

UTASS BRIEFING 13th February 2026



SFI UPDATE FOR 2026

Defra has announced that the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) will reopen in two application windows in 2026. This is welcome news following the sudden closure of the scheme in March 2025.

What We Know...

Applications will reopen in:

- **June 2026** – Initially for smaller farms and those without an existing ELM agreement (further detail on eligibility is still to be confirmed).
- **September 2026** – Open to all farmers.

What We're Waiting to See...

- How Defra will define “small farms” for the June application window
- What changes will be made to the action menu and payment rates
- How budgets, limits and demand will be managed

What You Can Do Now...

Interest in the scheme is likely to be high. Ensuring your maps and land details are accurate and up to date is essential. If you need assistance reviewing or updating your maps, please contact the office to make an appointment with one of the farming team.

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES – EXTENDED TO 2029

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) program has been extended and will now run from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029. Funding is available for one-off projects that:

- Support nature recovery
- Tackle climate change
- Improve access and understanding of the landscape
- Strengthen sustainable farm businesses

For guidance, application forms and further details you can reach the team on: FIPL@northpennines.org.uk or 01388 528801

CARCASE CLASSIFICATION

From 12th January 2026 a compulsory dressing spec for sheep has been introduced. This will apply to all sheep under 12 months going to abattoirs slaughtering more than 2,000 per week.

- The end of individual “company” specs.
- Now just Reference Spec and UK Standard Spec (additional removal of kidney knobs, channel fat and diaphragm).
- SEUROP confirmation and fat class 1-5 with three subdivisions retained.
- Cold weight rebate a fixed 2% rounded up to 1 decimal place.

This should ensure a more consistent and transparent deadweight payment system and give farmers the opportunity to compare prices offered by abattoirs and collecting centres on a like for like basis.

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HEDGEROW MANAGEMENT RULES

Farmers managing hedgerows on agricultural land must follow **two main rules** under the **Management of Hedgerows (England) Regulations**, which came into force in **May 2024**:

1. **No cutting or trimming hedges from 1 March to 31 August**
 - Only allowed for **safety, access, or urgent health reasons**.
 - Protects **birds and wildlife** during the nesting season.

2. **Keep a 2-metre buffer strip on each side of the hedge**
 - Measured from the centre of the hedge.
 - Green cover must be maintained.
 - No ploughing, fertilising, or spraying pesticides in this area.
 - Exceptions only for spot treatment of invasive weeds or specific cases.

For full details, exemptions, and guidance, visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

DELINKED PAYMENTS 2026 and 2027

Defra has just announced further reductions to delinked payments for 2026 and 2027. This means payments will be much lower over the next two years. Your payment will be based on your reference amount, but large reductions will be applied:

- Up to £30,000 → reduced by 98%
- Above £30,000 → reduced by 100%

This means you will only receive 2% of the first £30,000 and nothing on any amount above £30,000. Payments for both 2026 and 2027 are expected to be made as one single payment each August.

Need help? Contact the UTASS Farming Team for help with anything mentioned in this briefing or anything else farming related.

Phone: 01833 641010

Email: info@utass.org

UPCOMING TRAINING DATES

- 27 February – Emergency First Aid at Work, UTASS
- 4 March – Rodenticide Training, UTASS
- 7 March – Rodenticide Assessment, UTASS
- 27 March – Emergency First Aid at Work, UTASS
- 24 April - Emergency First Aid at Work, UTASS
- 22 May - Emergency First Aid at Work, UTASS
- 6 June – Dry Stone Walling Taster Day, Woodland
- 26 June – Emergency First Aid at Work, UTASS
- 27 & 28 June – Sheep Shearing – Woodland
- 18 July – Dry Stone Walling Taster Day, Woodland

Contact jo@utass.org for all your training needs or call 01833 641010

PLEASE TURN OVER