

Farming Newsletter



WELCOME!



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

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.

RIVERS TRUST STATEMENT ON SFI APPLICATION WINDOW 2 CLOSURE

The Sustainable Farming Incentive application window 2 closed to applicants within 6 hours of opening. £233 million of funding that will improve soil health, boost biodiversity and drive improvements in water quality and resilience evaporated in record time. Thousands of farmers and land managers, many reeling from the one of the most challenging harvests on record, have been left with nothing to show for months of careful planning and head into winter unsure of the future of their businesses. While the Rivers Trust Movement will continue to support and advise farmers to deliver these outcomes for nature, we call on Defra to set out how they will shape SFI27 and beyond to ensure the mad scramble seen yesterday is not repeated. Specifically, we call on Defra to work with farming and environmental bodies to move away from the menu-style approach of SFI26 and towards a system that recognises the challenges and opportunities at a landscape-level; to deliver what the landscape and farmers need. For more information click [here](#).





TREES FOR CLIMATE GRANT

The Mersey Forest has funding available through its Trees for Climate Grant to help landowners across Cheshire and Merseyside introduce trees onto their land.

Introducing more trees and hedges on your farm can provide shelter and shade for livestock, improve soil quality, help manage water flow and soil erosion, and attract pollinators and other wildlife.

The grant is very flexible, and a local Woodland Advisor can work with you to design a planting scheme that works for you and your business. Whether you are planting a small copse in the corner of a field, introducing low-density planting or hedgerows, or developing a wider agroforestry scheme, our advisors will work alongside you to find the best solution.

We offer one of the most competitive grants for tree planting, with funding covering up to 100% of planting costs, including related infrastructure such as tree guards, fencing, gates, and paths. Up to 15 years of maintenance payments are also included, providing ongoing support for the establishment and management of your trees. Make an enquiry today for free, advice on which woodland planting scheme could work for your land. For more information 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





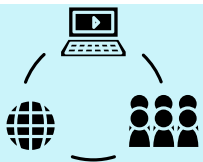
Defra regularly updates their [Farming Blog](#). To subscribe to the blog and ensure that you receive their latest farming updates click [here](#).

BLUE TONGUE: LATEST SITUATION

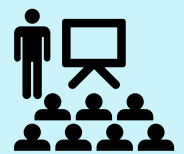
More than 2,300 premises across the UK have now confirmed cases of bluetongue virus (mainly serotype 3) in the 2026–2027 season, according to the latest government update. England accounts for the vast majority with 1,901 cases, followed by 368 in Wales and 40 in Scotland, while Northern Ireland remains free of the disease.

On 29 September alone, authorities confirmed 76 new cases in England, 30 in Wales and one in Scotland, bringing the total of premises under investigation to over 1,000. The whole of England and Wales, plus parts of south-west Scotland, remain under restricted zones to limit spread by midges, with farmers urged to remain vigilant for symptoms in sheep, cattle and other susceptible animals.

For more information click [here](#).



TRAINING AND EVENTS



AGROFORESTRY DEMO DAY

Tuesday 10th November 2026

10AM - 3PM

Wincle, Macclesfield

Join us for an Agroforestry Demo Day in Wincle, full details TBD.

This event will feature expert speakers and a guided walk around a farm, exploring the perks of farming with trees. This event includes a FREE lunch.

For more details and to register to attend this event please email Amber on - amber@merseyrivers.org





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. For more information click [here](#).

JULY

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

SEPTEMBER

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.

