



5ha Survey Responses March 2025

Working together as the UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition, we set up a survey to help us understand how to make payments work for farms of 5Ha and less in England. The minimum area threshold for SFI payments was removed in July 2024 and we wanted to know if organic, agroecological farmers and growers in England had started to access SFI payments and what barriers prevented them from doing so. During the period that the survey was live, SFI was abruptly stopped and so we have a range of answers including those who had managed to get applications in and others on the verge of applying or disappointed by the scheme suddenly closing to new applicants.

The UK Fruit & Vegetable Coalition includes the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Network, the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA), the Organic Growers Alliance (OGA), the Soil Association and the Sustain Alliance for better food and farming (Sustain)

Overview:

Our farmers and growers welcomed the removal of the 5Ha limit, finally they saw a way of being rewarded for work that in general they were already doing, encouraging farmers toward the adoption of organic practices. However, there are a number of significant barriers to the application process and reward delivery, all of which could be made much more straightforward, which would enormously help our farmers and growers, and give a real boost to British horticulture. These include:

- Simplifying the application process and providing more advice and support for first time applicants (for instance pre-registration and with some kind of ready reckoner)
- Simplifying the mapping for those practicing rotation / growing a large number of crops (CSAs are often growing 80+ different crops)
- Adding options for small-scale horticultural capital items
- Adding payments for educational visits in to SFI
- Rewarding those who are already farming sustainably
- Making payments higher per hectare for intensive agroecological horticulture on small areas of land

Summary results:

- **71 responses** of which vast majority filled in by grower / farmer with others filled in by a board member, director or other staff member
- The 71 farms produced the **following products** (number of farms producing each given next to product):
 - Vegetables 61
 - Salads 54
 - Soft Fruit 34
 - Top fruit 35
 - Herbs 44



- Flowers 16
 - Eggs 18
 - Nuts 6
 - Fuel 2
 - Grapes for wine 2
 - Meat 12
 - Preserves 8
 - Fuel 2
 - Fibre 2
 - Milk and other dairy products 2
 - Fruit trees, willow wands, plants, honey and dried beans
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- Average **area of land over which they have control**: 4.39 Ha ranging from 0.01 to 12
 - Average **area of land used for horticulture**: 1.59 Ha ranging from 0.01 to 7
 - Of the 70 responses to the question “**Do you know that farms under 5 hectares can now apply for Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) payments?**”, most (56 or 80%) knew that the 5Ha limit had been dropped, of the remaining 20%, eight (11%) didn’t know it had been dropped and six (9%) didn’t know what the 5Ha limit was. One didn’t answer.
 - About a third of the respondent farms **had applied for a subsidy** (23 or 32%), and four had applied for multiple different subsidies. The most commonly applied for subsidy was Countryside Stewardship (13 farms), then SFI (eight farms), FIPL (3 farms), BPS (two farms) and AHW payments for sheep (one farm).

For those that had already applied to SFI their experience has been mixed:

- Of the 14 responses given, two had had a positive experience
- The others talked about how complicated and confusing the process was and how it had been hard to get any help or support from DEFRA/RPA on the application process
- It was also mentioned that even when they had spoken to nice staff the guidance hadn’t been appropriate
- The need to map each accurately and how to map different crops in a rotation system has also caused anxiety
- Finally, some respondents felt the amounts didn’t justify the work to apply, although one expressed that they were doing it in the hope that educational payments would come online as part of SFI which would make it worth it
- One had successfully applied with help from an external agronomist and another had had excellent help from the Royal Countryside Fund



“Have found the process really opaque throughout. Eg, understanding how to do the maps of our land, what had to be on them, how accurate they needed to be etc. I really couldn't find any guides for hand-holding a beginner through this. A few times I've spoken to RPA mapping staff on the phone, and they've been really nice and helpful, but they can only deal with the facts of the mapping, and it's been difficult to resolve the nuances of what is a hedgerow and what is a wide scrubby area!”

“Almost none of the area-based actions are worth us applying for - even though we use green manures etc, it is over areas too small to get any meaningful payment.”

