



Sustainable Farming Scheme 2026 Universal Actions Compliance Summary

Overview - The Universal Layer

The SFS Universal Layer comprises 12 Universal Actions (UAs). Farmers must complete all applicable UAs each calendar year to receive the Universal Payment. Some UAs do not apply to every farm; these are noted below. The Universal Payment in 2026 is intended to be equivalent to the outgoing Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

**Source: Welsh Government SFS 2026 Scheme Description (Information correct as of June 2026)*

UA1: Soil Health	
Who must do it	All farms with agriculturally improved land (land that has received, or may receive, inputs or lime). Excludes land classified as habitat under UA5.
What is required	Test at least 20% of improved land each year on a rolling 5-year cycle (all improved fields tested within 5 years). Tests must cover: Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K), Magnesium (Mg), pH and Soil Organic Matter (SOM). Enter results on RPW Online for each field parcel. Option to skip Year 2 testing if time is needed to interpret year 1's results - extends the cycle to 6 years.
Deadline	All tests completed by the end of each calendar year.
Evidence	Results entered on RPW Online per parcel. Keep records for 5 years.
Prepare now	Soil tests including P, K, Mg and pH carried out up to 4 years before entering the scheme count towards this action, even if SOM was not included. SOM will still need to be tested within the 5-year cycle.

UA2: Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

This UA applies only to farms that use plant protection products (PPPs). If no PPPs are used on the holding, UA2 does not apply and declare nil use on RPW Online.

Who must do it	Any farm that uses plant protection products (PPPs): insecticides, herbicides, fungicides (including seed treatments/dressings), molluscicides, or plant growth regulators. Farms using no PPPs declare nil use on RPW Online.
What is IPM?	Integrated Pest Management uses a combination of cultural, biological, mechanical and chemical measures to reduce reliance on pesticides. The SFS requires evidence of an active IPM approach, not simply routine spraying.
Annual IPM Assessment and Plan	Complete an IPM Assessment for the farm each calendar year. Identify pests, weeds and diseases present or likely and their economic/environmental thresholds. Record IPM measures considered and/or used for each pest/weed/disease (cultural, biological, mechanical and chemical options). Produce an annual IPM Plan setting out which non-chemical measures will be used, when chemical control is justified, and which products will be used. The Plan is not submitted to Welsh Government keep on file for 5 years, available on inspection.
PPP application records	Record every PPP application made during the year. Each record must include: Product name (including active ingredient) Amount used (rate per hectare and total quantity) Date of application Field or parcel applied to Area treated (hectares) Crop or situation treated Reason for application (pest/weed/disease targeted) Weather conditions at time of application Retain all records for a minimum of 5 years.
What counts as IPM activity	Crop rotation designed to break pest/disease cycles. Use of resistant or tolerant varieties. Monitoring (field scouting, traps, thresholds) to time or justify spray decisions. Use of biological controls (e.g. beneficial insects, biocontrol products). Mechanical or cultural weed management (e.g. tillage, cultivations). Spot treatment rather than blanket application where appropriate. Calibrated equipment regular sprayer testing and maintenance.
Deadline	IPM Plan completed by the end of each calendar year. Records kept ongoing throughout the year.
Evidence	Annual declaration on RPW Online. IPM Assessment + Plan and all PPP application records kept for 5 years, not submitted but available on inspection.
Prepare now	If not already keeping spray records digitally, set up a system before the scheme starts. Farming Connect can provide advice on IPM approaches and record keeping.

UA3: Benchmarking

Who must do it	All farms in the scheme.
What is required	Option A: Complete benchmarking through the Farming Connect tool FARMDATA+. Option B: Declare on RPW Online which approved industry benchmarking tool you are using (e.g. via a levy board, dairy processor or other approved provider). Single sector farms (e.g. beef only): minimum 2 sector KPIs + 1 Whole Farm KPI. Multi-sector farms: minimum 2 sector-specific KPIs per sector + 1 Whole Farm KPI. KPI results are private. The Welsh Government only receives the KPI titles, not the data. You do not need to use the same KPIs each year.
Deadline	By end of each calendar year.
Evidence	FARMDATA+ titles automatically shared with RPW. For external tools, record the tool name on RPW Online. Keep results for 5 years.
Prepare now	FARMDATA+ can be used now to familiarise before the scheme starts. Farming Connect ICT & Digital Support provides fully funded assistance to set up and use FARMDATA+.

