

Supporting guidance for Conservation Management of Small Units

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To see recent changes to this guidance, [check the bottom of the page](#)

Introduction

By their very nature, crofts and small units tend to create a more varied landscape than larger units. And the greater diversity of management practices and crop types benefits biodiversity.

The economies of scale involved in managing crofts and small units can make traditional practices uneconomic and there has been a decline in activities such as cropping, hay making and cattle keeping, which maintain biodiversity.

On some crofts, specialisation and intensification have led to silage cropping and earlier cutting dates and more intensive sheep grazing on in-bye land (land used mainly for arable and grassland production and which is not hill and rough grazings).

What needs to be done?

The [Conservation Management of Small Units](#) option provides support for managing a mosaic of habitats of conservation value across small units. The combination of habitats managed, or cropping practices adopted, will vary in each area.

It is recognised that there are additional costs to undertake cultivation and keep cattle in crofting areas. Therefore, this option provides compensation to off-set the additional costs associated with adopting two of the following options:

- [Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds](#)
- [Forage Brassica Crops for Farmland Birds](#)
- [Unharvested Conservation Headlands for Wildlife](#)
- [Retention of Winter Stubbles for Wildlife](#)
- [Cropped Machair](#)
- [Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland](#)
- [Corn Buntings Mown Grassland](#)
- [Corncrake Mown Grassland](#)
- [Chough Mown Grassland](#)
- [Species-rich Grassland Management](#)

You can still choose to manage your land under any of the other AECS options that you are eligible for, but the small units payment is only available on land managed under the options listed above.

You may wish to seek advice to help you to choose on the best combination for your unit.

The species and habitats that could benefit from this option include machair, species-rich grassland, farmland birds and chough.

If you wish to benefit these habitats and species aim to meet these key requirements:

Machair – a wide range of arable and grassland flowers, invertebrates and birds benefit from a mixture of cropping followed by fallow.

[Cropped Machair](#) option

Species-rich grassland – careful grazing and cutting management, ensuring that the sward is longest in the summer and shorter in the spring and autumn, allows flowering species to set seed and germinate. This supports a wide range of flowering plants, along with pollinating bees, butterflies, moths and other insects.

[Species-rich Grassland Management](#) option

Farmland birds – blocks or strips of seed bearing crop mixtures or brassicas grown under low-input management support arable weeds and provide grubs and insects for farmland birds during the summer. During the winter and into the following spring the crop provides both seed and cover for birds.

[Wild Bird Seed for Farmland Birds](#) option

[Forage Brassica Crops for Farmland Birds](#) option

Ground-nesting birds – wading birds such as lapwing and curlew benefit from extensively managed hay and silage fields. Avoiding field operations from 1 April to 30 June and cutting in a wildlife-friendly manner reduces the risk of damage to birds, their eggs and fledglings. Leaving an area uncut also provides cover for the birds. Hares and other small mammals also benefit.

[Wader and Wildlife Mown Grassland](#) option

Corncrake and corn buntings benefit from extensive management of hay and silage fields. Delaying mowing reduces the risk of damaging the birds, their eggs and fledglings. Leaving an area uncut also provides cover for the birds.

[Corncrake Mown Grassland](#) option

[Corn Buntings Mown Grassland](#) option

Chough feed mainly on insect larvae found in soil and animal dung. They forage short-grazed, free draining grassland and silage aftermath. Hay and silage crops are especially beneficial where cutting dates are staggered to extend the period when a freshly-cut crop is available.

[Chough Mown Grassland](#) option

How do I know if I am eligible as a small unit for this option?

Your eligibility for this option is based on the area of land in your IACS business permanent land holding that is not rough grazing. This area must be less than 30 hectares.

This area would not take into account areas of land covering rocks, scree, water, dense bracken etc. We will check this using the same approach we use to check land for the Basic Payment Scheme.

If you are in the Crofting Counties, this limit includes the following:

- the area of your croft, and
- any in-bye apportionment, and
- any arable cropped land on the common grazing assigned to you by the common grazing committee

The area does not include the remainder of the common grazing.

The in-bye apportionment applies to that part of the apportionment where the bulk of the land is used for arable or grassland production. Uncultivated field corners and field margins (such as water margins) within

this area are included as 'in-bye'.

Is the land on which I propose to adopt associated management options restricted to the area that qualifies my holding as a small unit?

No. This option provides an additional payment on those areas which you manage under one of the associated management options. The eligibility of your land for the options you choose to undertake will be dependent on the eligibility requirements for each option. This may include rough grazing land in some cases.

How do I apply for this option?

To apply for the Conservation Management of Small Units supplement you will need to answer a question while completing the 'Application Information' section of the online application.

If you are eligible for the supplement and your application is approved, the contract will include the supplementary payment which you will claim along with other annual management options on the Single Application Form each year.

Recent changes

Section	Change
What needs to be done	Inclusion of list of options that can be combined to allow customers to be compensated

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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