



Rural Payments  
Agency

April 2021

# An update from the Rural Payments Agency



Go to [www.gov.uk/rpa](https://www.gov.uk/rpa) for scheme information



## Coronavirus (COVID-19) update

We continue to deliver our services to agricultural and rural communities across the country. The deadlines and information given in this update are correct at the time of publication. However, if it is necessary to make any changes due to the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we will publish updates on our page [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): information for farmers, land owners and rural businesses](#) on GOV.UK. Check the page regularly for any updates.

For example, you can read about the different ways to submit applications, claims and documents to us, while our offices remain closed and we are unable to accept correspondence or documents in person.

Although we're unable to open drop-in centres in 2021, in this update we've explained where you can find useful guidance on GOV.UK to help you apply or claim for RPA schemes.

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# Key dates and overview

## Countryside Stewardship applications

Applications for Higher Tier, Mid Tier, Wildlife Offers and Capital Grants are now open.

In response to customer feedback and in preparation for our future environmental land management schemes, we are considering introducing a flexible application window in 2021. We'll let you know about any changes as soon as we can, through our normal communication and social media channels.

**We strongly advise you to submit your application during the published application deadline dates, as we cannot specify when a flexible window will be introduced.**

A reminder about key dates, a summary of the main updates, and how to apply are given below. For more detailed information, read the relevant manual and 'How to apply' guides available on the [Countryside Stewardship: How to apply](#) page on GOV.UK

### Higher Tier

**31 March** – deadline to request an application pack online using the Rural Payments service, or to call or email us to send an application pack to you.

**30 April** – initial applications close.

Submit your application by email or post.

### Capital Grants

There is a new Capital Grants package which replaces the Hedgerows and Boundaries grant and stand-alone water capital grants in the Mid Tier. It offers a greater number of capital items that you can apply for online, using the Rural Payments service. These standalone capital items cover water capital, hedgerows and boundaries, and air quality.

**30 April** – applications close.

Submit your application online, by email or by post.

You can get a copy of the [application form](#) from GOV.UK, or call us or email us if you cannot access it.

### Mid Tier

There's a number of new options to the scheme to help improve air quality, reduce ammonia emissions and improve water quality. Advice will be available from Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers to ensure these environmental actions are targeted to where they can best benefit priority habitats.

It is no longer possible to apply for a Mid Tier capital only agreement. Applications should include capital items and management options. If you want to apply for capital items only, you can do this by applying for the new Capital Grants offer.

**28 May** – deadline to call us to request an application pack, if you can't request one using the Rural Payments service.

**31 May** – last day to request approval for options in a Priority Habitat.

**30 June** – deadline to request an application pack using the Rural Payments service.

**30 July** – applications close.

Submit your application by email or post.

## Catchment Sensitive Farming

If you are in a high priority area for improving water and air quality and your options and items require Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer (CSFO) approval, request support from your local CSFO as soon as possible.

Download the [Request for support and approval form](#) from GOV.UK and send it to your local CSFO now. The last date to complete and return the request support for your Mid-Tier application is **Friday 18 June 2021**.

## Priority habitats and species

Some management options support priority habitats and species.

Before you include these options in your application, you must make sure that you meet the relevant criteria. If you do, then call us on 03000 200 301 to request approval to include these options. You must do this by **31 May 2021**.

For more information, read the 'How to apply - [Approval for management options for priority habitats and species](#)' at section 4.7.2 of the [CS Mid Tier manual](#), which is available on GOV.UK.

## Wildlife Offers

Eligibility criteria for the upland option UP2 (management of rough grazing for birds) has been expanded, so more land managers can access this option. New wood pasture options in the uplands have also been introduced, at payment rates suitable for upland application, to help support 're-wilding'.

**28 May** – call us by this date to request an application pack, if you cannot apply using the Rural Payments service.

**30 July** – applications close.

Submit your application online, by email or by post.

## Woodland support grants

Improvements have been made to woodland options. For example, bringing bracken control and stone wall options into woodland management grants, and including deer high seats in Woodland Tree Health applications. Also, the Woodland Creation and Maintenance (WCM) grant agreement is new for 2021. It combines the existing Woodland Creation grant and the Woodland Creation Maintenance (WD1) payments to make the application easier for the applicant.