UA4: Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Year 1 only: complete the Health & Safety e-learning module (Farming Connect) and confirm on the SFS dashboard by 15 January 2027.

Who must do it	Every farm business. Multiple partners/directors can share the requirement between them.
What is required	Minimum 6 hours of learning per scheme year, covering one or more Sustainable Land Management objectives. Plus Year 1 only: complete the Health & Safety e-learning module (Farming Connect). Must be confirmed on the SFS dashboard by 15 January 2027. Subsequent years: health and safety or wellbeing learning from external providers also counts. Accepted formats: discussion groups, masterclasses, accredited training, e-learning, mentoring, Agri Academy, Agrisgop, On Farm events. BCS and Mobility Scoring training completed under UA12 counts toward the 6 hours if done by a business partner/owner (not an employee). Learning records held on Farming Connect's Storfa Sgiliau platform are automatically shared with RPW no further action needed if this covers the full 6 hours.
Deadline	Learning is completed by the end of the calendar year. Confirm H&S module on SFS dashboard by 15 January 2027 (Year 1).
Evidence	Farming Connect: automatic via Storfa Sgiliau. External providers: record course name, date, length and person on RPW Online. Keep certificates for 5 years.
Prepare now	Any Farming Connect pre-SFS learning from Summer 2025 counts toward the 2026 scheme year.

UA5: Habitat Maintenance

Who must do it	Farms with any of the 12 classified habitat types on their holding. If no classified habitat exists, UA5 does not apply but UA6 will apply to reach the 10% scheme requirement.
The 12 habitat types	1. Coastal saltmarsh 2. Coastal sand dune and shingle beach 3. Lowland and coastal heath 4. Enclosed wetland and marshy grassland (lowland bogs, fens, flush/mire; marshy grassland) 5. Enclosed semi-natural dry grassland (grazed pasture or hay meadow) 6. Upland open habitats 7. Traditional orchards 8. Dense bracken 9. Scrub 10. Wood pasture 11. Permanent wildlife ponds 12. Newly created habitat on improved land (streamside corridors, restored peat, no-input grassland, other habitat creation areas)
What is required	Maintain all habitat areas in accordance with Annex 5 requirements for each specific habitat type. Keep an activity diary for every habitat parcel and record all relevant management activities throughout the year. Habitat land maintained under UA5 counts toward the scheme requirement for 10% of the farm to be habitat.
Key Annex 5 rules (all habitat types)	No ploughing, reseeding, cultivation or agricultural improvement of habitat land. No application of fertiliser, lime, slurry or manure on habitat land (farmyard manure only where specifically permitted by a habitat action). No plant protection products on habitat land except: spot treatment of injurious weeds (creeping/spear thistle, docks, ragwort), control of invasive non-native species (Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, rhododendron). No rolling or chain harrowing on habitat land between 15 March and 15 July. No clearing ditches on habitat land between 1 March and 31 August. No supplementary feeding within 10m of any watercourse. No bale feeders or troughs on habitat land at any time. Avoid poaching. Poached and bare areas must remain under 5% of the total habitat parcel. No storage of machinery, vehicles, manure, silage or waste materials on habitat land. No new drainage or modification of existing drainage on habitat land or within 100m of wetland habitat.
Hedgerows counting towards 10%	A hedgerow only counts toward the 10% habitat figure if it meets all of the following: At least 3m wide AND 2m tall (or 2m wide and 3m tall) Gaps total no more than 5% of hedgerow length Minimum 3m between double fences (or 2m where established under previous Glastir support) Broadleaved woodland and habitats established since 2022 (streamside corridors, ponds, woodland, hedges) also count toward the 10%.

Annex 5 marshy grassland	During summer (1 June 30 August): at least 75% of the grassland (excluding rushes) must be between 10cm and 50cm tall. Remove livestock if conditions become too wet to prevent poaching and compaction. Do not plant new trees on enclosed wetland; do not cut rushes between 15 March and 15 July; do not top more than 30% of rush in any one year.
Deadline	Ongoing management requirements apply throughout the calendar year.
Evidence	Activity diary for each habitat parcel. Keep for 5 years and available on inspection.

