



English Woodland Grant Scheme

Email Alert December 2007

Rural Development Plan for England Update

The Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE) was agreed by the EU Rural Development Committee on 6 December 2007. The legal Commission Decision formally approving the Programme should be published by the New Year, allowing full implementation of the new Programme in January 2008.

However, at the end of November 2007 Defra agreed that we may issue provisional contracts on Woodland Creation Grant (WCG) and SSSI Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) in advance of formal approval of the Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE). This recognises the urgent need for work to be able to proceed, where possible, during the current planting season without further disruption.

Also during November it was confirmed that our request for State Aid approval to pay the higher 'farmer' rate of Farm Woodland Payment (FWP) to 'non-farmers' has been declined and therefore FWP for 'non-farmers' will be capped at a rate no higher than E150/ha. Application of the 'non-farmer' definition to a disproportionate number of applicants would obviously have a very negative effect on the willingness of land managers to engage in woodland planting. We are therefore seeking agreement on a working definition of 'farmer' that enables an appropriate proportion of people to qualify for the higher rate.

What this all means is that our Regional Offices are now issuing WCG and WIG SSSI contracts where normal application processes have completed in the following cases:

- WIG SSSI all cases
- WCG with no FWP
- WCG with FWP where the applicant has ticked the ">25% income from farming" box on the EWGS 1 form*

* We are taking the view that applicants who have declared this position will comply with any new working definition of 'farmer'.

For applicants who have not ticked the ">25% income from farming" box on the EWGS 1 form we need to clarify the working definition of 'farmer' before we issue any contracts to ensure they are not penalised by a capped rate of FWP. We will try and resolve this as soon as possible but do not want to hold up the issuing of contracts in the other categories whilst this is resolved.

An updated EWGS plan and Q&A document can be found on our [RDPE web page](#).
