

Field Margins

Objective

To create a wildlife corridor that can provide habitat for overwintering predatory invertebrates, hunting ground for birds of prey such as Barn Owl and Kestrel, and to help protect water quality from nutrient and sediment run-off.

Background

Severe declines in biodiversity have been well documented for many groups including plants, invertebrates, birds, and mammals due to intensification of agricultural practices. The creation of a rough grassland field margin provides an important habitat which acts as a refuge for wildlife and a corridor to help connect habitats across a landscape. These field margins can also play a role in protecting water quality by reducing nutrient load, intercepting nutrients and sediment runoff, and slowing overland flow.

Site suitability

- This action can only be selected on parcels with an Eligible hectare > 0
- This action is available on non-CP parcels only that will be claimed by the participant for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
- This action is not available on areas that are SAC/SPAs, NHAs, pNHAs, and Annex 1 Grasslands.
- This action should not be selected on peatlands.

Note 2: Where a fence has been grant aided under TAMS or any other National/EU funded Agri-environment or Capital investment Scheme from 01 January 2018, this cannot fulfil part of the requirement for this ACRES NPI action.

Requirements

1. Create a grass margin by erecting a permanent stock proof fence 3m out from the field boundary in a grassland parcel. To be eligible for this action, the minimum continuous length to be delivered is 10m.
2. The location and length (metres) must be identified on the LPIS parcel(s) and marked on the map submitted. Each margin applied for is only eligible for one NPI payment and once claimed must be maintained for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
3. To create a grass litter layer, do not cut or graze the margin from when the margin is created by erecting the fence until the 31st of August the following year.
4. In the second year after the grass margin is created you must cut the margin between September and December but not below 10cm to ensure the litter layer is retained. Alternatively, margins may be managed by grazing, but this can only take place during the month of September and ensure that no poaching occurs, and the litter layer remains.
5. Chemical or organic fertiliser or lime is not permitted in the field margin.
6. Pesticides and herbicides are not permitted, except for the spot treatment of noxious/invasive weeds.
7. Do not disturb the integrity of the existing hedgerow or field boundary when creating the field margin.

8. Fencing for Field Margins must not limit public access along right of ways.

Additional Guidance:

- This NPI should be targeted to boundaries that are not adjacent to a water course. See Riparian Margins NPI for margins adjacent to water courses.
- Appropriate management to create this essential litter layer is to allow the grasses to grow tall over summer in year one by not cutting or grazing so that this grass will then collapse in the autumn. Fresh grass will grow up through this and the following summer most of the first year's growth will have died back and formed a litter layer.
- Depending on the height of the litter layer after year one you may need to cut higher than 10cm.
- Do not install in close proximity to a badger sett.
- It is recommended to leave an access point when erecting fence to facilitate management of margins. When margins are cut, it is recommended to remove offtakes to reduce the overall fertility of the margin.
- This action will have greater benefits if used to link up existing habitats on the farm such as hedgerows and wooded areas.
- A field margin strategically placed in an area prone to runoff and erosion further up a slope may be beneficial in addition to a Riparian Buffer Strip or Zone closer to the watercourse.

Picture 1: Small mammal holes in 1m² of rough grass margin where there is a litter layer >7cm deep.



Source: The Barn Owl Trust.