

SFS Structure:

SFS is a whole farm scheme. The **Universal Layer** contains a set of **Universal Actions (UAs)** which generate a **Universal Payment**.

Additional SFS payments will be available in the **Optional** and **Collaborative Layers**.

This three-layered structure is built upon **Scheme Requirements**, as follows:

- **SFS Regulatory Baseline** – set of legal requirements that apply to all farmers including public access and the control of invasive non-native species
- **Universal Code** – framework of non-regulatory requirements which SFS applicants must adhere to
- **Scheme Requirement to have 10% habitat**

Universal Actions:

- UA1 – Soil Health
- UA2 – Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- UA3 – Benchmarking
- UA4 - Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- UA5 – Habitat Maintenance
- UA6 – Temporary habitat creation on improved land
- UA7 - Designated Site Management Plans
- UA8 – Hedgerow management
- UA9 – Woodland maintenance
- UA10 – Tree and Hedge Planting Opportunity Plan
- UA11 – Historic environment
- UA12 – Animal Health & Welfare

Payments:

Farmers will need to carry out Universal Actions & Scheme Requirements to receive the **Universal Layer Payment**.

The Universal Layer Payment comprises:

Whole Farm Payment - £70 per ha for the first 70ha, £2 per ha for all remaining eligible land, including Common land based on rights apportioned

Habitat Maintenance Payment - £69 per ha for habitat maintained as part of UA5 or created under UA6

Woodland Maintenance Payment - £62 per ha for all woodland maintained as part of UA9

Social Value Payment – £107 per ha for all eligible land reflecting the social value of the Universal outcomes

Stability Payment - Farms joining the Scheme in 2026, with 100 ha or less will receive an additional £1000 as a one-off stability payment.

Capping will be applied:

- Up to £25,000 – 0%
- £25,000 to £50,000 – 5%
- £50,000 to £150,000 – 10%
- £150,000 to £200,000 – 15%
- £200,000 to £250,000 – 30%
- £250,000 to £300,000 – 55%
- Over £300,000 – 100%

Scheme Eligibility:

- Have 3 ha or more than 550 standard labour hours
- Management control for at least 10 months including 15 May 2026
- Undertake agricultural or ancillary activities

SFS Transition and BPS phase-out

- At SAF, farmers choose either SFS or BPS
- BPS phase out: 60% in 2026, 40% in 2027, 20% in 2028, no BPS in 2029.

Summary of key dates:

- 31 Dec 2025 - SFS Map available on RPW online
- 1 Jan 2026 - Start of SFS year, SFS Regulatory Baseline requirements begin for 2026
- 2 March 2026 - SAF 2026 available
- 15 May 2026 - Closing date for receipt of SAF 2026 & supporting documents without penalty
- 14 Oct 2026 - SFS Advance Payments commence
- 11 Dec 2026 - SFS Balance Payments commence
- 31 Dec 2026 - Deadline for completion of all applicable Universal Actions
- 15 Jan 2027 - Deadline for updating the SFS Universal Dashboard for 2026 scheme year.
- From 1 January until the SAF deadline on 15 May, you will be considered as meeting the Universal Layer requirements

Advice and guidance available from WG Customer Contact Centre on 0300 062 5004

[Sustainable Farming Scheme – Universal Layer: Guidance 2026](#)