



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T: 03459 33 55 77
helpline@defra.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

[REDACTED]
By email: [REDACTED]

Our ref: EIR2026/21680
19 October 2026

Dear [REDACTED],

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026 Window 2 demand forecasting

Thank you for your request for information of 24 September 2026 about Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026 Window 2 demand forecasting. We have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

The EIRs apply to requests for environmental information, which is a broad category of information defined in regulation 2 of the EIRs. Public authorities are required to handle requests for environmental information under the EIRs. They give similar access rights to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Your information request and our response are set out below.

- 1. Any forecasts or modelling produced between 1 May 2026 and 22 September 2026 estimating the expected number and/or value of applications to SFI26 Window 2.*
- 2. Any forecasts or modelling produced during that period estimating how quickly the funding allocated to Window 2 could be exhausted.*

Defra produced business planning forecasting for SFI26 in April/May 2026, prior to the launch of the scheme. Forecasts were produced for Window 1 and Window 2 using a range of budget cap scenarios. We did not run a scenario reflecting the eventual overall SFI26 budget of c.£310m but did run one with a cap of £300m.

In scenarios where we did not run out of budget ('No cap' or low demand), the default expected closure date is the end of the financial year 2026/27 (31 March 2027). Please note that the forecast is generally lower where the budget is lower (i.e. budget is constraint, not demand in these instances).

Table 1 below summarises the output of these forecasts for Window 2, including the date we expected to have to close SFI based on the rate of applications. The modelling was done on a monthly basis, but the expectation based on our high scenario demand



forecast was that the scheme would need to close shortly after Window 2 launched in September, including scenarios that led to closure on the day of opening.

Table 1 – Defra’s SFI26 forecasts from April/May 2026

Demand Scenario	Window 1 budget cap	Total SFI26 budget cap	Window 1 total submitted value	Window 2			Forecast closure date
				Total submitted value	Volume submitted	Average value	
Low	No cap	No cap	£8m	£173m	19,100	£9,100	End of FY 2026/27
		£300m					
		£250m					
	£60m cap	No cap					
		£300m					
		£250m					
Medium	No cap	No cap	£27m	£308m	22,500	£13,700	End of FY 2026/27
		£300m		£285m	20,600	£13,900	Feb-27
		£250m		£233m	16,800	£13,900	Dec-26
	£60m cap	No cap		£308m	22,500	£13,700	End of FY 2026/27
		£300m		£285m	20,600	£13,900	Feb-27
		£250m		£233m	16,800	£13,900	Dec-26
	No cap	No cap	£67m	£521m	25,300	£20,600	End of FY 2026/27
		£300m		£239m	11,400	£20,900	Sep-26
		£250m		£189m	9,000	£20,900	Sep-26
High	£60m cap	No cap	£61m	£527m	26,000	£20,300	End of FY 2026/27
		£300m		£245m	12,200	£20,100	Sep-26
		£250m		£195m	9,800	£20,000	Sep-26
	No cap	No cap		£521m	25,300	£20,600	End of FY 2026/27
		£300m		£239m	11,400	£20,900	Sep-26
		£250m		£189m	9,000	£20,900	Sep-26

- Any briefing, submission or advice provided to Defra ministers between 1 August and 22 September 2026 which stated that demand for SFI26 Window 2 could exceed the available budget or result in the window closing on its first day.

We can confirm that we hold information in scope of your request. However, we have decided that it should be withheld as it falls under the exception at regulation 12(4)(e) of the EIRs, which relates to internal communications.

In applying this exception, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure. In considering the exception

we have also applied a presumption in favour of disclosure, as required by regulation 12(2) of the EIRs.

Regulation 12(4)(e) – Internal communications

We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosure of information about the Sustainable Farming Incentive. We understand that release of this information aids accountability and transparency in government.

However, we believe that, in this case, the public interest remains in favour of withholding the information. This is because we consider that disclosing the information held by Defra would undermine effective government by discouraging frankness and candour in internal communications. It is important that government officials should have the necessary space to think in private and to formulate their decision-making. Releasing information within the scope of your request would risk inhibiting officials from having full, frank and open discussions as part of the process of formulating policy, particularly if they felt that speculative information relating to live policy issues would be released before final decisions were made on those issues.

Therefore, we have concluded that in all the circumstances of the case, the information should be withheld.

4. The number and cumulative value of SFI26 Window 2 applications submitted during each hour that the window was open on 22 September 2026.

Table 2 shows the value of applications submitted each hour during the SFI 2026 Window 2 opening on the 22nd of September. The value of applications when we closed the window was £263.9million, more than our £253 million budget. This was to allow for any reduction in agreements over the span of the 3-year agreement lifetime due to removal of actions, changes to parcel boundaries or early closures of agreements.

Table 2

Time of day	Cumulative number of applications	Cumulative value of applications
10:00	0	£0
11:00	1,834	£37,444,551.76
12:00	3,978	£91,429,009.10
13:00	6,110	£142,872,368.56
14:00	8,280	£188,392,762.66
15:00	10,420	£231,102,829.11
16:00	12,204	£263,957,547.82

5. The number of SFI26 Window 2 applications that had been started but had not been submitted at the point the window closed.

2859 applications had been started but not submitted by the time window 2 closed.

Information disclosed in response to this EIRs request is releasable to the public. In keeping with the spirit and effect of the EIRs and the government's Transparency Agenda, this letter and the information disclosed to you may be placed on GOV.UK, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. No information identifying you will be placed on the GOV.UK website.

We attach Annex A, explaining the copyright that applies to the information being released to you, and Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Information Rights Team

InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk



Annex A

Copyright

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Copyright in other documents may rest with a third party. For information about obtaining permission from a third party see the Intellectual Property Office's website.

Annex B

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 11 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Damian Lynch Head of Information Rights via email at InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk and they will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our website.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for a decision. Please note that generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure.

The ICO can be contacted using the following link:

<https://ico.org.uk/>