

River Ouse, River Cuckmere and Waller's Haven

South East Water has teamed up with Catchment Sensitive Farming to work with farmers and land managers to improve water quality and increase on-farm efficiency. We offer free training, advice and other incentives to support the farming community. For more information contact your local Catchment Officer – contact details below.

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Catchment Advisor's update

What a year 2020 has been. Covid-19 will have affected us all in different ways; some saw supply chains disrupted, some had employees unable to come to work, and many were particularly concerned about vulnerable family members. And yet, to a great extent, farming has of course had to continue as usual.

The weather has not made that easy this year, with prolonged wet weather last autumn and winter making winter crop establishment a real struggle. Then once the rain stopped, it seemed to stop permanently, creating a whole host of other concerns such as having enough forage.

These extremes have highlighted the need for healthy soils that are resilient to such weather variations, as well as water resilience more broadly in the catchment. See our feature on this on page 2 and please contact me if you would like to discuss this further.

I continue to work in the Ouse, Cuckmere and Waller's Haven catchments as part of the partnership between South East Water and the Catchment Sensitive Farming project. As I have now been seconded into South East Water, my contact details have changed, but I am still working on many of the same projects as before; read on for details of our Capital Grants Scheme, Maize Management Project and our newly launched Soil Innovation Fund.

Despite all the challenges of this year, I have been impressed with all the interesting projects that are progressing in our catchments, and I have managed to get out and visit quite a few of you. I look forward to seeing more of you throughout the winter, and working together to improve water quality and water resilience across our catchments.

All the best,



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**A clear solution
for farmers**
CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING



Drought and flood resilience in the face of climate change

As if Covid-19 was not enough to deal with, we had an incredibly dry spring to contend with, culminating in extremely hot weather in early August.

With more families staying at home than is usually the case in the school holidays, paddling pools were being filled, sprinklers were on for both lawns and children, and gardens were watered to such an extent that demand for water in South East Water's supply area reached an all-time high on 7 of August.

This extremely high demand meant that some customers experienced low pressure and some unrelated, ill-timed pipe bursts resulted in supply outages.

Climate change predictions are such that we can expect very wet winters and dry summers to become more common, but there are a number of ways farms can increase their resilience to this.

1) Be water-wise on the farm

- Harvest rainwater for your livestock: a study by ADAS found that dairy farms spend £31-£100 per cow a year on water. [See this article by Farmers Weekly](#) for some potential options for your farm.
- Check for leaks: signs may include unusually damp ground or lusher than expected vegetation.
- See further guidance, like LEAF's Waterwise On the Farm
- Speak to your catchment officer about specialist advice and/or capital grants available for improvements which will improve water resilience.

2) Improving soil health

Improving soil health has many benefits, including greater resilience to both wet and dry weather:

- Many of you will by now have drilled your cover crops; they could be the difference between losing your topsoil or retaining it and having fields you can actually travel on or fields that are a rutted, muddy mess.
- Minimise areas of bare soil in the summer as well as the winter. When soil is exposed to the sun, the moisture held within it will evaporate. To retain moisture in the soil between plants that need wide spacing, techniques such as undersowing with red clover will reduce areas of exposed soil while minimising weeds at the same time.
- Livestock farmers should take stock of which fields suffered from poaching or run-off after a wet winter, and which did better during the very dry spring and summer. Some will have seen that their diverse leys were faring at least a bit better during the driest months, due to different rooting depths and the interaction of soil biology.
- Don't rely on this year's weather being exceptional; consider what you could do differently to avoid the same outcome if the same weather strikes again. Please speak to your catchment advisor for help; we may be able to help with advice and/or funding for any projects you are considering.



Cattle poaching areas of fields and edges of rivers



Run off from a maize field in Kent



Protecting drinking water supplies into the future

We are working with Water Resources South East (WRSE) to create our next water resources management plan, due for publication in 2024.

The plan sets out how we'll keep taps running while striking that delicate balance between protecting the environment and keeping our customers' bills affordable.

The plan considers everything from the natural environment and population growth to our changing climate and drought. It then recommends a series of options we, as a business, will work towards to ensure we have the water available in the future. Those options could include reducing leaks and increasing water efficiency to building new reservoirs and water reuse systems.

Working in partnership with WRSE, we're issuing a series of reports and consultations during the coming months to help form the foundations of this next plan; we would really value your feedback.

We're also keen to hear from you if you have a sustainable raw water supply that you could trade with us.

To find out more, visit southeastwater.co.uk/yourwateryoursay

WRSE is an alliance between six water companies in the south east - ourselves, Southern Water, Thames Water, Affinity Water, SES Water and Portsmouth Water.

