



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Agri-Environment Control & Verification

Reduced and no input options

Commitments we use in the England RDP under the AECM measure

We have a range of options where we reduce or stop application of inputs in terms of quantity, dates and type of input:

- A **Reduced input** commitment which stops application of fertilisers or manure in years when the parcel is not cut for hay, haylage or silage and restricts application of fertilisers or manures to particular levels in the years when it is cut. Further restrictions will apply to stop agreement holders from increase their current application rates and from applying any inputs at specific times of the year. (E.g. Grassland).
- A **Reduced input** commitment which allows for application of specific levels of livestock manure. Further restrictions will apply to stop agreement holders from applying any inputs at specific times of the year. (E.g. Grassland).
- A **No input** commitment that does not allow for application of fertilisers and manures. (E.g. Buffers).
- A **No input** commitment that does not allow for application of inorganic fertilisers containing Nitrogen (Legume and herb sward).
- A **No input** commitment which stops application of fertilisers or manures between certain dates. (E.g. livestock removal).

Why Do We Do This?

Improving water quality:

- Reduced, low or no nutrient inputs can help to address diffuse water pollution from agriculture to help meet commitments under the Water Framework Directive which include commitments for Natura 2000 protected areas and the provision of drinking water. In addition the farming sector is also threatened by unsustainable use of soils and its continued environmental degradation.

Air quality and nitrogen deposition:

- Reduced or low input commitments will help to maintain and buffer sensitive habitats, for example, lowland heathland and acid grassland, are characterised by their low nutrient status, and low input levels. In many areas atmospheric deposition of nitrogen is increasing fertility levels, strengthening the case for the buffering of sensitive habitats

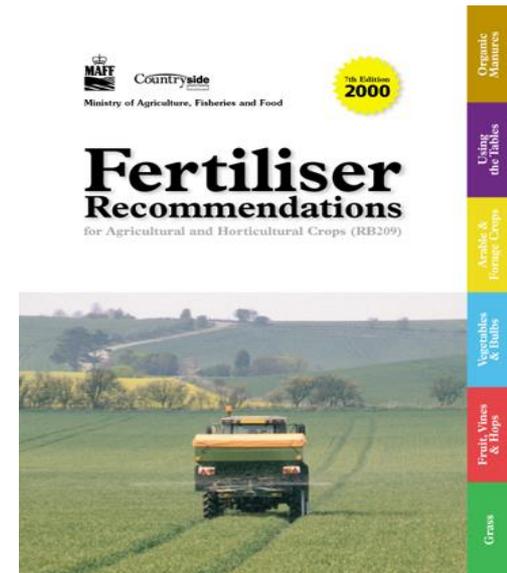
Why Do We Do This?

Biodiversity:

- Reduced or low nutrient inputs and herbicides restrictions will improve the biodiversity of the targeted area, protect grass swards and also support the species that rely on these swards and habitats.
- Botanical diversity is best achieved by maintaining low soil fertility on existing species-rich grassland and targeting low fertility sites for restoration and creation of new habitat.
- Low rates of Farm Yard Manure (FYM) can have positive effects on insects and earthworms, to support a range of bird species such as yellow wagtails, skylarks and breeding waders.

Using a recommended fertiliser management system

- Assess the fertiliser requirement for the range of crops you plan to grow
- Account for both mineral fertilisers and integration of other sources of nutrients such as manures and slurries
- Decide the correct amount of nutrient to use along with planning how they are managed and applied
- Supported where appropriate by professional advice
- Record of applications



Using a recommended fertiliser management system

Recommended fertiliser management systems utilise a range of reliable information:

- Soil type
- Rainfall
- Field cropping
- Fertilising and manuring history
- Regular soil analysis for soil mineral nitrogen, pH, P, K & Mg
- Nutrient balances - surplus or deficit from applications to previous crops
- Assessment of available nutrients from organic manures
- Crop tissue analysis where appropriate

Soil Nutrient Testing

- We use nutrient testing at the start and end of agreements.
- To test for eligibility at the start of an agreement
- To set a nutrient level
- And at the end of the agreement to ascertain performance

- Not always appropriate e.g. water inundation or a high water table – coastal, fen, reedbed, raised bog, moorland and water meadows.