UA6: Temporary Habitat Creation on Improved Land

Who must do it	Only farms that do not have sufficient existing habitat to meet the scheme requirement of 10% of the farm as habitat. Does not apply if 10% is already achieved through UA5 and qualifying hedgerows/woodland.
What is required	Create enough temporary habitat on improved land so that total habitat area (existing + new) reaches 10% of the farm by the end of the calendar year. Choose one or more options from the approved list below. Manage each habitat type in accordance with Annex 6 requirements. Keep an activity diary for each parcel (establishment dates, cutting dates, seed labels/invoices). Retain for 5 years. Record crop codes on SAF (can be added as secondary crops if established later in year).
Approved temporary habitat options	Fallow crop margins Unfertilised, unsprayed and unharvested cereal and linseed headlands Fixed rough grass margins on arable land Rotational rough grass margins on arable land Unsprayed spring sown cereal and protein crop mix with stubbles retained Retain cereal winter stubbles Wildlife cover crop on improved land Unsprayed, unfertilised and uncultivated buffer adjacent to existing habitat (including open water) on improved grassland Mixed leys / herbal leys on improved land Late cut improved grasslands Improved grassland allowed to set seed
Note on grassland	Take care selecting permanent grassland (GR2 on SAF) for cultivation land under 10 years old provides a guide. Check EIA (Agriculture) Regulations 2017 definition of 'improved land' before cultivating.
Deadline	Habitat is established by the end of calendar year. Multi-year habitats (e.g. herbal leys) carry over into the next year.
Evidence	Crop codes on SAF; activity diary per parcel.

UA7: Designated Site Management Plan

Who must do it	Farms that include part or all of a designated site (SSSI, SAC, SPA, RAMSAR, NNR) where the farmer has management control or agreement of the landowner. RPW confirms designated sites via the RPW Online interactive map.
What is required	Work in partnership with RPW and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to develop a Designated Site Management Plan and agree a Schedule of Works. A buffer area around the designated site may also be included on a case-by-case basis, agreed voluntarily. Existing Section 16 Agreements with NRW, or Glastir Advanced contracts maintained through HWS 2024 and 2025, may already satisfy this requirement.
Deadline	End of 2030. NRW will contact farms in turn - no immediate action needed until NRW contacts you.
Evidence	RPW and NRW produce the Management Plan, no evidence submission required from the farmer.
Prepare now	Check RPW Online interactive map and NRW MAGIC map to confirm whether any farm parcels fall within or adjacent to a designated site.

UA8: Hedgerow Management

Who must do it	All farms with hedgerows where the farmer has management control, including your side of shared boundaries with neighbours or roadsides.
Must do	Allow hedgerows to grow by at least 5cm taller and wider each time they are cut, until the hedge reaches 3m x 2m (or 2m x 3m). Once at that size, you choose whether to maintain it there or let it grow further. Maintain or establish at least 1 hedgerow tree per 50m of hedgerow on average. Declare annually on RPW Online that requirements are being met.
Must not	Cut the same hedgerow in two successive years - alternate hedgerows each year. Cut hedgerows back below the achieved height (except as part of coppicing or laying to rejuvenate a mature hedge). Cut hedgerows or hedgerow trees between 1 March and 31 August. Permitted exceptions: Overhanging a highway, road, track or footpath where work is necessary for health and safety As part of routine ditch maintenance on improved land Utility companies maintaining electricity or telephone lines Where winter arable crop establishment requires cutting before 31 August
Bramble	Cutting encroaching bramble outside the hedge profile for animal health and welfare reasons is permitted outside the nesting season.
Hedgerow trees	In areas important for ground-nesting birds (e.g. curlew) or exposed coastal areas, the hedgerow tree requirement may not be appropriate - considered on a case-by-case basis.
Deadline	Ongoing annual management requirement throughout the year.
Evidence	Annual declaration on RPW Online. Hedgerow condition, incremental growth and hedgerow tree numbers checked visually on inspection.

