
P416	Select feeding areas that are firm and free-draining such as farm tracks, hard standing areas and in close proximity to enhanced overwinter stubbles, game cover, or wild bird seed mixtures.
P417	Keep a feeding diary which includes details of mixture (weight of components and cost), dates of feeding, method of feeding (hopper or spreading), amount of feed, and the location of feeding areas.

4m to 6m buffer strip on cultivated land (SW1)

£353 per ha

Where to use this option

On the edges of cultivated fields, between the productive part of the field and an existing feature or habitat (which must be identified on the Farm Environment Record (FER)), such as:

- hedgerows and hedge trees
- remnants of trees on former boundary lines
- stone walls
- woodlands
- ponds, ditches, rivers and streams

It can also be used next to:

- trackways that channel runoff water directly to a watercourse
- fence lines that form links between areas of wildlife habitat identified on the FER

Where this option cannot be used

- overlapping a public right of way (such as a footpath or bridleway)
- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment

A grass buffer strip may provide new habitat, protect existing landscape features, and improve water quality.

Next to existing features, it will provide habitat for wildlife, and form links or corridors between other habitats.

Next to a watercourse, it will also prevent pollutants, such as sediment and nutrients, from being transported in surface water runoff.

REQUIREMENTS

- establish or maintain a 4 to 6m wide grass buffer strip during the first 12 months of the agreement
- once the strip has been established, cut between 1 and 3m of the strip next to the crop edge every year after 15 July
- only cut the remaining width to control woody growth (leaving aside areas containing fallen timber)
- where there are hedgerow trees over 30cm in diameter at breast height, leave fallen timber beneath the canopy, stacking any timber that obstructs management of the buffer strip

Do not:

- remove the limbs (including lower limbs) of any hedgerow trees that are over 30cm in diameter at breast height
- apply any fertilisers or manures
- use the buffer strip as an access route for vehicles or stock
- use pesticides, except for herbicides to weed wipe or spot treat injurious weeds, invasive non-native species, nettles or bracken

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- field operations at the parcel level, including associated invoices

On your annual claim you will be asked to declare that you haven't carried out any activities prohibited by the option requirements.

You should also be aware that at the start of each claim year, a percentage of agreement holders will be asked to take and submit the following photographic records:

- photographs of the strips

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully, but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Using this option on existing buffer strips

This option can be used on buffer strips that are already established, unless they are being paid for through another scheme. However, the buffer strip should be on land that can be cultivated (e.g. it cannot be on a very steeply banked strip alongside a boundary).

Buffer strips established under Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) can continue to be managed under a new Countryside Stewardship agreement.

How to choose a site

To protect watercourses, create the buffer strip:

- next to the watercourse
- across the slope on long, steep slopes, to intercept runoff before it builds to a damaging flow

To benefit wildlife, select a location that links habitats, or that is next to:

- watercourses
- hedgerows (particularly hedges with mature hedgerow trees)
- stone walls
- remnants of trees on former boundary lines
- groups of trees in strips along the edge of woodland

To protect archaeological features, create the buffer strip beside:

- archaeological features located above the ground
- historic features
- metal parkland fencing

How to manage the buffer strip

- remove any subsoil compaction where required to prepare a seedbed, except on archaeological features
- control weeds and cut regularly in the first 12 to 24 months of establishment to encourage grasses to tiller
- avoid cutting when the soil is wet, to prevent compaction
- the buffer strip should remain in place and not be re-sown for the duration of the agreement

The buffer strip can be partly covered by a hedge, as long as the hedge is located on land that is eligible for this option. See the Mid Tier Manual section 6.7.