### Woodland tree health

As tree diseases are widespread, regularly check the condition of trees, looking out for possible tree diseases (ideally in the spring and early autumn). Grants are available to help with conditions such as ash dieback and the removal of diseased trees and infected rhododendron.

### Woodland management plans

If you are seeking support through this year's Countryside Stewardship Woodland Improvement Grant, Woodland management plans need to be fully approved, including felling licences, by the Forestry Commission, by the end of August 2021.

### Registration of woodland

Land managers – make sure you register your woodland alongside all other land before including it in Countryside Stewardship, so that it shows on your digital maps. You should also regularly check the Rural Payments service to make sure that your land records are up to date. If they are not kept up to date, it may affect future applications.

### Tree felling licence

Remember that works including tree felling need a felling licence. There have been recent cases of alleged illegal tree felling in Mid Tier, and Hedgerows and Boundaries grant agreements. You should check if you need a licence with the Forestry Commission before you start any tree works. Read the [Tree felling licence: when you need to apply](#) guidance at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) for more information.

## Submitting your CS application

If you apply online, you'll receive an online receipt once your application has been submitted successfully.

To submit your application to us by email, send it to: [ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk) – in the subject header put: 'CS application' and name the element of the scheme, for example, 'Mid Tier'. Include your SBI and application ID number in your email. When we've received your application, we'll send you an acknowledgement by email.

If we send you an application pack by email, please reply to the email. If you prefer not to reply direct to the email, follow the guidance above.

To submit your application by post, send it to: Rural Payments Agency (Countryside Stewardship), PO Box 324, Worksop, S95 1DF. Put your SBI and application ID number on everything you send to us. When we've received your application, we'll send you an acknowledgement by post.

## A reminder about CS simplifications

The following important changes have been made to Countryside Stewardship agreements starting from 1 January 2021 or later.

- Some CS options reworded to make overall aims clearer and less prescriptive
- Capital Grants (replaces Hedgerows and boundaries grant): apply for all Mid Tier capital options using the Rural Payments service, includes water capital, hedgerows and boundaries, and air quality
- Woodland capital grants: improvements made to woodland options. One application covers a Woodland Creation and Maintenance grant

# Claims

## CS revenue claims

**You must submit an annual revenue claim every year, this includes for agreements that started on 1 January 2021.**

**17 May** – submit your claim by midnight.

Submit your claim online, by email or by post.

If you submit your claim by email, please reply to the email we sent with your revenue claim attached.

## CS capital claims

Claims are open all year but you must submit your final claim within 3 months of your agreement end date. If you have received confirmation that your agreement has been extended, make sure you submit your claim within 3 months of the new deadline.

Before you submit a claim, make sure all items in the claim have been fully paid for. Please provide all required evidence when submitting your claim. For more information about the requirements, read [Countryside Stewardship grants](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants) at [www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Submit your claim online, by email or by post.

## Environmental Stewardship

**17 May** – submit your claim by midnight

Submit your claim by returning it to the email or address on page 1 of your claim form. If you have received an email form but would like to request a paper form, please call us on 03000 200 301. You will receive a receipt by email where possible, or by post where we do not have an up-to-date email address for you.

## Basic Payment Scheme

**17 May** – submit your application by midnight

Submit your application online using the Rural Payments service or by post to:

Rural Payments Agency (Basic Payment Scheme), PO Box 352, Worksop, S80 9FG. Put your SBI on everything you send to us.

If you apply online, you'll receive an online receipt once your application has been submitted successfully. If you submit your application by post, we'll acknowledge receipt by post.

### Submitting your CS claims

If you submit your claim online, you'll receive an online receipt once your application has been submitted successfully.

To submit your CS claim by email: reply to the invitation to claim email, or email [ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk) – in the subject header put: 'CS claim' and name of the element of the scheme, for example, 'Mid Tier'. Include your SBI and application ID number in your email. When we've received your CS claim, we'll send you an acknowledgement by email.

To submit your CS claim by post, send it to: Rural Payments Agency (Countryside Stewardship), PO Box 324, Worksop, S95 1DF. Put your SBI and agreement number on everything you send to us. When we've received your CS claim, we'll send you an acknowledgement by post.

## A reminder about BPS simplifications

An outline of the simplifications made from 2021 are given below. You can find more information about these in the [Rural Payments Agency December 2020 update](#) available on GOV.UK.

