

Make SFI options work for your farm

The first part of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) will be launched to all farmers in England next year, marking another significant step in the move away from direct support payments that will be phased out completely by 2027



*Will Foyle
(Hutchinsons Farm
Business Consultant)*

A pilot of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), which is one of three schemes within ELMS (alongside the Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery schemes), got underway this year, and a cut-down version is due to be launched more widely in 2022.

The SFI will contain eight sets of land management actions, known as "Standards", although just four are being launched next year. Of most interest to arable farmers is the arable/ horticultural soils standard, which rewards farmers for completing various activities that benefit soil health. Payments range from £26/ha for the basic "Introductory" measures, up to £60/ha for the advanced options (see table on next page).



All levels have a focus on improving soil structure by alleviating compaction, building organic matter, improving biology and establishing green cover to protect soil over winter.

"A lot of farmers are doing many of these things already, so accessing payments available within the soils standard should be achievable for a broad range of growers," Hutchinsons Farm Business Consultant **Will Foyle** says.

"With farm subsidy payments due to halve by 2024, compared to 2020 levels, farmers urgently need to find other ways to substitute and replace this lost income. In the short-term, there's a great opportunity to claim both BPS and SFI income to offset the ongoing cuts.

"But now and longer-term, growers have to think very carefully about the options available and select those most appropriate to their business." >

> Joined-up thinking

Indeed, Mr Foyle says farmers must take a holistic approach when considering the most suitable options and not think of it as a tick-box exercise to claim payments.

“You need to make sure any options work for your farm, which may mean rotating options each year or tailoring them to specific agronomic requirements.

“For example, in some situations you might want a deep-rooting cover crop to alleviate compaction, whereas elsewhere the priority may be to build fertility or add organic matter. It’s not a case of buying a cheap cover crop mix and ticking a box to get a payment.”

Such joined-up thinking is vital to ensure new support options deliver maximum benefit financially, environmentally and agronomically, he adds.

Digital assistance

Targeting the best options to specific areas, recording the necessary information and monitoring any impacts could be very complex, especially where stewardship is closely integrated into rotations, so digital platforms like Omnia could prove invaluable, Mr Foyle says.

The system’s yield analysis, field performance and cost of production mapping allows users to easily identify areas that may be more suited to stewardship than crop production, while users can also examine multiple “layers” of data, including soil analysis or observations uploaded via the Omnia Scout app. A new rotation planning tool is also due to be added later this year.

Soil testing

All three levels within the soils standard require farmers to conduct a basic soil assessment at the outset to evaluate texture, drainage, slope and identify any connections to a waterbody or sensitive habitat. These records should be reviewed every two years.

Additionally, every year at least 20% of land should be assessed for soil structure, biological indicators (e.g., earthworm counts) and organic matter, although Mr Foyle recommends testing 25% of land each year, so that each field is covered every four years.

The Hutchinsons Healthy Soils audit is ideal for soil benchmarking, providing all the information growers and agronomists need to actively manage soil resources and optimise crop performance.

Soil standard requirements

Introductory £26/ha	Intermediate £41/ha	Advanced £60/ha
Soil VESS tests	Introductory plus:	Intermediate plus:
Soil assessments	Reduce tillage on 25% land area	Create and use a soil management plan
Sow 5% winter cover	Sow 10% winter cover	Sow 15% winter cover
Incorporate organic matter on 10% of land	Incorporate organic matter on 15% of land	Incorporate organic matter on 20% of land
Reduce compaction		

For advice on making SFI options work for your farm, contact us: information@hlhltd.co.uk



Matt England
(Hutchinsons
Environmental
Services Specialist)



Event showcases environmental options to 'bridge the BPS gap'

This month Hutchinsons is hosting a new event to help growers plan the best way to capitalise on the opportunities available within ELMS and the SFI.

As part of the Hutchinsons Helix initiative, a new trials site has been established near Warboys in Cambridgeshire dedicated to testing out some of the many environmental stewardship options that will be central to the new support schemes.

A one-day event on 16 September (see details below), will give growers chance to see first-hand the many traditional and exotic species that make up different stewardship mixes, learn how to establish them successfully and discuss the benefits they deliver to biodiversity and soil health.

