

FARMING AND PROPERTY BULLETIN – APRIL 2017

BPS 2017

The application period for this year's applications is now underway. In general the online system has not changed since last year. A few points to look out for when completing your application are detailed below:

Missing or Amended Land Parcels

Before starting your application you should check your land parcels on the 'land viewer' carefully. In a number of cases maps have been updated by the RPA resulting in missing parcels or incorrect boundaries.

Parcels can be re-added to your claim by emailing the RPA at ruralpayments@defra.gsi.gov.uk and making the subject 'Add Land'.

To amend an incorrect boundary a paper RLE1 form must still be submitted. The parcel should then be added to a paper continuation sheet to accompany the BP5 form, detailing the correct areas as per the RLE1.

Online Greening Checker

The RPA have confirmed the online 'greening checker' which shows on the BP5 application summary to confirm whether the requirements of Crop Diversification and Ecological Focus Areas have been met is not working in some instances. They have confirmed it will not work if:

- There are 'under declared' areas on the land use table.
- There is organic land and the organic exemption is being applied for.
- The 'new land, new crops' crop diversification exemption is being used.
- Land has been included on a paper continuation booklet.
- There is land in another part of the UK.

In all instances we would recommend you carefully check your greening percentages manually rather than relying solely on the RPA checker.

Entitlement Trading

The deadline to transfer entitlements is the 15th May 2017. Entitlements are currently trading in the region of £170 per hectare.

RPA Drop-in Centres

The RPA drop-in centres opened on the 3rd April. The local centre is in Reading and is open between 8.30am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. The address is North Gate House, 21-23 Valpy Street, Reading, RG1 1AF.

Ecological Focus Areas

The European Commission have now confirmed the percentage of arable land that must be allocated as Ecological Focus Areas (EFA) will not be increased from 5% to 7% as had been suggested. This is due to the fact that the amount of arable land allocated as EFAs in 2015 exceeded the 7% threshold, indeed 10% of all arable land across the EU was allocated as EFA.

The study found that Nitrogen Fixing Crops were the most popular option, accounting for 39% of EFAs. In contrast hedgerows accounted for only 1.7% of the total area and buffer strips 0.7%.

Countryside Stewardship

Applications are now open for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This applies to agreements that will commence on the 1st January 2018.

Whilst some functions for Countryside Stewardship are available online the initial application must still be made on paper. The application forms must be requested by the 31st July 2017 for mid-tier applications and submitted by the 30th September 2017. Full scheme guidance can be found on www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management

Key BPS Dates to Remember:

- **1st May 2017** – All nitrogen fixing crops for Ecological Focus Areas should be in the ground by this date in accordance with the BPS 2017 rules.
- **1st May 2017** – The beginning of the cropping and fallow period for Crop Diversification measures of greening under the Basic Payment Scheme.
- **15th May 2017** – Deadline for submission of Basic Payment Scheme Applications to the Rural Payments Agency.
- **15th May 2017** – Deadline for land and entitlement transfers, young farmer applications and the submission of supporting evidence for active farmer, young or new entrant applications
- **31st May 2017** – deadline to make certain changes to a BPS application without receiving a penalty.
- **9th June 2017** – BPS Late Application Deadline. Deadline for late applications or late amendments, both will be penalised. Applications beyond this date will not be accepted.
- **31st August 2017** – EFA catch crops must be established by this date.
- **1st October 2017** – EFA catch crops must be retained until this date. Also the deadline for EFA cover crops to be established.
- **15th January 2018** – EFA cover crops must be retained until this date.

Other Key Dates to Remember:

- **1st May 2017** – you cannot carry out hedge or tree coppicing or hedge laying from this date until the 31st August 2017.
- **15th May 2017** – Deadline to submit Environmental Stewardship claim forms to Natural England. These forms will be sent to all Agreement Holders for completion and return.
- **15th May 2017** – Deadline to submit Countryside Stewardship claim forms to Natural England. Countryside Stewardship claim forms must be completed online using the Rural Payments System.