UA9: Woodland Maintenance

Who must do it	Farms with existing woodland of at least 0.1ha and at least 20% canopy cover (or potential to achieve 20%). Individual trees and groups under 0.1ha are covered by Part 3 (Trees) of the Universal Code instead.
What is required (Annex 7)	Felling limited to 1 September 28 February, and no more than 5m per quarter. Retain standing dead trees where safe. Fallen dead timber to be kept in situ or moved to a nearby shady location (all species except spruce). Protect native ground flora, trees and roots from damage caused by cultivation, compaction, machinery or agrochemicals (including fertilisers). Monitor grazing pressure, keeping livestock impact low. Avoid woodland grazing in spring and early summer. Avoid supplementary feeding in woodland where possible. Meet requirements of the Universal Code (Annex 2) for trees.
Key Universal Code rules for trees (Annex 2)	Prevent damage to trees from livestock or machinery. Do not plough, fertilise or lime under the crown/canopy. Do not spray or allow PPP drift under the canopy. Do not plant additional trees within 5m from the edge of the tree canopy. Do not cut or trim trees between 1 March and 31 August (same exceptions as UA8). Report potential tree health diseases via the Tree Alert website.
Deadline	Ongoing requirements apply throughout the year.
Evidence	Declaration on SAF/RPW Online confirming woodland maintenance. Woodland condition checked visually on inspection. Keep felling exemption evidence for 5 years.

UA10: Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan

Hard deadline: Opportunity Plan must be created on RPW Online by 31 December 2026. This is the only Year 1 action with a fixed end-of-year deadline. Do not leave this until last.

Who must do it	ALL farms in the SFS - no exceptions.
What is required	Create a Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan (map) on RPW Online by 31 December 2026, identifying locations where 250+ trees or new hedgerows could be planted. No specialist support needed RPW will automatically highlight sensitivities (SSSI, curlew habitat etc.) when the map is completed. Plant a minimum of 250 trees (or 0.1ha of new woodland/hedgerow) by 31 December 2028. The plan can be amended after Year 1 if land or tenancy circumstances change.
What counts toward planting	Any planting since 1 April 2022 already counts. Trees in pasture (agroforestry / silvopasture). Trees planted in hedgerows. Small shelterbelts or woodland areas. New hedgerow creation or restoration. Broadleaved woodland created under this action also counts toward the 10% habitat scheme requirement once established.

Tenant note	Discuss with landowner tenancy agreements may restrict planting. Temporary habitats (UA6) are compatible with tenancies.
Deadline	Opportunity Plan on RPW Online: 31 December 2026. Planting started: by 31 December 2028.
Evidence	Plan on RPW Online. Progress recorded automatically if Welsh Government funded, or updated on SAF if not.

UA11: Historic Environment

Who must do it	Farms with any of the following: scheduled monuments, historic environment features (individual features or archaeologically sensitive areas), registered parks and gardens, or traditional farm buildings.
What is required (Annex 8)	Confirm historic assets on your farm on SAF 2026 RPW provide the information they hold to help with this. Maintain all historic assets in line with Annex 8 requirements throughout the year. The general approach is 'do no damage' monitoring, basic maintenance and protection of features. No requirement to reinstate features to their original condition or undertake significant costly work. Different feature types have specific management requirements in Annex 8 ranging from avoiding disturbance to active monitoring with geo-tagged photographs.
Traditional farm buildings	This UA does not prevent adapting or converting farm buildings the farmer's responsibility is to ensure all necessary consents and licences are in place from the relevant authorities.
Deadline	Ongoing year-round management. Confirm features on SAF 2026.
Evidence	Declaration on RPW Online annually. Geo-tagged photographs and records of condition or active management as directed by Annex 8. Retain for 5 years.
Prepare now	Identify, assess and document the condition of any historic features on the farm in advance. Check Cadw and Coflein (RCAHMW) records online.

