SINGLE FARM PAYMENT 2011

Application  Eligibility  Inspections

The complete guide to safeguarding your 2011 Single Farm Payment

In association with the Department of Agriculture
I am pleased to see the launch of this comprehensive booklet for farmers, designed to assist and explain all aspects surrounding the 2011 Single Farm Payment scheme. The objective of this booklet, produced by my Department, in conjunction with the Irish Farmers Journal, is to provide as much information to farmers in order to ensure that the Single Farm Payment application is completed properly and submitted on time. The application also covers the area-based schemes such as the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, REPS, and other area-based schemes. It provides information to farmers on the conditions of the schemes in order to ensure they can maximise and protect their payments by adhering to those conditions.

EU direct payments to Ireland are crucial to the farming sector; none more so than the Single Farm Payment, worth annually in excess of €1.2 billion. The direct benefit to the farmers concerned and their families is obvious, but the scheme also benefits the wider rural economy, enabling a wide variety of businesses, both large and small, to operate successfully.

My Department continues to be at the forefront among member states as regards the speed at which direct payments are processed and issued. There is a clear expectation on the part of the EU that the central record of all land claimed by farmers be fully accurate and up-to-date, given that it supports payments under all the area-based schemes, worth annually in excess of €1.8 billion. It is imperative that the mapping campaign, which began last year, be continued into 2011. I am urging all farmers to closely examine the individual maps recently sent out by my Department, identify all ineligible areas, and return the maps without delay, in order that the changes can be recorded.

I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of developing the Irish agri-food sector in the Programme for Government. The Government considers that the CAP will be vital for the future development of the agri-food sector. Our primary aim will be to secure a fair overall funding envelope for agriculture under a reformed CAP and a fair share of this budget for Irish agriculture. I would also like to emphasise that in the future CAP reform negotiations, I will prioritise a Single Farm Payment system which best benefits active farmers and the Irish grass-based farming enterprises.

Finally, I would urge all farmers to ensure that, having read this booklet, it is kept in a safe place. I am convinced that it will be a regular reference source throughout the year and beyond.

Check out the entire SFP video series on www.farmersjournal.ie

In association with Ballyfermot College of Further Education

SFP magazine is produced jointly by the Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Trust, publishers of the Irish Farmers Journal. The publishers do not accept responsibility for the veracity of claims made by contributors. While every care is taken to ensure accuracy of information contained in this publication, we do not accept responsibility for any errors, or matters arising from same.
SFP timeline

- **10 MARCH**
  2011 Maps issued

- **25 MARCH**
  2011 SFP applications issued

TUESDAY 17 MAY
Penalties start increasing for late applications

TUESDAY 31 MAY
Deadline for amendment forms to add new parcels

- **FRIDAY 10 JUNE**
  Final date for late applications (100% penalties imposed for application/amendments received after this date) and late amendment forms

- **LATE SEPTEMBER**
  Disadvantaged area payments commence

- **17 OCTOBER**
  Advance SFP payments start (if approval is granted by EU Commission on the justified grounds of exceptional circumstances)

- **1 DECEMBER**
  SFP payments commence if approval was not granted to make an advance payment. If it is SFP balancing payments will commence.

- **EARLY DECEMBER**
  Grassland sheep scheme payments commence

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**Single Farm Payment** Irish Farmers Journal
The most important form of the year

Over €7.4 billion, or €1.2bn per year, has been paid out to Irish farmers under the Single Farm Payment scheme since it started in 2005.

When the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, REPS, AEOS, Grassland Sheep Scheme and other area-based schemes, are combined, the yearly figure rises to almost €1.8 billion. That’s the reason the completion of the form by the deadline of 16 May 2011 is one of the most important tasks farmers will face this year.

There are few changes to the application form in 2011. The only real change is a new column on the back page linking maps submitting with the parcel that is to be changed. However, every year thousands of farmers make errors when sending in their application. If you apply online or authorise an agent (adviser/consultant) to submit an online application on your behalf, most of the common errors can be avoided. Here are the tips to avoid mistakes and ensure you do not incur any penalties:

- **Don’t forget** - It is difficult to believe, but every year some farmers simply forget and do not submit their applications by the deadline.

- **Sign it** – Ensure the 2011 SFP application form is signed and dated, especially in the cases of a joint application or by the appropriate person in the case of a company.

- **Blank boxes** - The applicant does not insert the claimed area, which may not be pre-printed in all cases. You should always ensure that you include claimed areas on your application form.

- **Over-claiming** - When the area claimed is greater than the reference area. The reference area of the land parcel is the maximum area of the parcel that can be claimed unless a map or documentary evidence is submitted to justify a claimed area that is greater than the reference area. This creates an error and delays the processing of your application.

- **Supply evidence** - An applicant declares commonage for the first time but neglects to submit evidence of his or her right to claim the commonage. Generally the evidence required is legal documentation.

- **New parcels** - In the case of new land parcels claimed, applicants do not always declare whether the land is owned, leased-in or rented. A simple mistake, but it can delay the processing of your application and payments under more than one of the Schemes involved.

- **Crop type** - Another simple error that can easily be avoided is that in the case of certain crops the applicants do not correctly declare the crop. Examples are declaring wheat or barley without specifying whether it is a spring or winter crop. Similarly, declaring potatoes without indicating whether they are early, main crop or seed potatoes should be avoided.

- **REPS** - All details are completed for each parcel/plot on the back page including the requirement to identify each parcel in REPS, if you are a participant in REPS.

- **Make changes** – Amend pre-printed details where necessary and if a parcel on pre-printed form is not part of your holding this year put a line through the entire row.
Farmers realise benefits of online SFP

Significant increase in number of web SFP applications

One in every three SFP applications was registered online in 2010. You can clearly see the growth since the service was first offered in 2007 in the graph.

The reason is simple. The online system is user friendly and cuts down on simple errors that happen with paper applications by up to 80%. Advisers/consultants across the country are driving the surge as they realise that it reduces the time needed to submit each application.

This year the Department has added a new facility where maps can be uploaded and submitted along with the online application. This not only cuts down on the risk of delays but ensures that online applications will be processed quickly, ensuring that farmers who apply online will be cleared for payment quickly.

The biggest benefit of the online system is its ability to crosscheck the information inputted and flag any errors before you submit the form.

Farmers who have registered this year will also find the online calf registration and herd movement and profile service useful tools to save time and reduce paperwork.

What are the benefits of SFP online?

» Instant access to Entitlements details and details of payment information from the Reference Years

» Ability to chose order for payment of Entitlements

» Prompt processing of SFP application and payments, including Disadvantaged Areas

» Validations throughout the forms to reduce clerical errors

» Ensures that payment is maximised by maintaining a running total of land eligible for Single Farm Payment, Disadvantaged Areas Scheme etc.

» If your application is submitted through a registered agent, prompt processing and elimination of errors using the electronic (email) processing facility

» Easy access to helpful guidelines

» New facility to upload maps to register changes

» Facility to submit SFP amendment forms

» View your SFP applications from previous years including land parcel details and payment information

» View all previous correspondence with the Department

» Instant acknowledgement of receipt of SFP application from Department

50% online – An achievable target

Five counties submitted over 50% of the SFP their applications online in 2011. The number of online applications has been growing in every county and this shows that hitting a target of 50% of all applications online is an achievable target. It’s a target that would greatly reduce errors and also free up resources in the Department to ensure payments are made to all farmers more quickly. So go on make sure you set yourself up to submit your SFP application by registering or talking to your adviser immediately.
Is there still time to register online? Yes. Just log in to the www.agfood.ie and click the button to register. You will be asked to submit your details and will receive a password in 3-5 working days.

Is the form automatically submitted once I register online? No, definitely not. Registering is just the first step. You have to go through the process and submit your 2011 SFP form. The same is the case if you have authorised an agent (adviser or consultant) to submit an application. You must make arrangements to meet the agent and bring along your pre-printed application form, accompanying maps and any other documentation that is required to complete your application.

Do I have to submit the form online if I am registered? No. You can just use the service for information purposes and submit the form by post. However, it is recommended that you do in order to facilitate the prompt processing of your application.

Can I get my adviser/consultant to submit the form online for me? Yes but you have to sign a form to give the adviser/consultant the ability to do this. Contact your adviser/consultant immediately. A full listing of the agents registered by the Department is available on www.agriculture.gov.ie.

What do I need to do if an adviser/consultant is going to submit my form online? If the Agent is authorised to submit an application online on your behalf, the first thing you should do is to make contact with him or her to make an appointment. Do not waste any time after receiving your pre-printed form making an appointment. This is a very busy time for the advisers/agents.

