



# Government Agricultural Schemes 2023

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Agriculture schemes and grants in Ireland have been a long-standing support to farmers and the agricultural industry, typically provided by The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

As of 2023, the main grant available is the **Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS)**. This gives farmers a flat-rate payment based on their farm's **eligible hectares**. **Ineligible land** in the BISS includes any land said that is not considered suitable for grazing or cultivation throughout the calendar year. The current minimum BISS rate is **€93.71 per hectare**, a sum that is usually released/available in /made available from December each year. This scheme is designed to support farmers in meeting the costs of running their farms, such as labour, seed, fertiliser, and machinery costs. The BISS also provides payments to farmers based on the number of livestock they own, the minimum being **0.10 Livestock Units per hectare**. This has led to a situation where farmers are encouraged to keep more animals, which can lead to **overgrazing and soil erosion**.

The previous BPS and Greening Payment have been replaced by the BISS, the voluntary Eco-scheme and **Complementary Redistributive Income Support for Sustainability (CRISS)**.

The **Eco Scheme** is a voluntary grant within the BISS as part of the **Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) 2023-2027**. It comprises 8 agricultural practices:

- **Space for Nature (SPN)** – at least 7% of the land dedicated to features included in a predefined list (i.e., hedge, shrub, pond, riparian zone).
- **Extensive livestock production** – 0.10 to 1.4 livestock units per eligible hectare.
- **Limiting Chemical Nitrogen Usage** – according to Grassland stocking rates in 2022 (Ineligible for organic farmers and farm holdings with 50% or more of commonage area and/or forestry)
- **Planting native trees and or hedgerows** – within a species listed and bought from DAFM registered professional operators.
- **Use of a GPS Controlled Fertiliser Spreader or GPS Controlled Sprayer** – all chemical fertilisers or plant protection products must be spread using this technology.
- **Soil Sampling and Appropriate Liming** – 1 soil sample for a maximum of 3 hectares of eligible land.
- **Planting a break crop** – diversify crops with rotation. Must have applied 50% or more of their land as arable.
- **Sowing a Multi Species sward** – on at least 7% of the eligible land.

If farmers choose to participate in the Eco scheme, when applying for BISS **they must select 2 practices** among the previous list. **Payment rate** is approximately between 70 and 80 € per hectare.

Within the BISS there is also the CRISS scheme, which is a front-loading payment to any farmers that applied for the BISS, that are entitled to at least one payment, and are active farmers. The payment rate is 40 to 43 € per hectare, to a max of 30 hectares. It is said this complementary payment will help redistribute funds from larger to medium and small farms.



Whoever applied to all the schemes described above must follow Conditionality requirements which, as of 2023, replace Cross Compliance requirements. These comprehend 11 Statutory Management Requirements (SMR), applicable to all farmers, and 9 Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC), applicable to farmers receiving support under the CAP. An Area Monitoring System (AMS) will monitor CAP schemes through sentinel satellites. These will be linked with AgriSnap, an app where users can submit geotagged photos to DAFM.

Statutory Management Requirements (SMR)	Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC)
Protection of waters against pollution caused by phosphates. Protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates. Conservation of wild birds. Conservation of natural habitats & wild flora & fauna. Food & feed hygiene. Restrictions on the use of substances having hormonal or thyrostatic action & beta-agonists in farm animals. Proper use of plant protection products. Sustainable use of plant protection products. Minimum standards for protection & welfare of calves. Minimum standards for the protection & welfare of pigs. Minimum standards for the protection & welfare of animals kept for farming purposes.	Maintenance of permanent grassland. Protecting Peatlands and Wetlands ( <i>from 2024</i> ). Burning of arable stubble is not allowed. Establishment of buffer strips along water courses Tillage management to reduce the risk of soil degradation & erosion. Land management practices to limit soil erosion during sensitive periods. Crop rotation in arable land ( <i>from 2024</i> ) Minimum share of agricultural area of 4% to non-productive areas & features, retention of landscape features, ban on cutting hedges & trees during bird breeding & nesting season & measures for avoiding invasive plant species. Protection of environmentally sensitive permanent grassland in Natura 2000 sites.

When applying for the BISS the farmer must also notify about any land that is hard to farm due to remoteness, topography, or poor conditions. These are **Areas of Natural Constraint** and can be funded accordingly if declared when applying for the BISS. These areas are still subjected to the minimum of livestock units mentioned previously, except for tillage land, which is payable but has no minimum stocking rate.