- Removal of greening requirements: from the 2021 scheme year, we have permanently removed all three of the greening requirements: crop diversification, Ecological Focus Areas and the greening permanent grassland rules. Other rules still apply to protect permanent grassland. For more information read '[Basic Payment Scheme: rules for 2021](#)' at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
- Removal of cross-border applications: we will process and pay your English entitlements only.
- Removal of entitlement usage rules: removes the entitlement 2 year usage rules from 2021 onwards.
- Force majeure notification period extended for applications and claims from 2021.
- Supporting documents: we will accept supporting documents until 11 June, without reductions or penalties being applied to your application, as long as the original application was submitted by midnight on 17 May.
- Amend your application: certain amendments to an application accepted up to 11 June, without applying reductions or penalties, as long as the original application was submitted by midnight on 17 May.
- Obvious errors: from 2021 onwards, in certain instances we may consider information held by RPA about an application or claim, rather than just the contradiction within the application or claim only, to determine whether an 'obvious error' has occurred.

**The paper application form (BP5) has not been reformatted following simplifications. Therefore, some sections have been greyed out, such as Part D: Greening, and Part I: Land in more than one area of the UK, and remaining sections have not been renamed.**

## Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) progressive reductions

We plan to phase out Direct Payments in England from 2021 to 2027. Our approach is designed to help everyone manage the transition away from Direct Payments as smoothly as possible. We set out the percentage reductions that we intend to apply to payments for the 2021 to 2024 scheme years in our '[Rural Payments Agency update - December 2020](#)', which you can read at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

Reductions will be applied to the total payment farmers would have been due in each year. While we operate BPS, the reductions will be applied to the total BPS payment, including any young farmer payment, after all other reductions and penalties have been applied. We will shortly make available online a calculator to show how progressive reductions for scheme years 2021 to 2024 could affect your Direct Payment (currently paid through the Basic Payment Scheme).

The money saved by the reduction in Direct Payments will be invested back into new schemes to support farming and the countryside, such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive and the Farming Investment Fund. For more information, read our [Farming is Changing booklet](#) on GOV.UK

# Important reminders

## Permissions

Please make sure the person who submits the form holds the correct level of permission in the Rural Payments service.

### BPS

Business details – permission level is ‘Full permissions’ **OR**

Basic Payment Scheme – permission level is ‘Submit’

### CS applications

Business details – permission level is ‘Full permissions’ **OR**

Countryside Stewardship (applications) – permission level is ‘Submit’

### CS claims

Business details – permission level is ‘Full permissions’ **OR**

Countryside Stewardship (claims) – permission level is ‘Submit’

You can check your permission levels in the Rural Payments service, or call us if you are unable to get online. If the level of permission is incorrect, contact the person who has full permissions for the business, to ask them to change it.

## Submit your claim

If you’re claiming online for CS, remember to ‘submit’ your claim.

Every year, claims are rejected because they were not submitted. You’ll receive a receipt online once your claim has been successfully submitted.

## Emailing documents to RPA

Here’s a quick reminder about what you need to do when emailing us. More detailed information is available on GOV.UK – read ‘[Emailing documents to the Rural Payments Agency \(RPA\)](#)’ at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

1. **Subject headings:** include the name of the scheme and what the email is about in the subject header, include your SBI in the body of the email. For example, the element of the scheme you’re applying for – ‘Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier application’.  
If we send you an application pack or claim pack by email, please reply to the email. If you prefer not to reply direct to the email, follow the guidance above.
2. **Email size:** we can only accept emails up to 32MB. Send further emails if you need to, use the same subject heading, and state the number of emails, for example, ‘Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier application 1 of 3’.
3. **Use attachments:** we cannot accept supporting documents and evidence from links to external shared drives, for example Dropbox or Google Drive; or discs, USB pen drives or other external storage media, for security reasons.
4. **Check your details** including your personal email address, business email address, and permission levels are up to date in the Rural Payments service.
5. **Be aware of fraud:** as fraudsters may target farmers who receive subsidy payments.

# Countryside Stewardship inspections

## Rural Payment Agency's approach to Inspections for Countryside Stewardship

CS agreements which started on or after 1 January 2021 must meet (UK) domestic rules and regulations, while CS and ES agreements starting in previous years must still meet European Union (EU) rules and regulations.

### Our approach

If your CS agreement started before 1 January 2021, EU rules and penalties still apply to your agreement. Reductions and penalties may be applied if breaches are found following an inspection.