Uploading maps

Farmers and agents will be able to use the Department website to upload maps in pdf format for the first time this year. The benefit is that changes to maps will be linked immediately to the online application, ensuring more efficient processing and farmers applying online being cleared for payment earlier.

Step by step

1. To access the Map Upload Screen, click the Upload link on the navigation banner.

2. To upload a map, click the browse button on the Map Upload Screen to locate the map on your file system.

3. Once you select a map, you can upload it by clicking the upload button.

4. The map to be uploaded must be a PDF document and the file size must not exceed 3MB.

5. The selected map will undergo a virus scan.

6. Upon a successful upload, a success message is displayed. Otherwise an error message is displayed.

7. Once the map upload has been successfully completed, the map can be visible under the Farmer’s correspondence.

Q&A

Getting online

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Useful tips for online applications

It's important to take your time and hit the right buttons and submit the form only when you are sure. When using the online SFP application, only use the buttons that are specifically presented to you on each page of the SFP application.

» Do not use the Back button (~ Back) that is above the Address bar on the top left hand side of your browser window. If you use the ~ Back button by accident, the best course of action would be to log off and then log in again.

» Only click any of the buttons once. Double-clicking does not speed up the process in any way and can in fact lead to problems. Rather than double-clicking, allow a few seconds for the page you are opening to fully load.

» In order to check whether any entitlements may be lost if they are not claimed in 2011, click Start on the Entitlements Payment Order form. The entitlements or top-ups which are at risk of being lost if you fail to declare enough land in 2011 will be presented on this screen.

» If you haven’t submitted your application, you can remove any changes that you have made and start again as follows - go into Saved Applications, then select the application and then click on Delete. This action will put the application back into the situation it was in when you first logged into the SFP online system.

» When adding plots to your application it is best if you name each plot in the townland numerically, ie Plot 1 Plot 2. This cuts down on confusion with Sub-divided Parcels (which are noted alphabetically ie A, B etc).

» When sub-dividing parcels, parcel A is automatically kept at the same area as the existing parcel. After setting up parcel B you have to go into parcel A to reduce the area to avoid over-claiming.

» Any information that cannot be fitted into the text boxes should be emailed to the Department via the email address on the Personal Details screen.

» An application is only regarded as submitted when the SUBMIT button has been pressed at the end of the application process and a confirmation has been presented to the user. This confirmation screen, which includes a unique reference number, is instantaneous once the SUBMIT button has been pressed.

» When you have submitted the SFP application and you wish to print a copy of the application for your records, remember that this is a pdf document so you must use the Print button within the pdf browser area to print the copy. A copy will not print if you use any of the print options at the top of your browser window above the Address bar. Additional copies can be opened and printed if required from the Correspondence section.
This shows the type of entitlements assigned to you on the Department’s database. All entitlements (including entitlements obtained from the National Reserve and entitlements that have been consolidated) now have the same usage rules and carry the “standard” category.

This is the group identifier for the different sets of your entitlements.

Shows the number of entitlements assigned to you on the Department’s database. If you have only one set of entitlements that are all the same value, one figure will appear in this column. However, if you have two or more sets of entitlements with different values, the number of entitlements in each set will appear in this column. The information in this column reflects the position at the date of printing the form. This position may change if changes are made to your entitlements after the date of printing.

Shows the net value of each individual entitlement assigned to you at date of printing the form. This position may change if changes are made to your entitlements after the date of printing the form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1: National Reserve entitlements (including consolidated entitlements) are categorised as Standard Sugar Beet (NR).</th>
<th>Column 2: All other entitlements are categorised as Standard (NR) and National Reserve Sugar Beet (NR) based schemes.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Columns 3 and 4:</strong> The figures in these columns reflect your entitlements position at the date of printing.</td>
<td><strong>Columns 5:</strong> Identifies those entitlements that were not used in 2010. You will lose these entitlements if you do not claim them before 16 May 2011.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Column 6: Shows the order in which payment entitlements will be paid (highest value first) but see column 7 for an alternative order. | **Columns 7:** Shows the order of payment entitlements that are made to your entitlements after the date of printing. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details of Entitlements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of entitlement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Application for Payment under Single Payment Scheme (SPS), The Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and Other Area Based Schemes

**The Closing Date for both Written and Online Applications is 16th May 2011.**

Penalties will apply to late applications, complete loss of payments where an application is made after the closing date. You must declare in respect of each entitlement.

---

**Joe Bloggs**

Address Line 1
Address Line 2
Address Line 3
Address Line 4

Herd Number: 1

Date: 1/1/2011

Signature: Joe Bloggs

Status of Signatory (Company):

For official use only NC1

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Don’t forget to sign the form. Every year hundreds of forms have to be returned because they are not signed at all or in joint application one signature is omitted.
This shows the number and value of entitlements that were not used by you in 2010. If you do not use them in 2011 you will lose them permanently to the National Reserve, (further details in column on right).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entitlements that will be lost at Reserve if in 2011</th>
<th>Payment order of sets of entitlements.</th>
<th>Alternative Payment order of sets of entitlements. Insert your choice of Payment order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value €</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows the order in which the Department will pay your entitlements (highest value first). If you are in danger of losing entitlements (figure in column 5) you may wish to change the order of payment by completing column 7.

If there is a figure in column 5 showing the number of entitlements that you will lose if not used in 2011 you can change the order of payment by inserting 1.2.3. etc in column 7. If you leave column 7 blank it will be assumed that you are happy with the order of payment in column 6.

Read this section carefully to see what you are signing up for. The SFP application form covers a lot of different schemes including Disadvantaged area, REPS, AOES and the Organic farming scheme. It also makes farmers eligible for the dairy efficiency scheme. You are signing up to have the land at your disposal on 31 May 2011 and must be maintained as agricultural land throughout 2011.
A new column to mark if you are submitting a map to make changes to any parcel is the only major change to the back page of the form this year. However, don’t let familiarity breed contempt.

Where possible, land parcel details declared by you on your 2010 SFP form have been pre-printed on your 2011 form. Examine each parcel carefully and make any amendment necessary. Remember it is your responsibility to check the details and to make any changes. Any box that has been left blank should be completed. Otherwise the application will be regarded as incomplete and processing will be delayed. You must legally declare all of the land you are farming on 31 May 2011. If any parcel is not being farmed by you this year it should be deleted by drawing a line through all its pre-printed details (i.e. across the entire row).

Experience has shown that some farmers, who carefully examined their maps and the pre-printed form in respect of 2010, found that there was a field or fields which were part of their farm but were not declared by them. A complete review of the pre-printed data in conjunction with the maps that you have received will ensure that:

- You avoid errors, which could delay your payment.
- You will reduce the risk of penalties by over-claiming or dual claiming on land parcels declared.
- You maximise your payment under area-based schemes if you find you are not currently declaring all of the land you farm.
- You reduce the risk of incurring a penalty for not declaring all of your land.

**Column 1: Townland.** Parcels submitted in 2010 will be preprinted on the form. New parcels must have official townland name (as shown on an Ordnance Survey or LPIS map) on a new line.

**Column 2: Land parcel number (LPIS No.)** will be printed here. New parcels must have the unique land parcel number (LPIS No.). Where the LPIS No. is not available, identify the new plot/s clearly on a map by calling them Plot 1, Plot 2 etc. The map(s) of any new plot(s) must be submitted with your application. To subdivide parcels, draw a line across the old parcel and write in all details in new lines with an indicator A, B etc and the revised areas in Column 7 for each subdivision. Add any new parcel details by writing in the parcel/plot details on a new line. Where you wish to sub-divide a parcel draw a line through the pre-printed details all the way across the page. Any parcel not being farmed by you this year it should be deleted by drawing a line through all its pre-printed details all the way across the page.

**Column 3: Commonage shares** will be pre-printed if you farmed it in 2010. If you are claiming a commonage for the first time in 2011, please insert the share/grazing rights that you are entitled to claim as a fraction and submit documentary evidence of your right to the share grazing rights.

**Column 4: Digitised area was previously called the Gross Area and will be pre-printed in hectares.** The digitised area of any new parcel you are declaring should be obtained from the previous occupier. If there are ineligible features within the land parcel, even if you are not claiming it, you should submit a map outlining the ineligible area for exclusion. The minimum parcel size that can be declared is 0.01 hectares.

