



Land eligible for Better Land Contribution



Introduction

This leaflet explains what kind of land you need to have before we can pay Better Land Contribution (BLC) in addition to planting grants under the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS). The Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (FWPS) uses these definitions too.

What land is eligible for BLC?

ARABLE LAND

This is land that is eligible for the 'Arable Area Payment Scheme' (AAPS) at the time of application to WGS. A definition of what is eligible for the AAPS is contained in Appendix 2 of the "Farm Woodland Premium Scheme – Rules and Procedures" booklet available in the WGS Applicant's Pack or from your local Agriculture Department office.

OTHER CROPPED LAND

This is land that is not eligible for the AAPS but which, for three years prior to the date of application to WGS, has been used for growing any agricultural crop other than grass.

IMPROVED GRASSLAND

This is agricultural land that was improved, as defined below, at least three years before the date of application to WGS. We will refuse BLC if we find that improvement took place less than 3 years before applying.

The test we use to determine 'improved grassland' depends on whether the area is in a Less Favoured Area (LFA). The LFAs are generally in the uplands, but your local Agriculture Department office will tell you more.

- **Outside the LFAs**

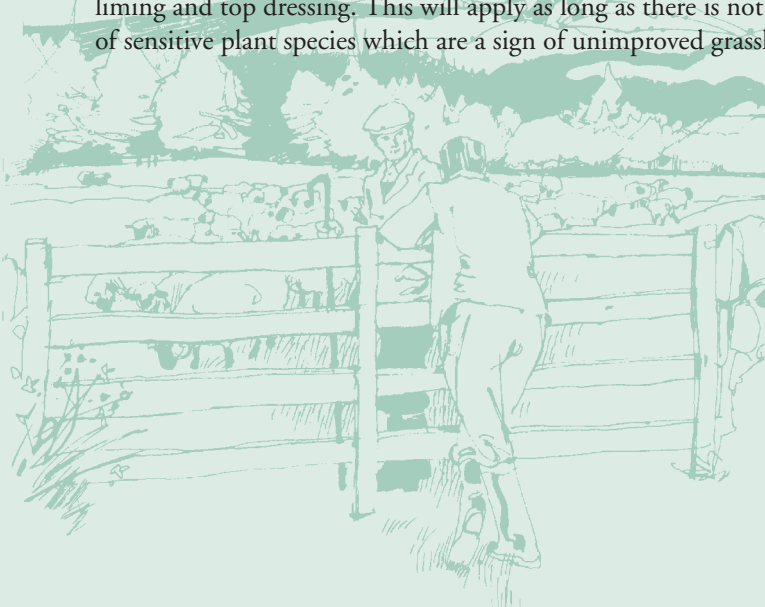
'Improved grassland' is land on which **more than half** the sward is ryegrass, cocksfoot, timothy or white clover, either singly or in mixture.

- **Within the LFAs**

(includes Disadvantaged Areas and Severely Disadvantaged Areas)

'Improved grassland' is land on which **more than one third** of the sward is made up of rye-grass, cocksfoot, timothy or white clover, either singly or in mixture.

If grassland within the LFA does not qualify under the definition above, it may still be eligible for BLC if it has been 'improved' by management practices such as a liming and top dressing. This will apply as long as there is not a significant presence of sensitive plant species which are a sign of unimproved grassland.



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What we include in ‘improved grassland’

‘Improved grassland’ is agricultural pasture mainly made up of mixtures of grasses and small herbs. There are different ways of improving grassland for agriculture. Some areas have been sown with highly productive ‘cultivars’ but others are just slightly altered semi-natural grasslands. Improving a wide variety of semi-natural grassland types leads to creating very similar swards that have few species but which are highly productive. For this reason, we are able to look at the sward that is present rather than try to find out how it was improved.

VEGETATION IN PATCHES

In some areas, particularly where only small improvements have been made to grasslands, the ‘improved’ areas are a patchwork with other vegetation types. If the patches are big and the ‘improved’ areas can be clearly distinguished, BLC can be paid on the improved areas. However, areas where improved patches are mixed with largely unimproved areas are not eligible for BLC.

VEGETATION TYPES THAT ARE NOT ELIGIBLE

The following vegetation types, some of which might be described as forms of grassland, are not eligible. This is because they cannot be regarded as improved agricultural pastures. Grasslands not used for agriculture are also excluded.

- **Woodlands and scrub**
- **Marshes, bogs, fens and swamps**
 - areas dominated by rushes, sedges, reeds, bog moss (*Sphagnum*) and cotton grass.
- **Heathlands, heather moors**
 - areas dominated by heather, heaths and bilberry.
- **Tall-herb, fern and bracken areas**
 - areas dominated by tall herbs like meadowsweet, globeflower, iris, bracken or other ferns and wood-rush.
- **Tussock grassland**
 - areas dominated by plants forming dense tussocks such as purple moor-grass (*Molinia*) and mat grass (*Nardus*).
- **Unenclosed sand-dune and sea-cliff grasslands**
 - areas dominated by marram grass, red fescue and maritime herbs like thrift.

The list of vegetation types that are not eligible is based on the categories of the National Vegetation Classification. We can give you more details of these types, if you wish.

