

Farming Newsletter



WELCOME!



Welcome to the August 2026 edition of the Mersey Rivers Trust farming newsletter!

This month we are waving goodbye to Sal Potts, whom some of you have worked with for a number of years. She will finish her time at Mersey Rivers Trust at the end of September, and is moving to a new role at Cheshire East Council. We wish Sal all the best on her new job!

Read on to find out more about farming news and what's on offer this month, you can also keep up to date with our [Farming Hub](#) online.

SFI WINDOW 1 CLOSING

SFI Window 1, which is aimed at giving smaller farms and those not already receiving ELM revenue funding an early opportunity to access the scheme, will close no later than 11:59pm on 28 August 2026.

Eligible farmers can apply before this deadline or, if they prefer, wait and submit their applications in Window 2, which opens in September 2026 and is available to all farmers and land managers, with a total budget of £230 million that includes additional drought support funding plus any money not allocated during Window 1. For more information and guidance on the application process click [here](#).

Defra regularly updates their [Farming Blog](#). To subscribe to the blog and ensure that you receive their latest farming updates click [here](#).



DROUGHT SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

The government have announced a package of support to help farmers manage the impacts of this summer's extreme dry weather.

These measures include:

- Temporary adjustments to Environmental Land Management agreements, so farmers affected by drought can continue to receive payments and take practical steps to protect livestock, crops and land.
- An extra £50 million for Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026 Window 2, taking the total budget for SFI26 to £290 million to help more farmers access support. Increased SFI uptake will help farmers to adapt to the risk of future droughts.
- Action to make it easier to build reservoirs, including reducing unnecessary barriers and updating planning guidance.
- Funding up to £15 million to build on-farm reservoirs, helping farmers store water and become more resilient to future droughts. This grant is expected to open during the Autumn. The scheme will focus on supporting water storage for crop irrigation, helping the horticulture and arable sectors adapt and improve resilience to drought.
- Improved access to water during drought conditions, the Environment Agency will prioritise requests for short term variations to abstraction licence conditions.

For more information on the support available please click [here](#).



FREE WATER MANAGEMENT PLANS IN THE RIVER BOLLIN CATCHMENT

Farmers in the River Bollin and Dean catchments (including Mobberley, Sugar, Birkin, Pedley and Marthall Brooks) are all eligible for a FREE farm water management plan produced by Mersey Rivers Trust. To chat to a Farm Advisor about this, please contact Amber via email - amber@merseyrivers.org



WILDER CHESHIRE AWARDS

Across Cheshire and Warrington, thousands of people are creating habitats, protecting wildlife, improving landscapes, inspiring communities and helping more people connect with nature. Many of these stories go unseen. The Wilder Cheshire Awards have been created to shine a spotlight on those individuals, schools, businesses, farmers, community groups and organisations making a genuine difference.

Nominations can be made up until the 13th of September. For more information scan the QR code or click [here](https://www.wildercheshireawards.co.uk).

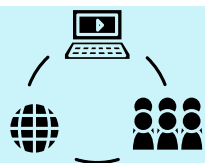
A promotional banner for the Wilder Cheshire Awards. It features a green and white logo of a bird with a leaf. Below the logo, it says "Wilder Cheshire AWARDS" and "Led by Cheshire Local Nature Partnership". The main text "WHO IS MAKING CHESHIRE WILDER?" is in large, bold, green letters. Below this, it says "Enter or Nominate Today" and "Scan the QR code to enter". A QR code is visible on the right. At the bottom, it says "Entries close 13 September 2026" and "www.wildercheshireawards.co.uk".

Wilder Cheshire AWARDS
Led by Cheshire Local Nature Partnership

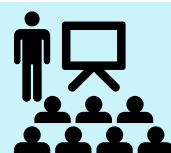
WHO IS MAKING CHESHIRE WILDER?

Enter or Nominate Today
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TRAINING AND EVENTS



WOODLAND CREATION WEBINAR

The Forestry Commission are hosting a FREE online webinar about managing new woodland. The first few years of life can be critical to establishing a healthy tree. Presentations will be followed by a Q&A. To sign up for this free webinar click [here](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/webinars).

A banner for a Forestry Commission webinar. It features a photograph of a man in a green vest planting a tree in a field. The text "Forestry Commission" is at the top. Below it, in a large orange box, is "Managing new woodland". In a green box, it says "21 October 2026". In a blue box, it says "Virtual event, 1-2pm".