The event provides the perfect platform for planning the next steps within the new policy framework and help bridge the gap that may develop in farm finances once the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) is gone.

"All farmers should be considering what they can do in terms of stewardship options now, don't just wait until ELMS is launched in 2024," says Services Leader Matt Ward. "Currently there's a great opportunity to get two bites of the cherry by

trying different stewardship options at the same time as still being able to claim some BPS.

"It is a very different world we're looking at though, which will require growers to be more flexible about how and where they grow crops and think carefully about where stewardship options best fit into their own business."

Explore the options

Understanding what is available and seeing how various options perform in a normal farm situation allows more informed decisions to be made, says Hutchinsons environmental services specialist Matt England, whose 180 ha (450-acre) family farm is hosting and managing the trials.

The site, which is predominantly on heavier clay-based soil, includes spring-drilled plots of 16 different species sown as straights, allowing growers to see the characteristics and growth habits of exotic species like sorghum, reed millet, camelina and quinoa, alongside more familiar names such as kale, stubble turnip and sunflower.

"Many species will be new to a lot of farmers, so it's interesting to see their characterises and how they grow in UK conditions. We've been fortunate with the rain in May coming straight after drilling, which really helped plots establish, so they should look fantastic by September."

A range of seed mixes has also been established, including the two-year legume option (with and without grass) and other flower/nectar-rich mixes, that are already attracting considerable interest among farmers in existing stewardship schemes, the ELMS pilot, and the regenerative agriculture movement.

"Weed control is one of the biggest challenges many growers face when establishing stewardship mixes, which is why we've included a herbicide trial of pre-em, post-em and a combination of both to see what works across the different species and seed mixtures," adds Mr England.

"If you can keep these mixes weed-free, it is much better for biodiversity as it allows the flowering and seed-producing species to thrive, rather than having them outcompeted by weeds.

"Ultimately, if you're going to be putting a percentage of your farm down to these kinds of mixes now and in the future, you've got to select the most appropriate options for your situation and manage them well to get the most out of them."

The impact of stewardship mixes on soil health is another area being investigated at the Warboys site, which has been assessed before drilling to provide a baseline from which any changes can be measured. "Many stewardship and cover crop mixes can have a beneficial impact on soil health, organic matter and biodiversity, so we hope to be able to show that change over time."

Book your place

The Hutchinsons environmental stewardship open day takes place on Thursday 16 September, near Warboys in Cambridgeshire. Advance booking is essential, so please email bookings@hlh ltd.co.uk or visit the events section at www.hlh ltd.co.uk for more details and to secure your place.

Ease of connectivity

makes transition to variable rate applications smoother than ever before



2018 saw the launch of Omnia's Connect app – a cost-effective solution designed to simplify and streamline precision farming by connecting growers to their machines to enable variable rate control, streamlining precision farming operations and providing greater control and improving efficiency.

The iPad app allows the user to seamlessly and instantly send variable application maps created in Omnia to the field, and also controls the spreader, sprayer or drill. There is no handling of data and maps can be sent by any user to anywhere.

It's really cost-effective in that it is one system that can be used across multiple machines and operations.

Robert Sullivan of GSC Grays and farm manager of Raby Estates, has been looking at how to introduce variable rate applications across the two farms that make up the estate in both Durham and Shropshire.

"We had already started using Omnia on our Shropshire farm and were impressed with it, and had confidence in the system, so it made sense for us to look at how we might be able to make it work in Durham.

"On a more strategic basis it would also allow us to record and share

data across the two farms and make well-informed management decisions accordingly.

"One of the challenges we faced was the logistics of our Durham farm - the 2800 acres of combinable arable cropping is spread out with 16 miles of road between the most eastern and westerly fields.

"Hutchinsons agronomist George Robson introduced us to the Omnia precision expert Lewis McKerrow who talked us through the Connect app and how easy it would be to generate and share variable rate plans across the machines on the farm – irrespective of geography!



George Robson
(Hutchinsons Agronomist)

"Lewis made the initial set up very straightforward and, importantly in a language, that a farmer like myself could understand and interpret!