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**Beware!**

- Maps the major change.
- A MAP MUST BE ENCLOSED FOR ANY NEW PLOT OR AMENDED PARCEL.
- A MAP MUST BE ENCLOSED FOR ANY NEW PLOT OR AMENDED PARCEL. A MAP MUST BE ENCLOSED FOR ANY NEW PLOT OR AMENDED PARCEL.
Column 5: Reference Area - This is the area from previous claims or based on Department inspections. A larger area than this cannot be claimed in Column 7. If you want to claim a higher area you have to complete Column 6 and supply a map or evidence to verify the new claim. This may be the case if you have reclaimed land, for example.

Column 6: This is only filled out with an X if you want to make a change to the reference area (Column 7) of any parcel. A map or other documentary evidence of the reason for the increase is needed to verify the new claim.

Column 7: This is the area on which you will be paid on so it is important that you ensure the claimed area is accurate. It is also the area on which area over-declaration penalties are incurred. It is, therefore, important that you take great care in inserting or changing the pre-printed claimed area. The claimed area must exclude any areas under buildings; farmyards; woods; rivers; streams; ponds; farm roads; expanses of bare rock, dense scrub or boglands that are unfit for grazing. In some instances the claimed area is not pre-printed on the form and many farmers forget to insert a claimed area, which may result in a delay in payment

Column 8: As well as the usual O for Owned, R for rented or L for leased, REPS farmers have to indicate each parcel which benefits from a REPS payment. This is done by putting in OR if the parcel is owned or LR if the parcel is leased in. Rented parcels do not qualify for REPS payments. Many REPS farmers forgot to do this last year. If you are no longer participating in REPS, the Department has made the necessary changes in the pre-printed data.

Column 9: If not pre-printed make the appropriate box with an “x”. Every parcel has to have this done. If a farmer declares an arable parcel as fallow, regeneration or green cover it should be described as Arable.

Column 10: Under nitrates legislation, this column has become much more important. As well as the crop type you have to specify whether the crop is winter or spring where appropriate. Check the list in the terms and conditions as only a parcel use stated on that list can be entered.

### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Digitised Area</th>
<th>5 Reference Area</th>
<th>6 Requested to Change to Reference Area</th>
<th>7 Claimed Area of each parcel in hectares</th>
<th>8 Or</th>
<th>9 Crop Category</th>
<th>10 Parcel Use in 2011</th>
<th>11 Submitted Map</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HECTARES</td>
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<td>HECTARES</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Permanent Pasture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>6.20</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.24</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.79</td>
<td>6.79</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>O</td>
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</table>

The only new column this year. Mark an “x” only if you are submitting a map to make changes to that specific parcel. The aim is to identify parcels that have maps submitted to speed up processing.
The Department maintains a database that contains the names of farmers holding entitlements and the herd number. If you don’t tell the Department about changes to your herd number, you risk not getting paid. If you sell or lease out entitlements to another farmer, you have to tell the Department. The application form (SPS/TE 2011) for transferring or changing the registration details of your entitlements is on www.agriculture.gov.ie.

Alternatively, contact the Transfer of Entitlements Section, Eircom Buildings, Knockmay, Portlaoise, Co Laois. Lo-Call 1890-200-560.

You must have your application to transfer or change the registration details of entitlements with the Department by 16 May 2011.

You will also find the following documents on the website:
- Standard Partnership Agreement
- Standard Dissolution Agreement
- Transfer of Entitlement Waiver Form (where beneficiaries of a Will wish to waiver the entitlements to a third party)
- The farmer to whom you are transferring entitlements must have the herd-number on the 31 May 2011 or have at least applied for one by that date.
- If you have applied for a herd-number but have not yet received it, you should send in your transfer application anyway and

You can only transfer entitlements to another farmer who holds a herd-number.
your entitlements

**Consolidation (Stacking) of Entitlements**

Consolidation or Stacking of Entitlements still means you give your existing entitlements to the National Reserve and are re-allocated a lower number of entitlements at a higher value reflecting the full value of your Single Payment.

If you declare in 2011 a number of hectares which is less than the number of entitlements you have been allocated you will be able to consolidate if:

- The number of hectares declared on your 2011 SFP application form is less than the number of entitlements allocated to you.
- You are able to declare a number of eligible hectares equal to at least 50% of the number of entitlements originally allocated to you including any additional entitlements allocated to you in respect of the Sugar Beet Compensation.
- The reduced number of hectares declared on your 2011 SPS application form must have been because:
  1. You were subject to a Compulsory purchase order (CPO)
  2. You leased/rented during the reference period where the agreement has now expired
  3. You benefited from Sugar Beet Compensation in 2006

You are entitled to apply for consolidation in more than one year provided all the conditions are met. If you were accepted under the consolidation measure in the past and wish to consolidate further in 2011, the land farmed during the reference period and not available to you when you previously consolidated cannot be used again as a reason to further consolidate.

Consolidation can be tricky so carefully read the Terms and Conditions to ensure you fulfil the requirements.

**Key steps for a clean transfer**

- Complete a transfer of entitlement application form when making changes to the person linked to any herd number.
- Ensure you fully complete the application form and include supporting documentation, where applicable.
- Ensure your application is signed and witnessed by a member of Teagasc, agricultural consultant, solicitor or peace commissioner.
- If your herd number is registered jointly with another person, all persons must sign the application form.
- If entitlements are being transferred by inheritance, the legal representative (executor, administrator) should sign on behalf of the deceased person. Where two or more persons fulfil this role, all should sign.
- If the registered owner of a herd number is a company, the director(s), secretary or majority shareholder must sign the form.
- If you want to submit a Single Payment application on behalf of the estate of a deceased farmer you should:
  - Contact the Inheritance Enquiry Unit, Eircom Building, Portlaoise, Co Laois, Lo-Call 1890 200 560, inheritance@agriculture.gov.ie (see below)
  - Check with the DVO that the herd number of the deceased is still valid
  - Enclose any relevant documents that you may have.

**National Reserve**

The National Reserve is now only replenished by the surrender of unused entitlements each year. It is becoming a very scarce resource. The National Reserve has always catered for new entrants to farming and is likely to again this year.

Applicants are required to meet certain criteria, including farm and off-farm income limits and minimum farming related educational qualifications. Applicants must submit a Single Payment Scheme application in 2011 declaring the eligible lands that they are farming.

Details of the 2011 National Reserve will be announced in April with a closing date of 16 May 2011 to coincide with the closing date of the Single Payment Scheme.
Land Eligibility

Land eligibility has become the major focus for the EU and Department of Agriculture. It’s not just about what farmers put down as eligible on their SFP forms. What is actually on the ground must be reflected on the Departments Land Parcel Identification system (LPIS).

Farmers responded to the call from the Department to make changes to maps in 2010. However, the job is not complete. Inspections by the Department continue to uncover errors on the ground compared to what is identified on the LPIS system. With the EU auditors focusing on LPIS, a lot more work needs to be done by farmers to avoid individual penalties and large national fines.

The LPIS system underpins all area-based schemes and culminates in payments of €1.9 billion to farmers, so it is worth the effort to get it right. In 2011 every farmer has received a full set of maps for the parcels they submitted last year. It is vital that farmers and advisers look carefully at them and make corrections.

Farmers must make sure they do not include ineligible areas on their 2011 SFP application form.

What do farmers need to do in 2011?
Farmers need to examine each map carefully and review each parcel. If you have submitted maps outlining details of exclusions you made in 2010, check that they have been applied correctly. If they are not there at all, you should resubmit the changes.

The only other changes you need to make are the alterations that have happened since then. On the other hand, if you did not submit a map or maps containing details of exclusions in 2010, you are now required to illustrate on the enclosed maps details of any building, farmyard, dense scrub, quarry or other ineligible areas.

You identify the ineligible feature by drawing a red line around it and submit the map to the Department.

As well as submitting the map after illustrating the ineligible area, you should also amend the pre-printed claimed area in the application.

What is eligible land?
Eligible Land is all land which is subject to an agricultural activity by an applicant for a period including 31 May 2011. In other words, all land which an applicant uses for arable crops, hay, silage, grazing by farm animals or which he/she chooses to top on an annual basis is eligible to that applicant. Land, which was declared on an application in 2008 which gave rise to an SFP payment and was subsequently afforested, can be eligible in certain circumstances. The Terms and Conditions have the full definition of eligible land.

If an applicant is not producing crops or animals from the land, he or she can choose to simply top it once a year to keep it in GAEC.

What is ineligible land?
Ineligible land is land which an
applicant does not control for a period including 31 May 2011 or land which he/she does control but which cannot be farmed. This includes land under houses, farm buildings, yards, roadways, lakes, rivers, streams, woodland, rock, scrub, furze, bog, or land not being farmed or fenced off to exclude livestock etc. While areas of scrub may be cleared and re-deemed as forage, growing scrub may not be burned. If a farmer burns scrub after 1 March it may lead to penalties under the Single Payment Scheme and other area-based schemes.