SW1	4-6 metre buffer strip on cultivated land
Aim	To provide new habitat, protect existing landscape features and may contribute to improving water quality.
Eligibility Rules	
E21	Around the edges of cultivated fields, adjacent to an existing feature identified on your FER such as hedgerows, hedge trees, remnant boundary tree lines, stone walls, woodlands or ditches, rivers and streams.
E22	Adjacent to track ways which channel run-off water directly to a watercourse.
E23	Adjacent to fence lines where they form links between areas of wildlife habitat identified on your FER.
E256	The buffer strip must not overlap with a public right of way.
Prescriptions	
P2	Do not apply any fertilisers or manures.
P10	Only use pesticides, including herbicides, to spot-treat or weed-wipe] for the control of injurious weeds, invasive non-natives, nettles or bracken.
P96	Where hedgerow trees over 30 cm diameter at breast height are present do not remove tree limbs, including lower limbs. Leave fallen timber beneath the canopy. Stack if necessary to allow management of the buffer strip.
P97	Establish or maintain a 4- 6 m wide grass buffer strip during the first 12 months of your agreement.
P99	After establishment of the buffer strip, cut between 1 and 3 m next to the crop edge annually after 15 July. Only cut the remaining width to control woody growth. Do not cut areas with fallen timber.
P677	Do not use the buffer or grassed area for vehicle or stock access routes.

Buffering in-field ponds and ditches on arable land (WT2)

£501 per ha

Where to use this option
Only on arable land next to ponds.

Where this option cannot be used
- on historic or archaeological features
- around ponds associated with industrial features such as effluent ponds, balancing ponds or small water supply reservoirs
- from 1 January 2019, on land already receiving funding for Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) declared for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

How this option will benefit the environment
It protects ponds from nutrient leaching and runoff. This will maintain and enhance water quality and wildlife.

If successful there will be:

- a grassy strip with a mix of grasses, flowering plants, scrub and trees
- a decrease in the amount of sediment and nutrient entering the pond

REQUIREMENTS
- establish or maintain a 10m to 20m wide buffer strip next to the pond in the first 12 months of the agreement
- let tussocky grass and low scrub develop
- only cut to control the spread of woody growth

Do not:
- let scrub develop on more than half of the pond margin - the southern side of the pond needs to remain open
- use pesticides, except for herbicides to weed-wipe or spot-treat for the control of injurious weeds, invasive non-native species, nettles or bracken
- apply any fertilisers or manures
- cut between 1 March and 31 August

Keeping records
Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- field operations at the parcel level, including associated invoices

On your annual claim you will be asked to declare that you haven't carried out any activities prohibited by the option requirements.

You should also be aware that at the start of each claim year, a percentage of agreement holders will be asked to take and submit the following photographic records:

- photographs of the strips

WT2	Buffering in-field ponds and ditches in arable land
Aim	To protect ponds and high value ditches from nutrient leaching and run-off, to maintain and enhance water quality and biodiversity.
Eligibility Rules	
E109	This option is only available on arable land adjacent to ponds or arable land adjacent to ditches in the Management of ditches of high environmental value option.
E4	This option must not be located on historic or archaeological features.
Prescriptions	
P2	Do not apply any fertilisers or manures.
P10	Only use pesticides, including herbicides, to spot-treat or weed-wipe for the control of injurious weeds, invasive non-natives, nettles or bracken.
P308	Allow the development of tussocky grass and low scrub. Only cut to control the spread of woody growth. Do not cut between 1 March and 31 August.
P309	Do not allow scrub to develop on more than half of the pond or ditch margin. The southern side of the pond or ditch must remain open.
P313	Establish or maintain a 10 – 20 m wide grass buffer strip adjacent to the pond or ditch during the first 12 months of your agreement.

Management of hedgerows (BE3)

£8 per 100m for 1 side of a hedge

Where to use this option

On boundary lines of shrubs, which are:

- composed of woody plants with less than 2m between the ground and the base of the leafy layer
- over 20m long
- less than 5m wide between major woody stems at the base
- composed of at least 80% native shrubs

Where this option cannot be used

- on features that are trees for most of their length
- lengths of hedge managed under this option are not eligible for the capital item BN7 - Hedgerow gapping-up but are eligible for other capital item payments

How this option will benefit the environment

Increases the availability of blossom for invertebrates. By allowing fruit and berries to ripen it provides food for overwintering birds. It will also improve the structure and longevity of hedgerows.

