CM 7b: Cover crops following maize and other late-harvested crops

This option will establish a fast-growing cover crop to reduce nutrient runoff and leaching from land that would normally be left bare or down to stubbles during winter. It will reduce surface runoff and the risk of potential pollutants, such as sediment, pesticides and nutrients, being leached to groundwater or carried to nearby watercourses. Forage crops grown for grazing (such as stubble turnips or kale) and cash crops grown to be harvested are <u>not</u> eligible. Cover crops already funded by any other scheme (such as Countryside Stewardship) are <u>not</u> eligible.

Length of Nature-based Project Agreement available

1st September 2021 until 31st March 2022 (7 months)

Where to use this option

Only on cultivated land where the crop prior to the cover crop was a maize crop (or other late harvested crop).

Where this option <u>cannot</u> be used

Cover crops cannot be funded in situations where the management of the field is in breach of the Farming Rules for Water or Nitrate Vulnerable Zone rules (if applicable). Successful applicants are required to sign the declaration described in the 'Keeping Records' section below.

Cover crops after maize cannot be funded in high-risk fields which are not appropriate for growing maize in. Please note that if your application for this option is successful, your scheme advisor can assess the risk of soil erosion and run-off on your maize ground and can make recommendations on how to mitigate these risks. Scheme advisors are also able to provide site specific advice on maize variety maturity group selection to help ensure the deadlines below are met. Please contact your Scheme advisor to discuss. Also see 'Keeping records' section below.

Requirements

- Establish a fast-growing cover crop by *10th October* to provide dense ground cover and protect the land from overwinter soil erosion and nutrient runoff/leaching.

- Retain the cover crop until at least *15th January* if the following crop is combinable and until at least *1st March* if the following crop is maize. Once destroyed, establish the following spring crop within 6 weeks.
- Grass may be used as a cover crop but only where it will be kept no longer than *31st May* in the year after establishment.
- If soil compaction has not been remediated upon inspection, funding may be withdrawn.
- Estimates of the nutrients released by the cover crop should be used in nutrient planning for the following crop to ensure there is no over application or excess availability of nutrients, which may subsequently leach or runoff.

Choice of cover crop

- A mix or a single species may be used, but crops should be suitable for autumn sowing, fast growing and frost tolerant to provide adequate ground cover overwinter.
- The main species should be Italian ryegrass, Westerwolds, rye, barley or oats. The minimum seed rate used for grasses should be 35kg/ha and for cereals 100kg/ha.
- Brassicas such as oil/fodder radish and mustard may be used as the main species but only if established before *15th September*. If used as the main or only cover crop species the minimum seed rate of oil/fodder radish should be 20kg/ha and for mustard 10kg/ha if drilled, or 12 kg/ha if broadcast.
- Other species such as clover and vetches may also be included in the mix.

How to establish the cover crop

- If ground conditions are suitable, remove any areas of soil compaction but do not subsoil over archaeological features.
- Sow the cover crop within 2 weeks of harvesting and no later than *10th October*.
- Establish by either: (i) direct drilling or (ii) cultivating and then drilling or broadcasting.
- Avoid overworking the soil, establish in as coarse seedbed as practical and avoid over-consolidation.
- Sow at a suitable seed rate to provide a dense groundcover and to prevent soil erosion.

Buffer strip requirement

A grass buffer strip of at least 6m width must be in place against all watercourses (including ditches), roads, tracks and neighbouring properties, or where there is an identified run-off flow pathway. If a buffer strip is not already in place it must be established by the time that the cover crop is drilled. Where buffer strips do not currently exist, establishment and retention of new buffers to accompany cover crops may be eligible for funding through the Arable Reversion (CM4) option of the scheme.

Do Not

- Do not graze the cover crop.
- Do not apply any organic manures or artificial fertiliser to the cover crop, or prior to its establishment. No organic manures for the following spring crop should be applied before 14th February.
- Do not establish the following crop without calculating the nutrient content of soil, any manures applied and the available nutrients from the cover crop residue. Apply no more nutrients than the crop requires.

Keeping Records

Agreement holders will need to keep the following records and supply them with the payment claim:

- Photographs of each field of established cover crops taken on any day in *December 2021*.
- Self-declaration that the terms of the Nature-based Project Agreement have been adhered to (key requirements are listed above).
- Successful applicants are required to sign a declaration confirming that:
  - reasonable precautions are taken to prevent manure, fertiliser and soil from the relevant field getting into watercourses or from being leached to groundwater to an extent that could cause pollution
  - the relevant fields have not been (i) the source of a recorded pollution incident which could have been prevented by the farmer taking reasonable precautions to prevent that pollution and/or (ii) the subject of a warning, fine, prosecution or BPS deduction issued to the farmer by the Environment Agency or RPA for a breach of NVZ rules or Farming Rules for Water in the past 5 years
- Field operations at the parcel level such as establishment date, and any associated invoices.
- Soil analysis results (pH, P and K as a minimum) for the field parcel dated within the last 3 years.

Italian ryegrass cover crop established immediately after harvest of forage maize