Some farmers are applying on parcels which are available to them but they do not actively farm them. This land is not eligible under the SPS or the Disadvantaged Area Schemes as the applicant is not actively carrying out an agricultural activity on the land. This applies equally irrespective of the land being rented, leased or owned. It also applies to commonage land or to land to which the applicant has a grazing right.

It must be clearly evident that the applicant concerned is actively farming rented land and it is suitable for and compatible with the applicant’s farming enterprise. It is not acceptable to rent land for use in a ‘map acres’ exercise. Where evidence of such an arrangement is found, the land in question will be deleted from the SPS application in question and the applicant subjected to the appropriate penalties. Farmers should consider the renting of such land very carefully as if it is not deemed eligible, it may result in the loss of the full Single Farm Payment for 2011.

Disadvantaged Area Scheme
The eligibility rules for the disadvantaged area scheme (DAS) are slightly different to those of the SFP scheme. Firstly, specific areas of the country are designated as disadvantaged so only parcels of land within this designated area are eligible for the scheme. Secondly, non-forage arable crops such as cereals, potatoes, vegetables, etc. are not eligible. The areas under Linnnet and REPS 3 or REPS 4 habitats are also not eligible. Thirdly, the land parcels in the DAS area must be farmed for the calendar year with a minimum stocking rate of 0.15 livestock units per Ha. The eligibility rules regarding ineligible areas referred to under SFP also apply to DAS. So in the case of a grass field with scrub/furze and/or rock the eligible area is the same for SPS and DAS.

To apply for the Single Payment Scheme you must be a farmer, have eligible land available to you for a period including 31 May 2011 and have payment entitlements. The specific rules are set out each year in the Terms and Conditions booklet which is posted to each applicant each year and is available at www.agriculture.gov.ie.
Eligibility: Ineligible features

It is no longer sufficient just to reduce your claimed area to take account of an ineligible area. A map outlining the ineligible features must be submitted in all cases. Farmers have received significant penalties because sufficient deductions have not been made for ineligible areas. Where these features are clearly visible on the maps, it is very simple to exclude them by drawing a red line around them.

New features such as farmyard extensions, new house sites as in the example here, new quarries etc which are not visible on the maps must also be marked on the map and the appropriate deduction made to the claimed area. The area under rivers and streams is not eligible so deductions must be made as appropriate to the claimed area.

In this example the farmer has sold a site that will be built on in the summer. Because he will not be farming it for the complete calendar year in 2011, it is not eligible and he has to exclude it. This is done by red-lining the site. In this case the site area will be given a parcel number and the eligible land remaining will be given a new parcel number. On the application, draw a line through the old parcel on the back page of the application form. He will write in the new parcel identifying it with the old parcel number and the letter A and fill in the new eligible area. As he has sold the site, it is not his land and will be excluded from his form.
Eligibility:
Taking out scrub

The map clearly shows a dense area of scrub. The digitised area of the parcel is 7.14ha. Stock cannot graze the scrub, so the farmer must put a red line around the area as it is ineligible. The area outlined (see below) is estimated at 0.5ha. This gives a new reference area of 6.64ha, which is now the payable area. If the scrub is not dense and animals can graze (for example, 40% of the land under scrub), the farmer would still put the red line in the same place, but would reduce the digitised area by 0.3ha, not 0.5ha, to take this into account.
Eligibility: Excluding buildings

Here we have a clear-cut case of the buildings not being excluded. The original area of the non-digitised parcel, including the buildings, was 9.00ha. The farmer has to draw a red line around the buildings (see below). In this case, two new parcels will be created. The first one is 8.65ha of Permanent Pasture. The second is put down as Other and Building. In the past, the farmer always reduced the area claimed on his SFP by 0.35ha. However, the change has to be made on the maps to ensure the Department LPIS system is accurate.
Eligibility: Scattered rock and scrub

Where rocks are present or dense scrub/furze has established on a parcel that is being farmed, you have to make a percentage reduction to the claimed area to allow for the ineligible area. A red line should be drawn around the area concerned and the appropriate reduction applied to the claimed area of the parcel. In this example the parcel contains three obvious areas of rocks. The farmer/agent has put a red line around each of these areas and made appropriate deductions. In the area on the left it is mainly rock and it is deemed that only 5% of the area can be grazed so he has to deduct 95% of the area. In the area redlined on the right it is 97.5% ineligible so the eligible area is reduced by 97.5%. The area in the middle is just rock so 100% has to be deducted from the eligible area of the parcel when it is submitted on your SFP application form.

Eligibility: Ineligible features

Difficulties can arise in the areas where bracken (ferns) and rushes are beginning to dominate the pasture through reduced stocking rates. A considerable proportion of higher land may be covered with heather among other species. With declining sheep numbers, much of this land is now significantly under-grazed and in many cases shows no evidence of use. Heather is often found to be increasing in height and becomes woody through under-grazing.

Inspectors are obliged to reject such lands not being farmed or being farmed at a stocking rate insufficient to keep the land in GAEC.
Safeguarding your Single Farm Payment

Inspections an important element of the process

Filling in your application correctly is the first step in getting your full SFP and other direct payments. To hold onto their payments, farmers have to ensure they fully comply with the cross compliance and eligibility requirements.

The Department is obliged to carry out a number of inspections every year. There are two types of inspection carried out under the SFP scheme: land eligibility and cross-compliance. Inspections are selected on the basis of risk assessment but also include a random component, so you don’t know when you could be subject to one.

LAND ELIGIBILITY

Five percent or around 7,000 farmers who submit applications for Single Farm Payment Scheme and other direct payments (e.g. DAS) are checked for eligibility annually. These checks are generally carried out as one inspection. You can be checked in two ways:

» Remote sensing using satellite technology
» Ground inspections

About two-thirds of these checks are carried out by way of remote sensing without the need for an on-farm visit.

If selected for a ground inspection, you will normally receive 48 hours’ notification.

The inspector will check the following:

» That the actual area and crop declared in the Single Farm Payment Scheme/Disadvantaged Area Scheme application form corresponds with the area and crop farmed and there are no overlapping claims or duplicate claims.

You can be checked in two ways:

» You may also receive an inspection under other schemes that you have applied for. These may include:
  » The Disadvantaged Area Scheme.
  » The Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme.
  » The Grassland Sheep Scheme.
  » Schemes under the Rural Development Measures.
  » The Burren Life Scheme.

Other Inspections

You may also receive an inspection under other schemes that you have applied for. These may include:

» The Disadvantaged Area Scheme.
» The Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme.
» The Grassland Sheep Scheme.
» Schemes under the Rural Development Measures.
» The Burren Life Scheme.

Common Failures include:

» Over or under declarations.
» Land declared but not being farmed by the applicant or kept in GAEC.

CROSS-COMPLIANCE INSPECTIONS

Cross-compliance checks involve two key elements:

» Verification that farmers comply with the 18 Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) set down in EU legislation on the public health, animal and plant health, animal welfare, and the environment and
» Verification that farmers maintain land in good agricultural and environmental condition (GAEC).

COMMON FAILURES

Most cross-compliance penalties result from non-compliance with the animal identification and registration together with nitrates requirements (see graphic).

Some 1,400 farmers (or 1% of SPS applicants) are inspected annually under all SMRs that are applicable to them. These inspections are required under the legislation and are unannounced in respect of the feed, food hygiene and welfare requirements.

However, 3% of farmers who have cattle must be inspected under Cattle Identification and Registration requirements and 3% of farmers who have sheep are checked for compliance with the sheep identification and registration requirements. Applicants may receive up to 48 hours’ notice for these identification and registration inspections.

ARE ALL THESE INSPECTIONS CARRIED OUT IN ONE FARM VISIT?

While every effort is made to minimise the number of visits to farms by integrating the eligibility and cross-compliance inspections, it is not always possible to avoid more than one visit. In some cases eligibility inspections may have to be prioritised and separated from cross-compliance inspections.

This is because all eligibility inspections must be completed before payment under the Disadvantaged Areas’ scheme issues in September and potential advance payment under the SFP on 16 October.

If the inspector finds a problem he/she will issue a non-compliance notification (NF) detailing the non-compliance issues found at inspection.

When the file is processed you will be informed in writing of the eligibility/cross compliance inspection results if non-compliance is found.