If your CS agreement starts on or after 1 January 2021 UK domestic rules will apply. For these CS agreements, the term 'environmental outcome site visit' will be used instead of 'inspection' because we want to focus on the environmental outcomes of the agreement.

There are 2 'environmental outcome site visit' approaches for 2021 as follows.

- Whole agreement - this will look at all of the options contained within your agreement and an assessment will be made against the environmental outcomes found.
- Campaign - this will only look at certain options within your agreement.

For 2021, the following campaign options have been chosen. These may differ for each scheme year.

### Buffer strips

- SW1: 4- 6 m buffer strips
- SW4: 12-24 m watercourse buffer strip on cultivated land

### Grassland options

- GS1: take field corners out of management
- GS2: permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDAs) as there is a high failure rate and a high intake rate
- GS7: restoration towards species-rich grassland
- GS17: lenient grazing supplement

### Boundary option

- BE3: management of hedgerows

The current CS prescriptions are being reviewed, under domestic rules and regulations. This means that from 2022, Mid Tier revenue options will look and feel different.

For these options, inspectors will first look to see if the aims have been met and that no prohibited activities have been carried out. If not, the inspector will check if the recommended management has been followed. Depending on findings, there may be a need to check for any supporting records that are available.

If a Campaign environmental outcome site visit finds breaches are due to the aims not being met, or prohibited activities carried out, all of the CS management options in the agreement may be checked.



## Support

Existing areas of advice, guidance and support are still available.

In addition to these areas, we will work with you to offer further advice and guidance to assist you in meeting the aims of your agreement and maximising environmental benefits.

## Remember

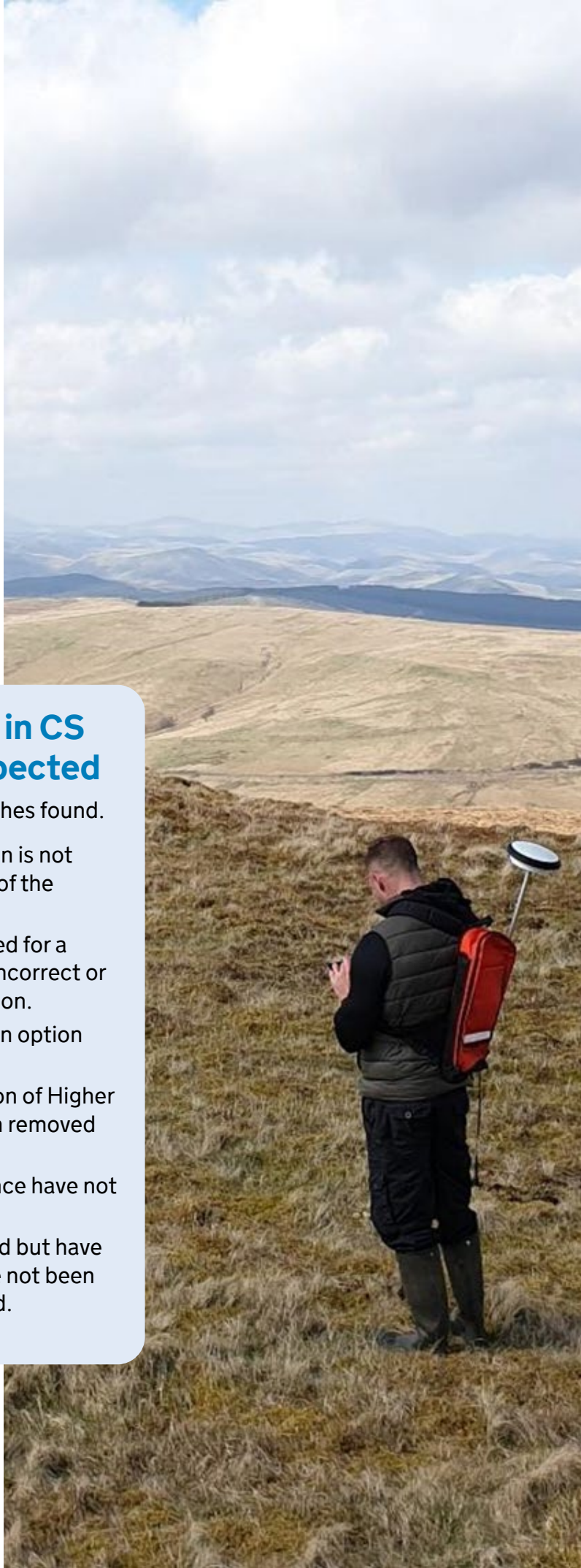
Before you sign up for a CS agreement in 2021, make sure you fully understand the requirements and how to meet these for your chosen option.