Each European Union member state must have an agri-environment scheme. During the last CAP the Green Low Carbon Agri-Environment (GLAS) scheme was in place. As of 2023, the new Agri-environment scheme is the **Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES)**. ACRES offers financial incentives to farmers who implement ACRES-approved management practices on their farms. These practices include measures to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and promote biodiversity. GLAS gave payments based on the completion of tasks while ACRES gives payment **based on the results** and achieved scores. The new scheme offers two approaches: General –available nationally (outside high priority geographical areas)– and Co-operation (CP) –available for farmer in high priority geographical areas.

ACRES General is divided into three tiers. Tier 1 represents top priority; it is reserved to farmers with Priority Environmental Assets (PEAs). Tier 2 is for farmers who do not have PEAs but whose lands include a Vulnerable Water Area. If a farm is not eligible for any of these, in order to obtain Tier 2 it should either have a stocking rate greater than 130 kg



livestock Manure Nitrogen per hectare or more than 30 hectares of arable land. Finally, Tier 3 includes a general list of actions all farmers can adopt.

For instance, one of the environmental assets part of Tier 1 is catchments within the High-Status Water objective mapped area in 2021 (figure below). If a farmer has at least 0.5 hectares of land within this area, they may apply for a Tier 1 priority entry and one of the 8 CAP practices must be identified as appropriate in the Farm Sustainability Plan.

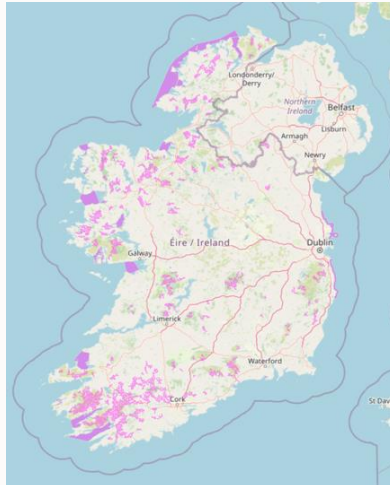


Figure 1. High-Status Water objective mapped area in 2021.

Other actions contemplated by ACRES general include, coppicing and laying of hedgerows, planting trees in riparian buffer zones and extensive grazed pasture. Only farmers with a maximum of 3 hectares, or less than 20% of their land which are under ACRES CP zone can apply for the ACRES General, otherwise they must apply for ACRES CP. ACRES general offers a maximum of 7 311€ per year, value which is determined according to actions selected and how they are implemented.

8 co-operation projects have been defined in the ACRES CP, as illustrated by the image below. County Leitrim is part of the North Connaught Ulster – Hen Harrier project. Within ACRES CP, a farmer can receive up to 10 500€ per year. Of this amount, 7000€ is the maximum that can be obtained based on results scorecards, while the remaining 3500€ is destined to extra Non-productive Investments (NPIs) and Landscape Actions (LAs). The list of actions will be provided to the farmer annually. If a farmer is within the Organic Farming scheme, they cannot receive the same amount of funds, there is a reduction of 250€ per hectare.

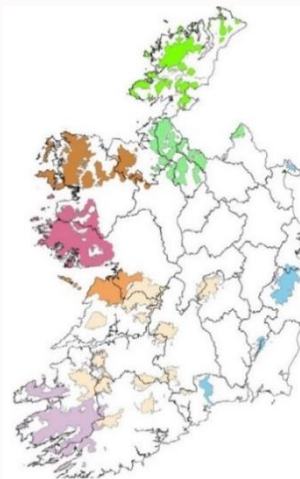


Figure 2. ACRES zones.



Another available agri-environment scheme is the **Organic Farming Scheme (OFS)**. The OFS provides financial support to farmers that want to transition into organic farming and want to maintain their organic certification. Farmers must commit to the European Organic Farming Standards, which aim to enhance food quality as well as soil health and biodiversity. However, under this scheme, **forestry is once again not eligible for funding**.

Organic farming is a type of agricultural system that relies on natural methods to produce food, such as crop rotation, companion planting and green manuring to improve soil health. Under the OFS, the use of synthetic fertilisers or pesticides is forbidden.

Farmers must consider that some actions might overlap between the Eco Scheme, ACRES and OFS. The government curated a list of the actions within each scheme stating which ones are allowed and which ones are considered double-funded. For example, according to the Eco Scheme, an organic farmer cannot select the 3<sup>rd</sup> agricultural practice –limiting chemical nitrogen usage– given that the use of synthetic fertilisers in the OFS is prohibited. Another example is the coppicing or laying of hedgerows, which is contemplated both by ACRES general and the OFC. However, especially in the OFC, there are actions that even though are allowed, they will result in a deduction of payment.

Good Energies Alliance Ireland believes that some of the actions proposed in this Action Plan can help local farmers obtain more funds, and continue their journey towards more sustainable agricultural practices.

## Sources and links

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