If successful there will be:

- taller and wider hedges, with gaps forming less than 10% of the hedge length
- a mix of hedges of different heights and width across the farm
- production of 2 to 4 times the weight of berries when compared with hedges cut every year
- an increase in the blossom available to insect pollinators
- dense cover, which is important for successful breeding for a variety of wildlife
- an improvement in overall hedge condition to maintain them as distinctive and historic landscape features

REQUIREMENTS

- maintain a hedge at least 2m tall and 1.5m wide by year 2, except for sections gapped up, laid or coppiced during the agreement term
- cut hedgerows:
  - either no more than 1 year in 3 between 1 September and 28 February - leave at least two-thirds of hedges untrimmed each year
  - or no more than 1 year in 2 between 1 January and 28 February - leave at least one-half of hedges untrimmed each year
- gap up any length of hedge with more than 10% gaps within the first 2 years

Do not:

- remove any tree limbs, including lower limbs, or mature ivy growth from hedgerow trees
- remove any standing deadwood
- supplementary feed livestock within 2m of the centre of the hedge

Keeping records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them on request:

- hedgerow management records

You should also be aware that at the start of each claim year, a percentage of agreement holders will be asked to take and submit the following photographic records:

- photographs of each hedge entered into the option

With their application, applicants will have to send maps showing:

- existing access tracks

This can be marked on the Farm Environment Record (FER).

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO CARRY OUT THIS OPTION

The following section gives advice on carrying out this option successfully but does **not** *form part of the requirements for this option.*

Pick the right hedge

If you do not have management control of both sides of a hedge then only enter 1 side into the option. If there is no parcel number listed under your SBI for the land on one side of the hedgerow, for example where it is a road or track verge, or the land belongs to a neighbour, that side of the hedgerow can't be entered into BE3 on your application.

Select hedges that:

- are connected to other hedges or habitats (such as woodlands and ponds)
- have other components such as hedgerow trees, bases or banks rich in flowers, or an adjacent ditch or margin

Use the option to improve the condition and longevity of hedges which are of particular historic interest, such as parish boundaries, or are especially important in the landscape.

Managing the hedges

If the correct rotor and forward speeds are used, well-maintained flails are effective for cutting 2 to 3-year-old growth of most woody species.

Fast growing species, such as ash or willow, may need heavier duty flails or more powerful cutting heads. Alternatively, use a circular saw or leave hedges uncut. There is no requirement to trim hedges at all during the agreement. Instead, leave them to grow and manage in a coppicing or laying rotation.

Cutting incrementally, rather than trimming back to the same point, allows hedges to increase in height and width by several centimetres at each cut, encouraging a dense, healthy hedgerow.

Use native shrubs species that already occur in hedgerows in the local area to gap up. A gap is a complete break in the canopy. Where a tree canopy overlaps the hedgerow canopy it is not counted as a gap.

Further information

Read more on:

- managing hedgerows in a long-term cycle - **http://hedgelink.org.uk/index.php**
- common questions on hedge cutting - **http://hedgelink.org.uk/index.php**

BE3	Management of hedgerows
Aim	To increase blossom availability for invertebrates, provide a vital source of food for over-wintering birds by allowing fruit and berries to ripen, and improve the structure and longevity of hedgerows.
Eligibility Rules	
E16	You can only use this option on: A boundary line of shrubs (a woody plant where the distance between the ground and the base of the leafy layer is less than 2 m) which is over 20 m long and less than 5 m wide (between major woody stems at the base) and composed of at least 80% native shrubs. You cannot use this option on features which consist of trees over most of their length.
Prescriptions	
P71	Allow hedgerows to reach and then maintain a minimum height of 2m and minimum width of 1.5 m by year 2. Sections gapped up, layed or coppiced during the term of the agreement are excluded.
P73	Either: Cut hedgerows no more than one year in three between 1 January and 28 February or 1 September and 31 December. Leave at least two thirds of hedges untrimmed each year. Or: Cut hedgerows no more than one year in two between 1 January and 28 February. Leave at least one half of hedges untrimmed each year.
P79	Do not remove any tree limbs including the lower limbs or mature ivy growth from hedgerow trees.
P80	Do not remove any standing deadwood.
P88	Do not supplementary feed within 2 m of the centre of the hedge.
P622	Gap up any length of hedge with more than 10% gaps within the first two years.

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