“I'm finding it super confusing! I've registered one piece of land but not sure what land use to put it as there's so many different crops and seems mad to put in each individually but that's what they have advised”

Payment amount

- Only six respondents shared a figure for what they had received and this ranged from £100 through £600 to a high of £13,000 with the majority around £3000. Others estimated they would have received between £3000 and £10,000 had they applied before the scheme closed

Non-applicants

For those who hadn't applied, the reasons given were concentrated around a number of themes:

- 11 farms mentioned the complicated nature of applying or being unsure what they could apply for
- 8 farms didn't know they could apply
- Two farms had tried to get support and felt let down
- 11 farms mentioned lack of time and money to complete the application and in one case compounded by having waited for new options and for another by not getting support around mapping updates
- For five farms the nature of their land rental had either confused the process or meant they couldn't apply (one mentioned that the landlord claimed subsidies and a couple more had informal or short tenancies)
- Five were unsure it would be worth it
- 10 farms were in the middle of looking into or finalising the application when the scheme closed

Respondents said:

“Too much paperwork and stress for too little cash.”

“I was still preparing an application when it closed - I am the only full time worker and so it takes a while to put things together.”

“I doubted it would be worth my time to complete very detailed forms. My expectation is that I'd get about £10, but I should investigate.”



"In the past we have found it troublesome with complicated forms for relatively small amounts of money. We saw that the SFI would have been more suitable for us, especially the organic top-fruit. We were enquiring with questions when we heard it had closed."

"Didn't find the time, especially as was hearing a lot about it being a confusing and time consuming process."

"When I last looked, the main payment for organic agriculture wasn't an option for me. The other options didn't seem to pay much. I need to check if the organic option is available yet."

In response to the question **"Do you have any comments about the SFI options that are currently available for growers of 5Ha and less?"** the following comments and themes emerged:

- A strong consensus on the lack of clarity around what you can apply for and a very difficult process for new entrants compounded by worries about options being withdrawn
- That the payments are still per hectare and so tiny for those on small land areas as many market gardens and CSAs are and that they haven't been well thought out for horticulture or top fruit
- That the payments are focused towards rewarding conversion to a more sustainable way of farming rather than rewarding those (like most of our members) who already farm sustainably
- That payments seemed focused towards land availability of land for permanent grassland or wildflowers which isn't an option on a small horticultural sites
- There are no payments for coppicing or capital payments, for instance for irrigation which is needed to expand business
- Entering each crop as a land use is very tricky - so many options and obviously each one will only be a tiny area.
- That there are no payments for public engagement in SFI
- That it doesn't reward diversity of crops or activity

"It is very hard to understand for new entrants."

"It need to be adjusted for small growers."

"It's not been clear to me about what's possible."

"It seems to be the case that you can convert land into making it more sustainable and reap the rewards but if you're already doing it there is no financial benefit."

"It's all very complicated to start with. I think there could be more to acknowledge that even though we are small we are directly feeding people and grow a very wide variety of crops that take considerable management



and skill. We also engage with the public, not just schools and I think some funding could go towards the offering of volunteering and corporate groups as well as events on farm."

"The plan of our farm, even though small, seemed too diverse for the categories of the scheme."

- In answer to the question **"Do you host school visits?"** 31 farms answered yes, 30 "no" and seven that they would like to or are planning to. Of those that did 21 farms hosted between 1 and 10 a year, three farms between 11 and 30 and five between farm 31 and 300. One market garden was in a school. Most were unpaid. Seven farms received payments from schools, four from Countryside Stewardship, three from FIPL and four from grants

Asked to give any final comments, respondents views included:

"Personal hand-holding/advice would be useful to help first time claimants maximise money for actions they are already taking/plan to take."

"Thanks for getting the 5ha limit removed - sure it was mainly down to your campaigns!"

"The shutoff of the process with no notice is extremely frustrating as well as the lack of support for something that is complicated but could have had a huge impact for us at small scale."

"We have always thought it very odd that fruit and vegetable growers are not able to access subsidies as other farmers are. We had been encouraged by the talk of the Sustainable incentive but it seems that we are unlikely to benefit because we already do it!"

"I'd really welcome some capital options for fruit pressing etc machinery."

"To be honest, it was a bit of a revelation - for the first time in 15 years of growing - to be getting rewarded for doing the right thing. For so long it's been farmers doing the wrong thing who often attract funding to encourage them to be less bad. Really great that being certified organic is getting rewarded. Have actually heard uncertified growers now talking about certifying (finally!) because of the financial incentive through SFI."

"The process required a bit of reading, but thought that was fair enough. Good there were a lot of options. Would be great for all the community and health work we do to be rewarded financially too, but guessing that that funding should come through the NHS instead."