Breakdown of non-compliance in 2009

- Cattle 42%
- Sheep 18%
- Nitrates 17%
- Other 3%
- Pesticides 9%
- GAEC 8%
- Food Hygiene 3%
- Food 3%

* Farmers can breach in more than one area

You can get a copy of the actual inspection forms the Department inspector fill out on the Department of Agriculture web site www.agriculture.gov.ie in the Cross compliance section.
There are four pillars to cattle inspections; tagging, Cattle Movement Monitoring System (CMMS)/AIM database, passports and the Bovine Herd Register (BHR). The inspector comes prepared with a current herd profile from the CMMS/AIM, which shows all the tag numbers for cattle in the herd. He also has a copy of the maps that the farmer submitted in his Single Farm Payment application.

The inspection normally starts inside, where the farmer will be asked for all passports. He counts these to see if they correspond with the tally that is on his profile. He also checks to see that each passport is properly signed.

The next step is to check each card against the herd profile. He will then check the herd register or ‘blue book’ - in most cases, looking specifically for updates of recent sales or purchases that have occurred since the CMMS profile was printed.

He should not find additional cards, especially if an animal has died and is still ‘live’ on the profile. This should have been sent back to the DVO or discarded, or given to the dead animal collection service.

The inspector then asks the farmer where the different groups of stock are and heads out to the fields to check them. He has to count every animal on the farm.

As the inspector goes though each group, he will record the number of animals and the field they are in on his map. This will be used to add up the total numbers later on. The inspector is specifically looking for animals with one tag or no tags at all and will record each one. He normally brings a small set of binoculars to help him to read tags on animals.

He also identifies animals that are over 27 days old but not tagged. A farmer has 20 days to tag an animal and seven days to register it.

The inspector also takes tag numbers down. As he walks around, he will take a random sample of animal tag numbers in herds greater than 20 animals. In herds up to twenty he will record all animals. Each animal on the farm will be checked to see if it has two tags.

The sample will be checked with the profile and herd register to see that each animal has a passport, that the animals are in the herd register and are also directly recorded on the CMMS/AIM system.

If there is a problem with the sample in any respect, then the inspector will put all animals through the crush to check each one.

However, if the sample is clear, no animals will need to be put though the crush. This is what happens in the majority of cases.

**Key points**

- One inspector will carry out the inspections in the majority of cases.
- Inspections normally start inside with the passports and the herd register.
- The animals on the farm should match the animals on the Department’s herd profile.
- The herd register is kept up to date.
- All movements, births and deaths are notified to the CMMS database. Both the buyer and seller are responsible for keeping their herd profiles updated. The buyer is responsible for notifying the Department that the animal is moved into his herd. Details of events must be entered within seven days.
- There is a passport for each animal on the holding and it is signed by the keeper.
- Passports for dead animals have been passed to the knackery or returned to the local Department office.
- All calves must be tagged within 20 days of birth and registered within seven days of tagging.
- A sample of tags are read during the inspection and checked. Missing tags are recorded.
- Farmers are given the opportunity to sign summary sheets, which show the provisional results of the inspection.
- Farmers have the option of appealing the findings.
The majority of the problems with nitrates appear in the farm yard. If a farmer gets that right, he is more than halfway there. The inspector normally starts the nitrates inspection in the yard. He will first do a sketch of the farm yard. He might have a copy of it from previous REPS plans. The key here is to ensure that he has all housing and storage tanks identified.

The inspector will go straight to the silage pits to see if effluent was being diverted properly into tanks that are “fit for use”. “Fit for use” kept coming up during the inspection. Livestock manures and other organic fertilizer storage facilities must be constructed and managed in a way that prevents pollution. The inspector will check for signs of pollution and structural defects such as cracks in concrete floors and walls.
The inspector will have a map of all the land submitted by the farmer on their SFP application. He will look carefully at areas where slurry and other organic and chemical fertilizers have been recently spread to see that buffer zones have been kept around water and especially any water used for human consumption (wells, abstraction points).

He will also check that slurry was not spread on waterlogged soils or on steeply sloped fields where there are risks of runoff into waterways. This applies all year round so if the land is wet or there’s heavy rain forecast slurry shouldn’t be spread, even if it’s the middle of July. Of course during the closed period he will check to see no slurry or farmyard manure has been spread. He will also check for dung heaps, which are not permitted to be stored in the field during the closed period.

Where arable land is ploughed or sprayed with a non-selective herbicide between 1 July and 1 December, he will check to see that a green cover has been established within six weeks. Grassland ploughed or sprayed after 1 July must have a green cover from a sown crop by 1 November. He will also ensure that grassland was not ploughed between 16 October and 30 November.

Another simple check he quickly does is to see if there is a downward splash plate on the slurry tanker.

A big emphasis is put on identifying where dirty water and clean water goes. Soiled water must be minimised by ensuring clean water is diverted to a clean water outfall. The inspector checks that functioning gutters and downpipes are in place.

The inspector will also check where silage bales are stored. If stored outside and within 20m of a watercourse, then there must be storage facilities for the effluent. There should be no escape of effluent.

In the fields

The inspector will have a map of all the land submitted by the farmer on their SFP application. He will look carefully at areas where slurry and other organic and chemical fertilizers have been recently spread to see that buffer zones have been kept around water and especially any water used for human consumption (wells, abstraction points).

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He examines any dirty yards where cattle have access. On this farm the dairy collection yard was looked at to ensure the dirty water was going into a collection tank and no clean water was able to flow into the tank. The only other check in the parlour for nitrates was to see where the dairy washings went. The reason is if the dairy washings are diverted to a separate tank they can be spread during the closed period. In all cases there must be at least 10 days of storage capacity. Where they are stored with slurry, they cannot be spread until the end of the closed period.

The biggest job the inspector has to do is measure every slurry/dirty water storage tank and dirty yard on the farm. Out come the tape measure and the rods. He measures the length and the width and gets the depth, even if there is slurry in them, by pushing the rods down to the bottom.

Loose houses and manure stores are also measured. These are recorded on a sheet.

To get a clear picture of the storage capacity on the farm, the inspector’s records have to go back to the office. There the storage capacity will be calculated as well as the amount of livestock manure produced on the farm.

The inspector works on the previous year’s records. The inspected cases have to present records within two weeks while farmers not inspected must have them completed by 31 March of the following year.
SMR2 on the protection of groundwater against pollution

The objective of this SMR is to protect the groundwater from contamination caused by dangerous substances. Groundwater, an important drinking water resource, provides the base source of water for our rivers and lakes. The legislative controls are primarily concerned with two groups of substances.

The first group includes products commonly found on farms such as sheep dip, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, detergents, fuel and waste oil.

The second group of substances affect the taste and odour of groundwater and include such products as dairy detergents, effluents, metal compounds, phosphorous and ammonia.

Care is needed in handling fertilizers and fuels on the farm to ensure that there is no potential for discharge to groundwater. Bags should be handled with care to avoid damage. Washings from fertilizer applicators should be collected in the same way as for soiled waters.

On-farm fertilizer stores, whether permanent or temporary, should be sited where there is no risk of flooding. An important area for the inspection check is the suitability of the storage area, especially when stored outside. What the inspector is looking for here is to ensure that fertilizer bags are not torn, allowing the fertilizer to leach out and risk causing pollution to the groundwater.

On sheep farms, a lot of focus will be on the dipping tank and the disposal of spent sheep dip to ensure there is no risk of it contaminating groundwater. The inspection process will check that the dipping tank, where it is being used, is working properly and does not have a bung in the base, thus ensuring that the dip is not let straight out.

The inspector will also check the apron where the sheep come out to ensure that the run-off is properly captured and that the farmer dilutes the dip and disposes of it properly to prevent pollution.

Checklist

You should always ensure that:

» Agri-chemical stores are sited well away from drains, waterways and drinking water supplies.

» Pesticides are stored in marked secure cabinets, sufficiently bunded to contain the volume of pesticide stored in them.

» Any spillages cannot escape to ground waters through drains, soakways, wells, boreholes and watercourses

» Fuel tanks are well located and maintained with no evidence of discharge.

» Waste oils and old batteries are properly disposed of.

» Dipping tanks are of sound construction and have no outlet pipe or valve at the base of the tank.

» Dipping tanks are empty and securely covered when not in use.

» Stock is excluded from land for the prescribed period following the application of diluted spent sheep dip.

» Where in exceptional circumstances a burial licence is granted to dispose of animals on farm, this should be done in a manner that prevents pollution.
How to keep on the right track with pesticides

Pesticides were brought into the cross-compliance inspections in 2006. There has been an increased focus on the area during full cross-compliance inspections, which led to a seven-fold increase in farmers getting penalised under Pesticides (SMR 9) last year.

