

Plantlife and Partner Statement on the removal of species-rich grassland action from the Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026

30 March 2026

Farmers have been dealt a new blow by the UK Government's unexpected decision to pull the plug on vital funding for Priority Habitat species-rich grasslands. The GRH6 option has been removed from the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) offer for 2026, despite being introduced in August 2024, only 18 months earlier. Defra's rationale is that a comparable action is available in Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT), however CSHT is currently only available to farmers by invitation. There is no openly accessible funding for farmers who want to manage or restore their species-rich grazing pastures and meadows.

In the name of 'simplification', Defra's decision:

- creates further financial pressures and uncertainty for farmers;
- puts at further risk England's most threatened and irreplaceable farmland habitats and species;
- weakens the links between farming practice, heritage and important habitats and landscapes, and;
- makes it harder, not easier, for farmers to deliver action through ELM which contribute to government targets and ambitions on restoring nature, climate, healthy food, meeting "30by30", and delivering Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

We are calling on the UK Government to demonstrate their commitment to farmers and to nature by:

- reviewing this decision and ensuring SFI design values the work of farmers who manage and restore Priority Habitat and other species-rich grasslands;
- urgently increase investment in Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier to ensure it is accessible to more farmers to enable the management and expansion of priority habitats and recovery of rare and threatened species, and;
- investing in Natural England's farming advisory capacity to scale up Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier to help deliver value-for-money outcomes for nature, climate and food, from the skills and hard work of participating farmers across the ELM scheme.