Robert Sullivan
(of GSC Grays and Farm Manager
of Raby Estates)



Lewis McKerrow
(Omnia Digital Farming Manager)

"The first step was to bring across data from our earlier soil sampling service into Omnia to which we also added yield maps. Being able to use historical data was a real advantage, saving both time and money.

"Once all the data was inputted into Omnia and variable rate plans developed all we had to do was plug in the iPad. Using Connect, the plans were downloaded straight onto an iPad in the tractor cab - and then it's all systems go.

It's been so simple to use, he says.

"We don't have to worry about downloading the plans onto a memory stick and then doing the same again in the cab. The whole process is very intuitive, logical and very simple to use."

Initially Robert had planned to concentrate on variable rate P&K applications, but has also used it to produce variable rate drilling plans.

"We have now drilled variably for two years – and infact this year all of our combinable crops will be variably drilled.

"The benefits of this approach are without doubt more consistent crops, this was particularly noticeable in last year's spring barley. We started off on this journey thinking our main savings and benefits would be in variable fertilisers, but we have actually seen more value from the drilling in terms of yield benefits in the end."

For more information on Omnia Connect, please visit our website:

www.omniaprecision.co.uk
or email: consultancy@omniaprecision.co.uk



Neil Watson
(Technical Manager)

BYDV in winter cereals a resurgent challenge

Neil Watson (Hutchinsons Technical Manager) describes measures to mitigate the risks.

Why did we see more BYDV in crops this season?

BYDV is a challenge that we had considered largely negated or may never have experienced. This season brought back in sharp focus the threat we still face.

Last autumn proved the perfect storm for BYDV, a combination of early drilled crops and early aphid invasion. A risk that could have been mitigated if not for the fact a wet October prevented any spray applications until it was too late to prevent infection spreading beyond the primary infection sites. Historically seed treatments might have bought us enough time to cover this delay, yet since their demise we are only left with the contact insecticides.

What lessons can be learnt for this autumn

With last autumn still very fresh in most people's minds, the temptation will inevitably turn to drilling early, irrespective of the impact on BYDV control or even the hard-learned lessons for grass weed control.

The **implications for early drilling and BYDV** control are likely to be three-fold: -

- Firstly, the number of potential sprays needed throughout the autumn period will increase, due to the wider window of exposure from early drilling.
- A mild winter has the same effect at the other end of the autumn window of vulnerability. We seem to be in a run of mild winters and aphid flight into crops still occurs beyond 11 degree C air temperatures.
- Winter temperatures also impact aphid survival and the potential for secondary infection.
- Despite our best endeavours, it is increasingly likely we will see some BYDV in our crops. It will be because of timing issues and relatively short persistency of the products we are now having to rely upon.

Is the risk inherently likely to be greater this season than last?

What is clear: -

- There is a greater potential source of infection in the present crops than in previous years.
- With seed size in the current harvest crops being small, a greater proportion will be blown out the back of combines as volunteers (as is the case at the time of writing in barley crops cut to date). It is therefore even more important to follow best advice and remove green stubbles, a primary source of infection (spraying off, or cultivation of volunteers at least 5 weeks before drilling will help reduce the survival and early ingress of aphids into newly drilled crops).
- Time BYDV sprays when required – this means not delaying application to suit other applications to the crop.

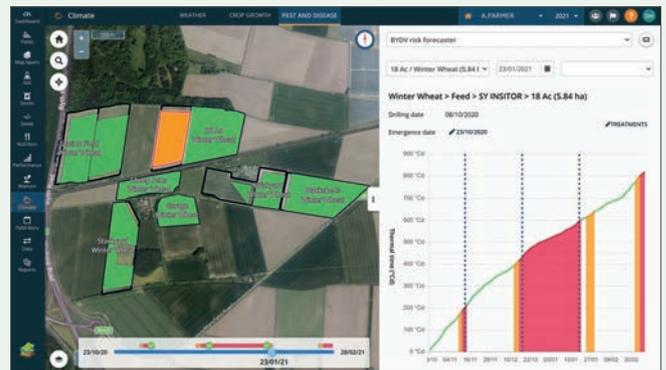
With aphids it is not just a numbers game

- The other surprising factor, highlighted by some recent monitoring, was the potential number of aphids carrying virus. Numbers were considerably higher in some sites than the traditional 5% considered the norm.