Most of these penalties were 1% of the farmer’s SFP but this article shows how a few small changes can help people safeguard their SFP.

In one of the quickest elements of the cross-compliance inspection to check on the day, the inspector will ask if the farmer uses plant protection products or dairy detergents and he will look at where they are stored. They must be stored in a secure lockable unit that is constructed so it will contain any spillages within the store. Dairy detergents can be stored in the dairy, but all other products must be kept in a dedicated store.

At first glance, the inspector will check that powders are stored above the liquids and, most importantly, that all the products are stored in their original containers with labels attached. The inspector checks to see if there is a graduated jug or scales for measuring the products when using them. The biggest job the inspector has to carry out is to record every product in the store. He will record the name, quantity and the PCS number, supplier name and date of purchase.

All products used and stored must be currently registered. Products that are recently out of register can still be stored but must be properly labelled and cannot be used. The inspector will take the list of products back to the office and the list will be forwarded to the Pesticide Control Service, where each one will be carefully checked. The inspector will also look for the farmer’s records for the application of the different products for the previous 12 months.

Key points

- Number of Inspections approx. 1,400 – 1% as part of full cross-compliance
How to keep on the right track with pesticides

You must have a bucket of sand or peat on hand to soak up any spillages.

He will also look for protective clothing and equipment such as a mask and face guard, which must be properly maintained.

The inspector will examine the sprayer and ask if it has been calibrated in the last 12 months. He will take down the make and serial number on the sprayer.

Checklist

The farmer must meet the following obligations:

» Plant protection and disinfectants (biocidal) products must be segregated from food and feed.
» Storage facilities used must be dedicated to storage of chemicals.
» Storage facilities must be enclosed, secure and constructed so that leakages and spillages are retained within the store.
» A warning sign must be displayed at the entrance to the store.
» Powders must be stored separately from, or above, liquids.
» Plant protection and disinfectant products must be stored in their original containers, in good condition, with labels attached.
» Scales and graduated measures (e.g. jugs) designated solely for weighing/measuring plant protection and disinfectant products must be available.
» Facilities for soaking up small spillages or leakages must be available (e.g. bucket of sand or peat).
» Protective clothing and equipment must be available and properly maintained.
» Records of purchases, acquisitions and disposal or return of plant protection and disinfectant products must be maintained.
» Records of use of plant protection and disinfectant products must be maintained.
» Application equipment in use must be suitable for purpose and must have been calibrated within the last 12 months.
» Only authorised or registered plant protection and disinfectant products may be stored and used on the farm.
» Products are used in accordance with the principles of good plant protection practice.
Keep on top of your flock

The inspector will normally start with flock register and the dispatch documents. He will go through the dispatch documents and see that they have been filled in properly in your flock register. The paperwork must be kept up to date. It is all about creating a paper trail to show what stock has come into your flock and what stock has been sold out.

The percentage of farmers that received penalties in 2009 jumped to 15.16%, or one in every eight farmers inspected. That's over double the level of 6.42% in 2008.

Nearly half of the farmers who got penalised suffered a 5% penalty to their SFP. The number of sheep inspections has increased from 3% in 2009 to 5% in 2010 due to the introduction of the Grassland Sheep Scheme. Having looked at what the inspections for sheep entail, it is clear that most of the penalties are received for poor keeping of records and not returning the census.

If you have had sheep at any time in the last three years you could be in line for an inspection. Cattle might have the CMMS/AIM system, but for sheep the most important document is the sheep census.

The inspector will have a printout of the census figures you have submitted going back four or five years and also the sheep tags that you ordered over the same period. If a farmer has not returned his sheep census in any of the last three years he will get a penalty. It would seem an easy one to avoid.

The inspector will then move outside. Every sheep on the farm has to be counted. This is to make sure the numbers on the farm tallies with the flock register. The inspecting officer will, depending on the size of the flock, want you to pen all or a number of sheep to allow him to check their ear tags.

Most penalties received for keeping poor records

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Checklist

Three key elements for sheep inspection:

» Sheep are tagged in accordance with the requirements.
» The Flock Register and dispatch dockets are up to date.
» A sheep census is completed and submitted at the end of the year.

Key points

» Number of Inspections about 1,500
» The increase in the rate of inspection to 5% is due to the Grassland Sheep Scheme

Flock register

What does the farmer have to do?

» Record the entire tag number for each breeding animal in the register.
» Keep the register up to date, including details of movement of sheep/goats onto and off the holding, including the date of movement, the number of animals moved, the destination or origin of the animals moved and associated dispatch/movement documents numbers.
» Record the annual census details in the register/s

Farm-to-farm movements

New dispatch/movement document books will be issued to farmers in April/May 2011. Once you receive your new book, you will be required to use the new dispatch/movement document for all movements off your holding including when sheep are moved directly from one farm to another to notify the movement to the District Veterinary Office within 7 days. Any old dispatch/movement documents must be destroyed and will no longer be acceptable.

Farmers must:

» As the seller, complete a dispatch/movement document, and retain the yellow copy for your own records and gives both the white and pink copies to the purchaser.
» As the purchaser, record your flock number on both white and pink copies of the dispatch/movement document and return the pink copy of the dispatch/movement document to the DVO within 7 days of sheep moving onto your holding from the other holding.

He will check the sheep carefully to make sure they are all tagged properly. He will then take a random sample of tag numbers of the sheep that are penned. These will be checked against the flock register and the dispatch documents at the end of the inspection. There have been significant changes in how sheep and goats are now tagged. During the inspection the inspector will check to see if you are complying with the new tagging regulations. All sheep must be tagged. The type of tag will depend on the sheep’s age with electronic tags a requirement for breeding sheep born after 1 January 2010. See the Department’s website for full information on tagging.

The inspection for sheep then finishes back inside, where the inspector checks the tag numbers he read against the animals in the flock register and dispatch documents. If they are found in the register and there is a dispatch docket for purchased sheep then there is no problem.
Getting the environmental conditions right is a key part of avoiding penalties.

Eligibility and getting the maps right have caused major holdups for farmer payments this year. Eligibility and keeping land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) are closely connected. There will be a continued focus on eligibility of land to draw down single payment. Under GAEC, agricultural land on which an application for single payment is made must be farmed and, if not commercially farmed, must be farmed in such a manner that it can be brought back into agricultural production easily. This can be achieved by topping or by managed grazing using appropriate stocking rates where topping is not feasible.

If the inspector finds no evidence of farming to keep the land in GAEC, the parcels will be rejected.

Most of the elements of the GAEC inspections will be carried out as the inspector walks around to count the stock on livestock farms. The inspector will have a copy of the maps corresponding with the most recent SFP application. He will also have any special features or natural monuments marked on the map.

The inspector will be checking to see that, in respect of forage land, external boundary fences are stockproof and also that fields have adequate ground cover, especially over the winter months. A big area of concern here is poaching. While a bit of muck around gates and under hedges where animals have sheltered from the elements is no problem, paddocks being used as a sacrifice area where a lot of the ground cover is gone is likely to attract a penalty.

Paddocks being used as a sacrifice area where a lot of the ground cover is gone is likely to attract a penalty.
Farmer obligations

Farmers are obliged to maintain land in good agricultural and environmental condition. The farmer must ensure:

» That farming practices are in place to avoid soil erosion. For example, finely tilled soils must not be left unsown, no severe poaching by livestock should be allowed, and there should be no overgrazing of land, including commonage and sand dunes.

» That soil structure is not being damaged by machinery, e.g. misuse of machinery in waterlogged conditions, compaction of soil during silage or crop harvesting, etc.

» That the minimum level of maintenance has been complied with, e.g. the management regime for permanent pasture (grazing, cutting, topping) allows agricultural production to take place the following year.

» That grassland is not abandoned and that permanent pasture is being protected.

» That tillage crops are grown under normal husbandry conditions and fallow land is managed in accordance with Single Payment Scheme Terms and Conditions.

» That there is no damage to designated habitats or protected monuments.

» That there is no encroachment of invasive species, spread of noxious weeds, burning of growing vegetation between 1 March and 31 August.

» That external farm boundaries of parcels declared as forage are stock proof.

» That landscape features (hedges) do not encroach into the field thereby reducing the utilisable area.

» That landscape features (hedges and open drains) are not removed.

» That soil organic matter is being maintained in continuous tillage parcels.