Finding out if the grassland qualifies for BLC

Once we are happy that your grassland is being used for agriculture, we may then carry out the following tests to find out if it qualifies for BLC.

If we need to do a test, we will choose **10** points at random within the area of land under consideration. These points will not include field margins, headlands and obvious areas of different vegetation.

TESTING FOR THE FOUR MAIN SPECIES

At each of the 10 points, we will examine the vegetation in a **circle of 1m diameter**. We will look for rye-grass, timothy, cocksfoot and white clover and make a note of how much of these species is found.

If at least half (or within LFAs, at least one third) of any test circle is covered with one or more of the four main species then it will be counted. If 6 or more of the 10 test circles are counted then the land will be deemed eligible for BLC.

Land within the LFAs which fails the test for the 4 main species may, however, still be eligible for BLC, provided it also fails the next test for 'unimproved grassland'.

TESTING FOR SPECIES WHICH INDICATE 'UNIMPROVED GRASSLAND'

We will select 10 points at random as previously. We will look for the plant species in the list on the back page of this leaflet.

If 5 or more of the listed species are found in any test circle then it will be counted. If any 6 or more of the 10 test circles are counted then the land will be deemed to be unimproved and therefore not eligible for BLC.

OTHER INDICATIONS OF 'IMPROVED GRASSLAND' IN THE LFAs

As well as containing few of the species from the list on the back page of this leaflet, areas which have been improved for agriculture within the LFAs often have some cover of ryegrass, timothy, cocksfoot and white clover. Also frequently present are Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and Crested dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*).

Assessing applications

Our Woodland Officers visit areas proposed for new planting under the WGS. They are trained to recognise important key species and will normally be able to decide if the land in question is 'improved grassland' and eligible for BLC.

In cases where it is not possible to provide a reliable assessment immediately, we may postpone approval until this can be done. This will usually be in late spring or summer.

Uncertain cases

If the land is otherwise suitable for planting, but we do not think it qualifies as 'improved grassland', you can ask a suitably qualified person to provide us with a certificate saying that they have examined the grassland and found that it meets our requirements.

Before you arrange for the survey to be done, you must ask us if we accept the person. We would expect the person to have qualifications and experience in agricultural botany or grassland ecology and readily be able to identify the important species.

We will provide them with more information on the method of assessment to be followed.

If you want to know more

Contact your local Forestry Commission Conservancy office or

Grants and Licences
Forestry Commission
Silvan House
231 Corstorphine Road
Edinburgh EH12 7AT

Tel: 0131 334 0303



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List of species which are a sign of unimproved grassland

This is a list of the typical range of species on different soil types which are a sign of unimproved grassland.

GRASSES

Quaking grass	<i>Briza media</i>
Sheep's fescue	<i>Festuca ovina</i>
Crested hair-grass	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>
Meadow oat-grass	<i>Avenula pratensis</i>
Upright brome	<i>Bromus erectus</i>
Tor grass	<i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i>
False oat-grass	<i>Arbenatherum elatius</i>
Yellow oat-grass	<i>Trisetum flavescens</i>
Wavy hair-grass	<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>
Mat grass	<i>Nardus stricta</i>
Sweet vernal grass	<i>Authoxanthum odoratum</i>
Purple moor grass	<i>Molinia caerulea</i>

SEDGES AND RUSHES

Sedges	<i>Carex spp</i>
Wood rush	<i>Luzula spp</i>
Cotton grass	<i>Eriophorum spp</i>

HERBS WITH BASAL ROSETTES BUT LEAFLESS FLOWERING STEMS

Rough hawkbit	<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>
Autumn hawkbit	<i>Leontodon autumnalis</i>
Stemless thistle	<i>Cirsium acaule</i>
Cat's-ear	<i>Hypochoeris radicata</i>
Cowslip	<i>Primula veris</i>

HERBS WITH BASAL AND STEM LEAVES (USUALLY SMALLER)

Bulbous buttercup	<i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i>
Common knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>
Salad burnet	<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>
Great burnet	<i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>
Dropwort	<i>Filipendula vulgaris</i>
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>
Ox-eye daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Common sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosa</i>
Wood crane's-bill	<i>Geranium sylvaticum</i>
Lady's mantle	<i>Alchemilla glabra</i>
Cuckoo flower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>
Tormentil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>
Small scabious	<i>Scabious columbaria</i>
Mouse-ear hawkweed	<i>Hieracium pilosella</i>
Pignut	<i>Conopodium majus</i>

HERBS WITH UNIFORMLY LEAFY STEMS, BASAL LEAVES USUALLY SMALLER

Common bird's-foot trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>
Squinancywort	<i>Asperula cynanchica</i>
Red clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>
Meadow vetchling	<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>
Heath bedstraw	<i>Galium saxatile</i>

ANNUAL HERBS

Fairy flax	<i>Linum catharticum</i>
Yellow rattle	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>

MAT-FORMERS

Wild thyme	<i>Thymus praecox</i>
Common rockrose	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>
Horseshoe vetch	<i>Hippocrepis comosa</i>

SUB-SHRUBS

Bilberry	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>
Heather	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>
Heaths	<i>Erica spp</i>

