

# Winter Cover Crop Agreement

## Prescription Version 1.0

### Natural England's Nutrient Mitigation Scheme



#### Introduction

Natural England is coordinating a Nutrient Mitigation Scheme on behalf of developers to reduce the impact of phosphorous and nitrogen on our most important wildlife sites and help new homes to achieve nutrient neutrality. It is intended that the private sector will be meeting the full costs of the nutrient reduction measures delivered by this scheme. Fast growing winter cover crops are a proven method for reducing surface runoff and the risk of potential pollutants, such as sediment, pesticides, and nutrients leaching into groundwater or being carried to nearby watercourses and harming protected sites. Cover crops will form a key part of a package of measures to reduce pollution of protected sites. Additionally, cover crop benefits include improving soil structure and health, weed suppression, enhancing organic matter and carbon sequestration.

**Scheme Aim:** Establish a fast-growing winter cover crop as soon as possible after harvest to provide a dense cover over the winter period.

#### Eligibility for scheme:

- This scheme is to be used on impeded and semi-impeded cultivated land within the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and The Broads SAC catchments (see map below).
- Cover crops already funded by another scheme (such as Countryside Stewardship and the Sustainable Farming Incentive) are **not** eligible.
- Forage crops grown for grazing (such as stubble turnips or kale) and cash crops grown to be harvested are **not** eligible.

#### Length of agreement:

- 3–6 year agreements will be available. It is anticipated this scheme will end on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2030.

#### Area of land required:

- Minimum number of hectares per application is 25 ha
- If you wish to increase the number of hectares you provide in a subsequent year you will need to apply to Natural England for a variation to the agreement. The increased quantity of hectares must be maintained for the remainder of the agreement.
- A decrease in the amount of land in the agreement will not be possible, even where the amount has increased part way through an agreement.

#### Where to use:

- On impeded and semi-impeded cultivated land within the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and The Broads SAC catchments (see map below).

- Any cultivated land where the crop grown prior to the winter cover crop was a combinable crop.
- Whole or part parcel; rotational or static.

**Where not to use:**

- Cover crops already funded by another scheme (such as Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship) are **not** eligible.

**Choice of cover crop species mix:**

- The choice of cover crop will depend on the cropping rotation and herbicides used and can be decided by the agreement holder. However, the cover crop must be legume-free, suitable for winter sowing, fast growing and frost tolerant to provide dense cover over winter.
- A mixture or single crop can be used. A mixture including buckwheat, linseed, phacelia, forage rye, black oats, radish (smart, daikon, oil), barley or white mustard is recommended as these aid diffuse pollution reduction and nutrient capture.

**Cover crop establishment, management, and destruction:**

- Remove areas of soil compaction before sowing, but do not subsoil on archaeological features.
- The cover crop must be sown as soon as possible after harvest and before the end of September.
- Establish either by direct drilling, cultivating and then drilling or broadcasting.
- Sow at a seed rate recommended by supplier to provide a dense groundcover and to prevent soil erosion.
- The crop may be grazed or destroyed after mid-January, and no more than 6 weeks before establishing the following spring crop.
- Cover crop destruction by an application of glyphosate is permitted.
- Once destroyed, aim to establish the following spring crop within 6 weeks.

**Prohibited activities:**

- To achieve the aims and deliver the nutrient mitigation benefits, do not apply any organic manures or artificial fertiliser to the cover crop, or prior to its establishment.

**Payment terms and record keeping:**

- £160 per hectare per annum
- Annual payments will be made for the duration of the scheme.
- Payments for cover crops will be made upon receipt of photographic evidence and a map highlighting the relevant land parcels.
- There will be no penalties if ground conditions prevent the sowing of cover crops, but payments will not be given where cover crops have not been sown.

- Please let us know if cover crop establishment will not be possible (e.g. due to weather conditions) by directly contacting your assigned Catchment Sensitive Farming or Farm Adviser where appropriate.
- You may be selected for a site visit to check the cover crop has been established.

[Guidance on combining environmental payments is available and can be found on GOV.UK](#)

For further information and to express an interest in joining the scheme, please contact: [nutrientmitigation@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:nutrientmitigation@naturalengland.org.uk)

Map to show winter cover crop scheme target area, where land in green is eligible for scheme.