Organic matter
Tillage farmers have started testing plots that have been in continuous cropping for over six years for organic matter. The Department inspector will look to see the records of the tests and also if remedial action is needed and if it is being carried out. They will also carry out a random number of organic matter tests themselves to verify the results a farmer has received.

Noxious weeds
Noxious weeds such as ragwort, docks and thistles are also on his checklist to ensure adequate management controls are being applied. Having a few ragwort in the field may not be a major problem once the inspector is satisfied that the farmer is making sufficient effort to keep them under control and he can rectify the problem. However, a sea of yellow ragwort or an obvious dock or thistle problem will put the farmer at risk of a significant penalty.

Removing old hedges
Since 2009 hedges and open drains are designated as landscape features. The good news is that they do not have to be deducted from eligible area. The bad news is that if a farmer wants to remove existing hedges he has to plant a new hedge of the same length on his/her holding first. The inspector will have a recent map showing hedges and open drains. If any part of a hedge has been removed he will ask to see where the new hedge was planted. Many farmers do not realise this and they could receive a penalty. In addition, they will have to replace the hedge. Another big issue is encroachment. He will check hedges to make sure they are not being allowed to creep into the field. This comes back to an eligibility issue as the land must be able to be brought back into farming easily. The farmer is not allowed cut down established trees without a permit. If the Inspector sees that trees have been removed he may ask to see the permits.

Land takeover by invasive species.
Established trees cannot be cut down without a permit.
Noxious weeds.
Farmers should expect the unexpected check

You should always be ready for an impromptu animal welfare and food and feed hygiene inspection.

The inspector will ask to see around your buildings. Where straw, peat or woodchip is used for bedding, he will look to see that enough is being put under the stock to keep them clean and comfortable. He will check if the sheds are suitable for the number of stock housed in them. His main concern is that animals have enough space and the sheds are well ventilated and have adequate lighting. He will check water bowls and troughs to see that they are clean and suitable for use. He will also check for sharp edges or places where animals could be injured. The inspector will check the electrical points to make sure they are safe and animals are not at risk of being electrocuted. If animals are kept outdoors, he will check to see if they have enough protection from adverse weather and are not being wintered on unsuitable land conditions.

The inspector will be focused on the area of sick animals and will want to see the medicine cabinet and will check on the products that are there with regard to their authorisation for use. The products should carry a veterinary product authorisation number or an EU-authorised medicine code. He will check each product against the remedies book, particularly for partially used products. He will also check if the animal remedies book is being maintained and animals treated have been recorded and withdrawal periods adhered to.

He will check the level of mortality on the farm and, if rates are higher than normal, he will ask for an explanation. Another big issue is ensuring that dehorning and castration are being carried out correctly. He will also check for evidence of tail docking. Tail docking and/or mutilation of the tail by even taking off an inch or two has been banned since 2003 and is part of the Cross-Compliance checks since 2007. Finally, he might check to see the farmer is carrying out good breeding practice and not using inappropriate sires that could cause difficult calving for the type of cows and heifers he keeps.
On dairy farms, the hygiene standards in the milking parlour will be checked. The inspector will look to ensure that doors/screens are in place to avoid contamination. He will check the bulk tank to make sure it is cooling milk properly and that the plant is being cleaned properly, focusing on internal surfaces that come into contact with milk. The inspector will want to observe the milking process but does not necessarily need to go into the pit. The concerns are that the cows are healthy and the udders are clean during milking. He will check to ensure that milk from diseased animals is not entering the bulk milk tank. He will want to see how a farmer identifies cows that are undergoing treatment and to make sure the milk from such cows does not go into the food chain. This could simply be a board to write the number on and that the farmer uses red tape or a marker that clearly identifies the cow during milking.

Young calves are focused on during the welfare visit. Calves must not be confined to an individual pen after eight weeks of age unless under veterinary certification. Calves must not be kept in individual pens with solid walls that prevent them seeing or touching other calves, unless with veterinary certification. Calves must not be tethered except for one hour while feeding milk and their use must not cause harm and they must not be muzzled.

The feed hygiene inspection will look at where feed is being brought from and stored on the farm. The inspector will normally start by looking at the feed stores to make sure they are bird-proof. He will also check for other vermin problems. While most farmers will have cats to control rats and mice, he will look at bait points where they are being used. Again, records are important and a farmer must keep records on where he bought the feed to ensure that it has been sourced from a registered supplier. The inspector will look for purchase/delivery dockets. He will also check the medicine cabinet to make sure no unauthorised or illegal substances are used on the farm and will check to make sure that any products are used properly and withdrawal periods are being observed. As you see, there is a slight overlap with the animal welfare inspection in this area.

The inspector will check to see if adequate cleaning and disinfecting of housing, equipment and utensils used for calves is being carried out. The lying area for calves must be comfortable, clean and adequately drained. Floors must not adversely affect calves and appropriate bedding must be provided for calves less than two weeks old. He will also ask for confirmation that calves have been given colostrum within the first six hours of life.

Key points

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<th>Animal welfare</th>
<th>Feed</th>
<th>Food Hygiene</th>
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<td>» Number of inspections about 1,400 - 1% under full cross-compliance inspections</td>
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With a major focus on land eligibility, Department inspectors are carefully looking over all land submitted by a farmer. As well as identifying whether the area in each parcel is correct, they will check to see that what is actually on the ground is reflected on the Department’s Land Parcel Identification system (LPIS). Sixty-six percent of the (6,750) eligibility inspections are done remotely using remote sensing technology. If issues are identified they will be referred for a ground inspection to confirm the eligibility status. Farmers need to have a good understanding of the eligibility of land and what they are required to do.

**Hedge trimming**

REPS have ensured the majority of the nation’s hedges have been kept under control, but many farmers don’t realise that it is also a requirement under GAEC and land eligibility. Poor maintenance of hedges can lead to an area reduction depending on the circumstances. Where a hedge has not been cut for a number of years and is encroaching into the field, a GAEC sanction will first be considered. If the encroachment is significant and brought about by not trimming for a number of years combined with a low stocking rate then an eligibility reduction will apply. A GAEC sanction can be significant as it applies to the full payment and highlights the importance of watching out for the GAEC requirements even though you may have more land than entitlements. Farmers have to realise that repetition means the sanction can be tripled if corrective action is not taken and hedges are not cut back.

**Heather**

The first issue for inspectors is whether the applicant is actively farming the land. If being farmed he will next consider the stocking rate. Where the inspector finds that such heather land is abandoned or insufficiently stocked, leading to excessively high woody heather growth, the parcel is rejected. The picture shows a heather parcel which was rejected at inspection. Where such cases are found by remote sensing they will be referred for a ground inspection to confirm the eligibility status.

**Other issue for eligibility inspections**

- Declaring land for SFP/DAS payments (owned, rented or leased) that a farmer did not intend to or could not farm.
- Newly created habitats under REPS 3 or 4 or AEOS must be declared by entering the parcel number, digitised area, ticking the ‘OTHER CATEGORY’, and entering the parcel use as REPS4 habitat or as appropriate. The claimed area must be set to zero.
know the lie of the land

**Bracken**
For bracken/ferns the inspector is trying to determine whether the land is being farmed or not. He will check for the presence of grass cover among the ferns. Presence of the grass indicated that the land was being farmed in this instance at an adequate stocking rate. Where inadequate or no stock were present the undisturbed decaying fern litter killed off all grass leaving the area concerned ineligible.

**Rushes**
Rushes are another species which appear to be becoming more common in recent years on pasture land. Such lands continue to be eligible where it is evident that sufficient stock is grazing the land and that this level of grazing is keeping rushes under control though it is not necessarily topped each year. Where rushes in pasture are controlled through topping, the GAEC requirements are satisfied. Where rushes have completely taken over, and the area shows no evidence of farming on inspection, such areas will be deducted in full.

**Trees**
Single trees in a field do not normally require any reduction in a grazing situation where grass continues to grow beneath it. The felling of a tree requires a permit and if the Inspector sees evidence of tree felling he will look for it. Even where there are numerous trees you can have ample grass growing beneath the dispersed trees. Where this is the case you must make a percentage reduction to reflect the loss in grazing due to the tree density. In a tillage situation where the land is not grazed after harvest the area under trees must be deducted in full as in the case of clumps of trees in difficult corners or other uncultivated areas. Furze or gorse on the other hand tend to be denser and normally need a full reduction for the area covered.