Role of advice

- Reduced input commitment for water options has a mandatory link to advice to ensure the adoption of recommended fertiliser management system for any farmers are not already using such a system.
- Facilitation and advice is also be used to drive agreement and option uptake in targeted priority areas.
- Low input biodiversity options will be targeted and supported with a high level of advice and facilitation to ensure land managers understand how to implement options to deliver the desired environmental benefit.

Controlling reduced, low and no inputs

Guidance and training to administration staff

CPA1 Training for administration staff

- Operational manual for advisors setting up the agreement
- Training to all staff involved in signing up options.
- Guidance and training to staff processing claims
- Guidance and training to inspectors on on-farm checks

Information, advice and guidance is provided to beneficiaries

CPA2: Information, training and advice for beneficiaries

CPA3: Information campaigns and guidance documents

- Information to agreement holders via scheme literature
- Advice from advisor setting up the agreement throughout set-up period
- Qualified external advice on input management

Controlling reduced, low and no inputs

Record keeping and documentation is kept by agreement holder / delegated body

CPA7 Improving internal control and coordination procedures

- A copy of the agreement is held by the agreement holder that includes a map of option locations
- Agreement holder must acknowledge receipt of commitments and confirm annually that commitments are still being met at claim
- An initial **soil sample** results are taken by advisors to help the agreement holder to self-monitor the condition of the land for highly targeted options. This is held on the agreement file and by the agreement holder
- Agreement holders following a **fertiliser management system** are required to hold records and documentation to show that they are following the system at a **whole-farm level**
- Recognised low input farmers are required to demonstrate eligibility of their status
- Agreement holders are required to keep input records for the areas under the agreement setting out **quantity, type** and the **timing** of input use

Controlling reduced, low and no inputs

Appropriate IT and Administrative checks are carried out

CPA4 Improvement of IT tools

CPA7 Improving internal control and coordination procedures

- An administrative check that the agreement holder has acknowledged receipt of the requirements. A record of this will be stored with the agreement
- An administrative check will be completed for claims to confirm the appropriate declarations have been made
- An IT check against location and land-use will be made
- Agreement holders may be asked to submit copies of on-farm records which will be checked for discrepancies
- An administrative check will be undertaken to confirm recognised low input status
- Procurement of external advice will include checks on relevant qualifications and experience of advisors.
- Delivery body advisers will visit all Higher Tier agreements once during the life time of the agreement to check understanding of the requirements and that the agreement holder has undertaken appropriate management of the site

Controlling reduced, low and no inputs

Appropriate inspection checks are carried out:

CPA7 Improving internal control and coordination procedures

Inspectors are required to:

- Visit all parcels and make a visual check of the condition of the land to assess whether it is consistent with the required level of inputs
- Annotate maps for relevant parcels or part-parcels where the agreement contains low input requirements;
- Annotate **no inputs** used if visual check suggests that they have not been used (and how this fits with specific times)
- Record concerns about input levels on the inspection report forms
- Check relevant input records of **input records** (for time-limited options) and **fertiliser management records**.
- Check independent soil sampling has been carried out at the beginning of agreement and at end, where appropriate
- Check **external advice** has been provided on use of a fertiliser management system and / or follow-up meeting has taken place with appropriate documentation retained from adviser visits
- Quantity check of inorganic and organic input products where a concern about usage is found

Controlling reduced, low and no inputs

Proportionate penalties are applied

CPA8 Making the system of reducing payments apply penalties proportionate to the gravity of the infringement

We have a penalty system that takes account of the severity, extent, duration and reoccurrence of the non-compliance.

Conclusions

- Options targeted at sites of high environmental value
- Site-specific advice provided to the agreement holder on how to manage the options, and to the paying agency on how to control the management of the option
- Agreement holders will be required to keep and make available detailed records of the management of the areas
- Where activities can be checked against external data sources, an administrative check will be carried out
- Inspections will be timed where possible to take place during the period the commitment must be met
- Inspections outside this period will confirm the condition of areas is consistent with the management records
- Sampling and analysis will be employed where it can help confirm the option has been managed correctly

Questions and discussion

Is the control and verification regime proportionate for the environmental gains that we are seeking?