Can we take some of the guess work out of product timing?

Last year we introduced a new Climate module into our Omnia Precision web-based software.

The BYDV risk tool combines 1km accurate weather (temperature is key) data, with the drilling date of the crop to give a field-by-field risk level as shown below. This gives a prediction of risk in a traffic light-based system, whereby red is highest level of risk and fields will need inspection for aphid infestation.



BYDV risk forecaster screen within Omnia

Do Tolerant varieties have a role to play?

The simple answer is yes, more options are available in hybrid barley than in wheat at present, although remember it will not alleviate the need for a contact insecticide. It just means if timings become compromised the impact on yield would not be as great.

Will reducing crop stress minimise the impact of BYDV?

It is also important to try to limit crop stress, particularly anything which might increase crop yellowing - whether that means maintaining adequate supply of micro nutrition, or minimising crop damage from herbicide stacks. This is because crop yellowing seems to attract aphid in to the crop.

If you have questions about the risks posed by BYDV, please contact us: information@hlhld.co.uk

Small steps to creating more resilient and profitable farming

This is how Ed Brown, heading up Hutchinsons new Agroecological services, summarises what underpins Agroecology.



Agroecology is a term that has come into fairly frequent use over recent years and is often associated with radical changes to standard arable farm practices. However this is a misconception he points out, as it really doesn't require a big sea change or leap into the unknown, and it's important to recognise this.

In fact, many agroecological principles such as reducing cultivations, using cover crops, and reintroducing livestock are already being carried out on many farms across the UK.

Agroecology is all about farming in partnership with nature - working with - rather than pushing against it. The arguments for this approach are compelling and a more environmentally focussed path is undoubtedly the way farming is heading. It also has political support which undoubtedly will create opportunities for growers to access new markets and income streams.

Every farm is different with its own set of challenges - so it's always worth trialling new ideas and techniques first to determine what works for that given farm. **Keep an open mind.**

Everything starts with the soil; if soils are healthy, they are more resilient, which in turn results in healthier crops that are able to reach their full potential even under more challenging weather conditions - the bottom line being improved profitability year in and year out. Many practices that build and maintain the natural fertility of soils are already being carried out on many farms.

Steps to adopting an Agroecological approach

Minimising disturbance - reducing or eliminating tillage wherever possible, minimal, and targeted use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Always keeping the soil covered - never leave the soils bare, return crop residues to the surface to armour the soil, utilise catch and cover crops effectively.

Maintain living roots throughout the year - roots help to stabilise, structure and aerate the soil whilst providing drainage channels, roots also feed soil organisms with carbon rich exudates.

Maximising the diversity of rotations; avoiding monocultures. Utilising intercropping, companion cropping and variety blends, integrating multispecies catch and cover crops is an important aspect of this. We have constructed a range of catch and cover crop mixes to suit all situations, these diverse mixes use reliable and high performing species, and our agronomists are well versed in how these are best utilised to deliver key objectives for particular situations.

Well managed grazing of livestock of forage and cover crops can also further enhance soil health.

Enhancing biodiversity and protecting natural resources.

Managing carbon and agroecology work hand in hand - the fundamental principles of agroecology help to reduce CO₂ emissions and enhance carbon sequestration.

Integrated Crop Management - agroecology utilises all available cultural control methods and aims to maximise plant health using forecasting and decision-making tools that allow for appropriate and targeted applications when necessary.

Enhanced crop nutrition - a healthy plant needs a balanced and adequate level of 16 elements. Soil testing and getting to know what is happening to these elements throughout the year is key. An ideal time to do this is early autumn.

Using technology to help plan, map and understand the impact that any agroecological practices can have.

Recognising industry demand for advice and support in making any changes, and to maximise opportunities from an agroecological approach, Hutchinsons has been developing and trialling different approaches and technologies on its Helix farms, as well as investing in training specialists across the business that can deliver these objectives across UK farms.

To find out more please contact us:
information@hlhlt.co.uk

For more information on any of our products or services, please contact your local Hutchinsons agronomist, or contact us at:

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