If you have a CS agreement that started on 1 January 2021, regularly check that the management option or capital item you have chosen is following the CS prescriptions, aims or specifications.

## Common breaches found in CS EU agreements when inspected

Below is a list of the main types of breaches found.

- The Agreement Holder, land or option is not eligible for payment under the rules of the scheme.
- The total eligible area of land declared for a particular option or/and location is incorrect or the option is not in the correct location.
- The management requirements for an option are not being followed.
- Features from the Baseline Evaluation of Higher Tier Agreements (BEHTA) have been removed or damaged.
- The requirements of Cross Compliance have not been followed.
- Capital works that have been claimed but have not actually been completed or have not been completed to a satisfactory standard.



# Useful information

## Farming Community Network

### Time to Plan

The Farming Community Network's (FCN) 'Time to Plan' initiative is all about supporting and encouraging people through change.

Over the last six months, FCN has been working with farmers and industry specialists to identify the key issues affecting today's farming community. As a result, together with industry partners, they have collated a wealth of informative articles, top tips, checklists and case studies. This information is free to access on the [FarmWell website](#) and includes downloadable fact sheets that can be printed out for a friend or neighbour who may not be digitally connected.

In due course they also intend to combine the content into a Time to Plan booklet – follow FarmWell on Twitter (@FCNfarmwell) for more information.

### RABI farmer online wellbeing service

Against a backdrop of continuing pressures in the industry, RABI launched an online wellbeing community and counselling service for farming people last October.

The initiative features two distinct sites - [Qwell.io/rabi](#) for adults, and [Kooth.com/rabi](#) for those aged 11 to 17 years of age. These safe and confidential online platforms are being delivered in partnership with a specialist online mental health provider. The websites include dedicated farmer friendly content that addresses farming community challenges.

For more information, visit the [mental health page of the RABI website](#) and, to access the online counselling platform, visit the [RABI website](#).

### Farmwell Helpline

If you, or someone you know, is concerned about planning for the future, or you would just like someone to talk to, you can email [help@fcn.org.uk](mailto:help@fcn.org.uk) or call the Farmwell helpline on 03000 111 999 between 7am and 11pm, any day of the year.



## Expressions of interest open for Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot

Later this year, we will start piloting the Sustainable Farming Incentive. For more information, and if you would like to express interest in taking part, read '[Sustainable Farming Incentive: expression of interest](#)' at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

Defra will involve several hundred farmers in the first phase of piloting the Sustainable Farming Incentive. Then, in 2022 we will start to roll out the scheme. It will initially be available to Basic Payment Scheme recipients. We will then extend and expand the scheme over time as we work with farmers to learn what works best in practice.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive is one of three new schemes to encourage environmentally sustainable farming, and sits alongside the future Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery schemes.

Together these schemes will pay for sustainable farming practices, improve animal health and welfare and reduce carbon emissions. They will create habitats for nature recovery and make landscape-scale changes such as establishing new woodland and other ecosystem services. The new schemes will help us to achieve a greener future for our country, as part of our 25 Year Environment Plan.

By taking part in the pilot, you would play an important role in shaping the future of farming in England. This is the biggest change in agricultural policy in half a century, and we must make sure that it's right for the farmers of today, and tomorrow. Participants will be our partners in designing and shaping the scheme.

## BCMS: How to order your barcode labels

You can request more barcode labels using the 'Contact BCMS' facility on CTS Online, or call our barcode label line on 0345 050 1234, it's open all day every day. You must be a registered cattle keeper to use this service, and you will need your CPH number.

For the latest BCMS updates, follow us on social media. During our latest social media campaign, we will post information every Thursday.

## Flooding advice for farmers and land managers

Guidance is published on GOV.UK – read '[Flooding advice for farmers and land managers](#)' at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) – giving information about what to do if your land has been flooded.

This guidance is not specific to any individual flooding event but is general advice covering the following schemes and services.

- Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)
- Countryside Stewardship (CS)
- Environmental Stewardship (ES)
- Farm Woodland Premium/English Woodland Grant Scheme
- Reporting animal movements
- Cross compliance

If you're not able to get online, please call us.