UA12: Animal Health and Welfare

Who must do it	All farms where livestock are reared or farmed. Does not apply to arable or horticulture businesses with no livestock.
Three elements	1. Animal Health Improvement Cycle (AHIC) 2. Biosecurity Assessment for incoming animals 3. Body Condition Scoring (BCS) and Mobility Scoring training
1. AHIC 4 steps with the vet	Measure: agree with your vet at least one livestock health/production metric to improve (e.g. calves reared per cow, age at first calving, mortality rate, culling rate). Plan: agree 24 actions to address the metric set realistic targets. Act: carry out and record the agreed actions. Review: assess impact with vet; identify next area for improvement. Year 1 minimum: Measure and Plan steps must be completed within the first calendar year. Act and Review follow in subsequent years. Results do not affect the Universal Payment. Completed AHIC template signed by farmer and vet = evidence. Keep for 5 years. Must be completed with the vet whose practice has the animals under their care except in exceptional circumstances.
2. Biosecurity Assessment	Complete annually with the vet using the standard SFS Biosecurity Assessment Template. Covers: pre-purchase enquiries, quarantine, testing and vaccination for incoming animals. Confirm all enclosed farm boundaries are stock-proof for the livestock kept. Completed template = evidence. Keep for 5 years.
3. BCS and Mobility Scoring	Complete training in Body Condition Scoring AND Mobility Scoring for every livestock class kept using the SFS modules on the Farming Connect platform or other approved training (e.g. relevant LANTRA courses). Training must be completed at least once every 5 years per species. Score the herd/flock for body condition and mobility at least annually. Record the date and any actions required. Share with vet at AHIC. If training was completed within the 5 years before joining the scheme and annual scoring records are maintained, this may already be met. If completed by a business owner or partner, the training hours count toward UA4 CPD in the year the training takes place.
Deadline	AHIC: Measure and Plan within Year 1. Biosecurity Assessment: annually. BCS/Mobility training: at least every 5 years. Annual scoring: at least once per year.
Evidence	Annual declaration on RPW Online. AHIC template, biosecurity assessment, and scoring records kept for 5 years not submitted but available on inspection.
Prepare now	Completing Farming Connect Animal Welfare e-learning from Summer 2025 counts as proficiency training for the next 5 years.

Farm-Level Carbon Baseline Scheme Requirement (not a UA)

A farm-level carbon baseline is a scheme requirement but is not one of the 12 Universal Actions. It will be introduced in Year 2, calculated by the Welsh Government using the SAF data provided in Year 1. No specific action is required from the farmer in Year 1.

Quick Reference - Applicability & Deadlines

UA	Action	Applies to all?	Key Deadline	Evidence / Record
1	Soil Health	Yes improved land only	End of each calendar year	Results on RPW Online
2	Integrated Pest Management	Only if PPPs used (declare nil use if not)	End of calendar year	Declaration on RPW Online; IPM plan + spray records 5 yrs
3	Benchmarking	Yes all farms	End of calendar year	FARMDATA+ auto-reports; or record tool name on RPW Online
4	CPD (6hrs + H&S e-learning)	Yes all farms	H&S: 15 Jan 2027. Learning: 31 Dec each year	Storfa Sgiliau / RPW Online; certificates 5 yrs
5	Habitat Maintenance	If habitat types present	Year-round, ongoing	Activity diary per habitat parcel
6	Temporary Habitat Creation	If below 10% habitat threshold	Established by end of calendar year	Crop codes on SAF; activity diary
7	Designated Site Management Plan	If SSSI/designated site present	By end of 2030	RPW/NRW produce plan no farmer submission needed
8	Hedgerow Management	If hedgerows present	Year-round, ongoing	Annual declaration on RPW Online
9	Woodland Maintenance	If woodland 0.1ha present	Year-round, ongoing	Annual declaration on RPW Online
10	Tree Planting Opportunity Plan	Yes ALL farms	Plan: 31 Dec 2026 Planting: 31 Dec 2028	Map on RPW Online; progress auto-recorded
11	Historic Environment	If historic features present	Year-round, ongoing	Annual declaration; geo-tagged photos
12	Animal Health & Welfare	Yes all livestock farms	AHIC M+P: Year 1 Biosecurity: annual BCS: every 5 yrs	Declaration on RPW Online; keep all records 5 yrs