**Landscape Features**
The designation of hedges and drains as landscape features was implemented in 2009 under the GAEC provision as part of the ‘health check’ to protect habitats. In addition, this designation also allows the area under such features to be considered eligible for payment. However these hedges must be maintained at the base. Hedges not adequately trimmed will incur a GAEC sanction. There is no need under the requirements to top unless part of an environmental management plan. However their removal without prior replacement will incur a considerable sanction with the additional requirement to immediately reinstate the hedge. The inspector will have orthophotos and remote sensing images so hedge removal will be easy to detect. In addition crop growth patterns on inspection would be obvious indicators.
Habitats directive on the conservation of flora and fauna

**AIM OF THE DIRECTIVE**
The aim of the Habitats Directive is to promote the maintenance of biodiversity in a sustainable way, thus ensuring the preservation of natural habitats and the protection of wild fauna and flora throughout the country.

The Habitats Directive, together with the Birds Directive, forms the cornerstone of Europe’s nature conservation policy. It is built around the two pillars of the Natura 2000 network and a system of species protection. The directive is primarily concerned with the conservation of a range of natural habitat types and of wild fauna and flora. Such habitat types include meadows and wetlands, which are of European importance.

**SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION**
The Directive defines the specific standards that are applicable to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). In addition to all other land, it lists certain habitats and species that must be protected within SACs. Irish habitats include such areas as raised bogs, blanket bogs, turloughs, sand dunes, heaths, lakes, rivers, woodlands, estuaries and sea inlets. Particular Irish species which must be protected include salmon, otter; freshwater pearl mussel, bottlenose dolphin and Killarney fern.

The main threats and pressures on habitats are:
• direct damage, such as peat cutting, drainage and infilling, road making, reclamation of wetlands such as bogs and fens; removal of sand and gravel;
• overgrazing and undergrazing;
• pollution of waters by nutrients or silt;
• unsustainable harvesting;
• invasive alien species.

Where a landowner is considering making changes on his farm that might affect wildlife habitat in a designated area, he must consult the relevant authority beforehand. ‘Notifiable Actions’ are activities or operations that might be damaging, and can only be carried out with the permission of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

On lands classified as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), under the Habitats Directive you must:
• Implement any management prescriptions applicable within the SAC.

You must not:
• Undertake any actions detailed
The aim of this SMR on the conservation of wild birds is to protect wild birds, their eggs and nests from destruction. There are additional requirements which apply on land designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA).

**SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)**

The EU Birds Directive provides for a network of sites in all member states to protect birds at their breeding, feeding, roosting and wintering areas. It identifies species which are rare, in danger of extinction or vulnerable to changes in habitat and which need protection. Such species include the Corncrake, Kingfisher and the Hen Harrier.

Certain activities may be restricted within SPAs and can only be carried out with the permission of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG). These activities are called “notifiable actions” and vary depending on the protected area that is present on the site. For example, notifiable actions for a river bank in an SPA may prohibit the use of fertilizers and herbicides or the removal of trees within a certain distance of the river.

As an applicant under the Single Farm Payment, you must ensure that you are aware of any designated land you make application on and must comply with the notifiable actions which apply.

On lands within an SPA, you must:
- Implement any management prescriptions applicable within a particular SPA.
- Comply with the notifiable action requirements.

You must not:
- Damage a protected site;
- Undertake any activities detailed on the notifiable actions list pertinent to the site unless you have received consent for that activity in the SPA from DEHLG or have the activity specified in a REPS/DEHLG farm plan.

On all lands you must not:
- Deliberately kill or capture any wild birds,
- Destroy, damage, remove or keep any nest or egg of any wild bird,
- Deliberately disturb wild birds while they are breeding or rearing young.

Where can I get further information?

Further information on the implementation of the Habitats Directive is available from: NPWS and the Dept of the Environment.
**Can I make changes to my form once it is submitted?**

Yes, you can submit an SFP Amendment form to make changes after you submit your SFP application. If you submitted your form online there is a facility to submit amendment forms online as well. Land parcels can be added and claimed areas corrected without penalties up to 31 May and with a penalty up to and including the 11 June. You may withdraw land, reduce the claimed area of a parcel or change use from eligible to ineligible, (for example, the transfer of a house site), from your application without penalty, at any time after the 31 May 2011 closing date for amendments provided the Department has not notified you about any irregularities concerning your Single Payment Scheme application, or provided you have not been notified of an on-the-spot inspection. Obvious/innocent errors can be changed at any time after the 31 May 2011 closing date for amendments. An obvious/innocent error would be a minor clerical error on your part, generally relating to missing details from your application, for example crop use. You may also change a declared crop use provided that the original crop was eligible.

**How do I ensure that the Department receives the form on time?**

Ensure that you post your form in good time to reach the Department by the deadline. You are advised to obtain proof of postage order of either a Swiftpost receipt or a Registered Post receipt to definitively confirm that the application was posted in good time. A Certificate of Posting is not considered acceptable.

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**Breakdown of penalties recorded in 2009**

- **Cattle**
  - Tagging 14%
  - CMMS/AIM Breaches 45%
  - Passport Breaches 24%
  - Register Discrepancies 17%

- **Sheep**
  - Discrepancy in Census return 15%
  - Maintenance of Register Breaches 32%
  - Failure to submit previous year Census 22%

- **GAEC**
  - Poaching causing erosion 4%
  - Stockproof Boundary Breaches 5%

- **Hygiene**
  - Cleanliness of Milk Equipment Breaches 6%
  - Mis-use of Feed additives/ Veterinary products 7%
  - Use of unauthorised or illegal substances 15%

- **Pesticides**
  - Unregistered Products 60%
  - Other 18%

- **Nitrates**
  - Inadequate collection of Organic Manures 38%
  - Management of manure storage breaches 21%
  - Structural Defects leading to pollution 12%

- **GAEC**
  - Withdrawal period breaches 7%
  - Inadequate management of animal feed 28%

**SMR**

- SMR3 - Sludge
- SMR6 - Identification and Registration of Animals - Porcine
- SMR10 - Hormones
- SMR13 - Foot and Mouth
- SMR14 - Swine Vesicular Disease
- SMR15 - Bluetongue
- SMR17 - Animal Welfare (Pigs)
My herd number was changed during the last few weeks to include my spouse’s name. Do I have to take any action? Yes you do. The SFP payment entitlements you hold must be transferred to you and your spouse’s names in order that the SPS payment can be made in 2011. You should complete the 2011 Transfer of Entitlements form and ensure that it is submitted to the Department by the deadline of 16 May 2011. The completed transfer form should be posted directly to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Single Payment Unit, Eircom Building, Knockmay Road, Portlaoise, Co Laois. You should also ensure that both you and your spouse sign the SPS application form.

How can I avoid a dual claim? A dual claim happens where two or more applicants claim the same land parcel. This is one of the most difficult errors to solve and, in many instances, it takes a considerable time to sort and results in significant delays in payment. The Department has encountered cases where multiple applicants declare the same land parcel. There are a number of precautions that you can take to ensure that the likelihood of a dual claim arising is minimised.

• If you are no longer farming a land parcel or parcels you were claiming in 2010, you should draw a line through the parcel details on the back of the application form to confirm that you are no longer claiming the parcel.

• If you are renting land and declaring it on the application form it is recommended that you seek confirmation from the owner of the land that you continue to rent the land and that you are using the land.

• If you are renting land for the first time, you should ensure that (i) you have the sole right to rent the land and (ii) you are farming the land in question.

What should I do if I am not claiming all of the lands that I farm? You are advised to carefully examine the pre-printed application form and maps received from the Department. If you find that one of more of your fields are excluded from the pre-printed information you should submit details of the land in question and attach maps of the area with your 2011 application form. You are reminded that penalties are applied if you do not declare all of your land. Furthermore, you payments may be understated, as you are not declaring all of your land.

What action should I take as my pre-printed application form does not include my farmyard? The Department has asked that all applicants with a farmyard, which has not been specifically identified and given a LPIS Number in the past should be identified in 2011. If you find that your farmyard does not have a LPIS Number please insert details of the area involved in the application and submit a map illustrating details of the farmyard.

Will the submission of a map hold up my payment? No. The submission of maps will not delay payment. However, it should be appreciated that the non-submission of maps could delay payment.

I mislaid the maps that I received from the Department. What should I do? All applicants registered for the Department’s online services (Agfood.ie) will have automatic access to their maps, whether registered as an individual user or with an approved agent. This is just one of the many benefits available through the online facility. Non-registered users should contact the Lo-Call number for their relevant County.

I am in REPS and the maps I got from the Department do not show my newly created REPS habitat or my linnet plot. What should I do? You must submit maps to show the location of “newly created” REPS habitats under REPS 3 or 4. In addition you must also show where linnet parcels are located. Ensure the claimed area is adjusted accordingly.
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