# Staying safe online

## Cyber crime

We're spending more time online than ever but so are cyber criminals. The increased use of email, online payments, automated farming equipment, virtual meetings, and improved access to loans and innovation grants has brought great benefits to all businesses, but it comes with risk of falling victim to cyber criminals.

Online security is as important as physical security. And even the smallest of businesses – including farms – are a valuable target to cyber criminals.

That is why the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has launched the Cyber Aware campaign – a cross government campaign designed to help keep us, including the farming community, secure online. The campaign is delivered in partnership with Cabinet Office, Home Office and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS).

At the heart of the Cyber Aware campaign are six practical actions that have been developed by NCSC technical experts and will help protect your farming business from the majority of the most common cyber attacks.

If you work for yourself or run a farming business with fewer than 10 employees, following this advice will make it harder for criminals to access your money, resource, and the critical information that keeps your business running.

Here at the Rural Payments Agency we would encourage you to visit [CyberAware.gov.uk](https://CyberAware.gov.uk) to find out more about the steps you can take to protect you and your farm online today.

This is in addition to the NCSC's collaboration last year with the National Farmers' Union on their very first piece of [guidance that was aimed specifically at the Agriculture and Farming sector](#), which also includes advice on phishing scams and how to report suspicious emails or texts.

## Behaviours

1

**Create a separate password for your business email account** – your inbox contains lots of sensitive information about your business. It's the gateway to all your online accounts so keep it safe with a strong password that is different to all your others.

2

**Create a strong password using three random words** – the longer your password, the harder it is to hack. Long passwords can be difficult to remember. But using three random words will help you create passwords that are both long and strong. Start with your most important accounts, like your email account.

3

**Save your passwords in your browser** – remembering lots of passwords can be difficult, but if you save them in your browser you don't have to and it's safer than re-using the same password for all your accounts.

## Be aware of fraud

Fraudsters may target farmers who receive subsidy payments and we're aware that in the past some customers have received emails, texts and telephone calls claiming to be from RPA or Defra. Links to a fake website designed to look like an authentic RPA or Defra online service are sometimes included in the message. We do not send emails or text messages with links to websites asking you to confirm your personal details or payment information. We strongly advise anyone who receives such a request not to open the link and delete the item.

As fraudsters may target farmers who receive subsidy payments, remember:

- never discuss your bank account details with someone you do not know
- we will not ask you to make a payment over the phone
- delete any emails or texts you do not believe are genuine, and do not open any links – our main email addresses are:
  - **[ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk)**
  - **[rpa@notifications.service.gov.uk](mailto:rpa@notifications.service.gov.uk)**
- be cautious about what information you share externally, particularly on social media.

If you suspect an attempted fraud or feel you have been the subject of fraud, you can contact:

- RPA's Fraud Referral Team on 0800 347 347 or [FraudInConfidence@rpa.gov.uk](mailto:FraudInConfidence@rpa.gov.uk)
- Action Fraud (the UK's national reporting centre for fraud and cyber-crime) on 0300 123 2040.

4

**Turn on two-factor authentication** – this free security feature adds an extra layer of protection online and stops cyber criminals getting into your accounts, even if they have your password.

5

**Update your devices** – using the latest software, apps and operating system can fix bugs and immediately improve your security.

6

**Backup** – backing up means you always have a copy of your important business data in the event it's lost or stolen, for example contract information, customers personal details, key contacts. Make sure these backups are recent and can be restored.

# Contact us



## Email us

[ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk)



## Call us

**03000 200 301**

(Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5pm, except bank holidays)



## Write to us

### CS customers:

Rural Payments Agency  
PO Box 324  
Worksop  
S95 1DF

### BPS customers:

Rural Payments Agency  
PO Box 352  
Worksop  
S80 9FG

**ES customers:** address details are split by county.

For more information, go to the Environmental Stewardship page on GOV.UK.

## Follow us on social media



Follow us on Twitter  
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Facebook: [www.facebook.com/RuralPaymentsAgency](https://www.facebook.com/RuralPaymentsAgency)



Sign up for our blog at  
[ruralpayments.blog.gov.uk](http://ruralpayments.blog.gov.uk)



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[Rural Payments Agency](https://www.youtube.com/RuralPaymentsAgency)

**For scheme information go to [www.gov.uk/rpa](http://www.gov.uk/rpa)**