Optional Layer

Optional Layer	
What is the Optional Layer?	The Optional Layer sits above the Universal Layer and allows farmers to receive additional payments for going further than the Universal Actions. Participation is voluntary, and businesses choose from a menu of Optional Actions that suit their farm type, ambitions and resources. Optional Actions are designed to deliver enhanced environmental and sustainable land management outcomes.
Who can join	Any farmer already enrolled in the SFS Universal Layer. Joining the Optional Layer is voluntary and separate from the Universal Payment.
How it works	Farmers select one or more Optional Actions from an approved menu. Each Optional Action has a defined payment rate, paid on top of the Universal Payment. Actions are agreed with RPW and recorded on RPW Online. Farmers can enter or exit Optional Actions between scheme years, subject to any minimum commitment periods. Some Optional Actions will have a minimum area or minimum number of years requirement.
Themes covered	Soils — advanced soil health management, organic matter improvement, reduced tillage. Water quality — buffer strips, constructed wetlands, runoff reduction measures. Biodiversity — enhanced habitat management, species-rich grassland creation, connecting wildlife corridors. Climate — greenhouse gas reduction, carbon sequestration, peatland restoration. Animal health and welfare — advanced welfare measures beyond UA12 baseline. Woodland and trees — agroforestry, woodland expansion, riparian planting. Resource efficiency — nutrient management planning, precision agriculture, energy efficiency.
Payment	Variable by action — each Optional Action carries its own payment rate set by Welsh Government. Payment rates are reviewed periodically.
Application	Via RPW Online. Welsh Government will publish the full menu of Optional Actions and payment rates before the Optional Layer opens.
Current position (June 2026)	The Optional Layer is being developed and will be introduced progressively following the launch of the Universal Layer. Welsh Government has consulted on the design of Optional Actions. Full details and payment rates will be confirmed by Welsh Government — check RPW Online and the Welsh Government SFS pages for updates.

Collaborative Layer

Collaborative Layer	
What is the Collaborative Layer?	The Collaborative Layer enables groups of farmers and land managers to work together to deliver landscape-scale outcomes that individual farms cannot achieve alone. It supports coordinated action across farm boundaries — creating connected habitats, improving water catchments and tackling environmental challenges at landscape scale.
Who can participate	Any farmer enrolled in the SFS Universal Layer. Groups typically require a minimum of two or more farm businesses, though some projects may require larger groups.
How it works	A group of farmers works together under a shared Collaborative project plan, led by a nominated Lead Body or coordinator. The Lead Body submits a single application to RPW on behalf of the group, setting out the project aims, participating farms and planned activities. Each participating farmer receives a payment for their contribution to the project, on top of any Universal or Optional payments. Projects have defined start and end dates and must demonstrate landscape-scale benefits. RPW and/or Welsh Government may provide coordination support, particularly for catchment-scale projects.
Who can be a Lead Body	A farmer within the group. A land management organisation, wildlife trust, river trust or other body with relevant expertise. A local authority, National Park Authority or AONB team. Farming Connect, where appropriate to the project scope.
Types of project	Water catchment management — reducing diffuse pollution, improving water quality, natural flood management across a river catchment. Connected habitat networks — creating or restoring wildlife corridors, linking existing habitats across farm boundaries. Peatland and upland restoration — coordinated restoration of blanket bog, upland heath and peatland across multiple holdings. Landscape heritage — managing historic landscapes, field systems or traditional farming features spanning multiple farms. Hedgerow and tree networks — connecting hedgerow and woodland networks at landscape scale. Coastal and estuarine management — coordinated management of saltmarsh, dunes and coastal habitats.
Payment	Collaborative payments are additional to Universal and Optional payments. Rates will be set by Welsh Government and will reflect the coordination effort and landscape-scale ambition of each project.
Application	Group application submitted to RPW by the Lead Body. Welsh Government will publish application windows and guidance. Projects are assessed on landscape-scale ambition, feasibility and strength of farmer engagement.
Current position (June 2026)	The Collaborative Layer is in development. Pilot projects have been consulted on and Welsh Government intends to introduce Collaborative opportunities progressively. Check RPW Online and Welsh Government SFS pages for updates on when applications will open.