Forestry Commission

Managing new woodland

21 October 2026
Virtual event, 1-2pm



WATER FRIENDLY FARMING DIRECTORY



ORGANISATION	DETAILS
	Offers free, confidential advice and support focused on water quality, soil health, and sustainable farming. Develop tailored Water Management Plans for farms in specific catchments, identifying funding opportunities (such as small grants for capital works), and supporting natural flood management as well as pond and wetland creation or management. Also offer workshops, demonstration days and training. The Trust offers services across the Mersey Basin, with targeted projects in the Upper Weaver, River Bollin, and Alt-Crossens catchments. farming@merseryrivers.org.uk / 07920 095 753
	Provides practical environmental advice to protect nature and boost sustainability, focusing on water quality, soil health, and habitat creation. This includes supporting farmers with hedge planting, woodland creation, reconditioning compacted soils, and implementing sustainable drainage systems through catchment specific projects. info@groundwork.org.uk
	Catchment/Environmental Advice: Free advice is available for farmers in specific catchment areas regarding water quality, pesticides, and nutrient management. Southcatchmentteam@uuplc.co.uk Agricultural Water Supply: For new troughs or farm connections, call 0345 072 6067 Biosolids Usage: For information on biosolids, contact UUBioresource@uuplc.co.uk / 0345 672 3723
	Advice, guidance, and support aimed at helping farmers comply with environmental regulations, reduce pollution, and protect natural resources (soil, water, and air). enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk / 03708 506 506
	Provides a map identifying the best locations for nature recovery, which informs Biodiversity Net Gain delivery and ELMs, farmers can add their land to this map. Future Farmer Group - A dedicated group to showcase ways to boost wildlife while improving profitability. Support for regenerative farming methods including action plans promote low-carbon, agro-ecological methods and soil health improvement - naturerecovery@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk
	Cheshire wildlife trust have a number of schemes running and available to support you with up to 100% grant funding to plant trees or hedges, create or enhance meadows and establish ponds. - naturerecovery@cheshirewt.org.uk / farming@cheshirewt.org.uk or call 07394 568564
	Political lobbying, expert legal and technical advice (via NFU CallFirst), and business-specific guidance. Membership includes the Legal Assistance Scheme, a free Legal Health Check, and access to specialised advisers. Also offer networking, sector reports, and discounts on insurance and services. - nfu_north@nfu.org.uk / 02476 939401
	Can provide significant grants, expert advice, and financial incentives for planting trees, creating woodland, and implementing agroforestry, notably through the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) which covers up to 100% of capital costs and 15 years of maintenance payments. These schemes aim to increase farm income, improve biodiversity, and provide livestock shelter. North West and West Midlands team, based at Delamere Forest, reachable at 0300 067 4340 or delamere@forestryengland.uk
	Works collaboratively with farmers, water companies, and regulators to ensure water sustainability in the North West and Midlands, particularly focusing on water security for agriculture in the face of climate change. Provides advice on long-term investments in on-farm reservoirs and water storage, promotes Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR), increased rainwater harvesting, supports funding for farmer-led groups to identify options for improving water supply resilience, gives advice on water rights trading and water transfers. waterresourceswest@outlook.com
	A partnership between Defra, Natural England, and the EA, this program offers free, one-to-one advice from local advisers to reduce water and air pollution. Can offer visits to provide advice, refer to technical experts where needed, advice ahead of inspections or submitting applications for capital grants. csf.northwest@naturalengland.org.uk
	Free, expert, and tailored advice on tree planting, agroforestry, natural flood management and woodland creation. Provide significant funding, often covering up to 100% of project costs and maintenance through the Trees for Climate grant scheme. Their support includes designing projects for biodiversity, shelterbelts, and increased, sustainable productivity. 03033 300 410 / mail@merseyforest.org.uk

The Farming Advice Service (FAS) provides free, confidential advice for farmers and land managers in England to help protect people, livestock and the environment, Technical advice line: 03000 200 301 | Email: advice@farmingadvice.service.org.uk

This is produced by the Weaver Gowry Agricultural Group. For more information please email farming@merseyrivers.org



DATES FOR THE DIARY



JANUARY

16th - For any land located in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ), this is the date from which you can apply manufactured nitrogen fertilisers to grassland and tillage land if conditions are suitable.

FEBRUARY

1st - For any land located in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ), you can apply organic manure with a high, readily available nitrogen content to grassland and tillage land on all soil types if conditions are suitable and you adhere to the quantity application restrictions.

MARCH

1st - You must not cut or trim a hedgerow that is covered by the Hedgerow management rules between 1 March and 31 August. You must not cause or permit another person to cut or trim such a hedgerow.

31st - If you hold a winter or all-year-round water abstraction licence (authorising abstraction outside the period April to October). You have 28 days to submit your record of actual abstraction to the Environment Agency.

APRIL

1st - This is the end of the burning season for heather, rough grass, bracken, gorse or vaccinium. The burning season is from: 1 October to 15 April in upland areas & 1 November to 31 March in other areas.

30th - If your farmland is located within a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ), by 30th April each year you must make a record of: the numbers and type of livestock you kept in buildings or on hard standing during the previous slurry/manure storage period & the dates for the start and end of use and locations of any field sites you use for storing solid manure.

JUNE

SFI 2026 application window 1 opens exact date - and will remain open for around 2 months - although it may close sooner if demand is high and the Window 1 budget is fully allocated. For more information click [here](#).

JULY

Capital Grants 2026 applications open (Date TBD). For more information click [here](#).

SEPTEMBER

SFI 2026 application window 2 opens

1st - in NVZs, closed period starts for high-nitrogen organic manure on grassland (shallow/sandy soils); manufactured nitrogen on tillage land.

1st - You may now cut and trim hedges until the 28th of February.