Ouse Soil Innovation Fund

Healthy soils are at the root of nearly everything we do in farming. They recycle nutrients and process water to nourish our crops and keep our water resources, such as rivers, clean.

Unfortunately, we are still seeing large amounts of sediment in the River Ouse in particular, and know that there is more we could do to keep soil on fields.

To encourage everyone to think about this without some of the usual constraints, we are now launching a Soil Innovation Fund. Any farmer in the Ouse catchment, whether livestock or arable, who has an idea to reduce overland flow of water into the river, could be considered for a grant of up to £10,000.

This money could be spent on in-field management measures, including seed costs or establishment costs, regenerative farm practices, alternative equipment, or capital items not currently available in our Capital Grants Scheme.

Applications will be reviewed based on their likely benefit to soil health and water quality. Any additional environmental benefits could also count in favour of your application.

Please feel free to call Anne for an informal chat about your idea or to request an application form.

Applications are now open, and close on the 12th of February 2021.

Greening Rules scrapped from 2021

This summer, Defra announced that the Greening Rules would be scrapped from 2021, meaning that they will not need to be complied with in order to claim BPS in 2021. Many will be pleased to hear this, as it does represent less of a bureaucratic burden and the environmental benefits of the greening rules have been questioned.

Before ploughing up field boundaries and removing hedges though, this is an excellent time to stop and consider what has worked well both environmentally and practically on your farm, as well as what you would like your farm to be like in an ideal world. If there are particular environmental outcomes you would like to achieve, but you don't feel like your EFA have quite delivered, you will now be able to tweak the options and take this time as a useful trial period for any management methods you may choose to proceed with under Stewardship or ELMS in the future.

Below are some potential benefits of greening options, and how these can translate into Countryside Stewardship options:

EFA / Greening Measure	Farm benefits	Equivalent Countryside Stewardship option
Crop diversification	Wider rotation for pest and weed control.	-
Fallow as strips against environmental features / in field	Make best use of unproductive land, protect hedgerows & watercourse, opportunity to enhance with nectar rich species to encourage beneficial insects (pollinators and aphid predators).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SW1 4-6m buffer strip £353 per/ha • SW3 Infield grass strip £557 per/ha • SW4 12-24m watercourse buffer strip on cultivated land £512 per/ha • AB1 Nectar flower mix £511 per/ha • AB8 Flower-rich margins and plots £539 per/ha • AB3 Beetle banks £573 per/ha
Whole/part field fallow	Take out awkward or high erosion risk areas. Utilise in rotation for control of weed species e.g. black-grass and build fertility. Provide break crop and build soil resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AB1 Nectar flower mix £511 per/ha • AB15 Two year sown legume fallow £522 per/ha • SW7 Arable reversion to grassland with low fertiliser input £311 per/ha • AB6 Enhanced overwinter stubble £336 per/ha
Cover/ catch crops	Utilise in rotation to capture nutrients, maintain soil cover and build soil health and organic matter. Supports a diverse rotation thus reducing pest pressure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SW6 Winter cover crops £114 per/ha



Buffer strips protect water resources and provide habitat.



Cover crops capture nutrients and improve soil health

Great progress on maize undersowing scheme

South East Water has been working in partnership with Catchment Sensitive Farming and FWAG South East for a number of years to consider the best ways of reducing the risks of maize growing.

The main risk of maize is of course soil loss, since it is harvested later than other crops and it is often difficult to establish a cover crop after harvest.

Leaving soils bare overwinter can result in significant soil loss, to the detriment of both farm productivity and water quality of our local rivers.

In 2019, we launched the first round of our Maize Management Scheme, where growers were incentivised to either harvest maize early and quickly follow it with a grass cover crop, or to undersow the maize crop with grass.

In that first year, most growers opted for the grass cover crop option, but last year's very wet autumn and winter meant that many found it difficult to establish.

Those that managed had varying degrees of success in terms of growth and many of them therefore chose to switch to undersowing this year.

There are now growers undersowing their maize in all three catchments and I have been out speaking to many of you and taking a look at grass growth. Feedback has been very positive, with harvests looking good and grass growth also promising.

Everyone I have spoken to so far intends to undersow again next season. We have also organised some specialist visits from the Maize Growers Association for additional agronomic advice and information about variety selection, nutrient management and the practicalities of undersowing.



Maize at harvest



Maize early summer



A bare maize field from a previous year

Benefits of undersowing include:

- Retention of soil and nutrients
- Building of soil fertility and organic matter
- Additional winter/spring grazing
- Compliance with The Farming Rules for Water

If you are interested in learning more about this scheme for next year, please contact Anne for an informal discussion.

Capital Grants Scheme

South East Water's Capital Grants Scheme is now available in the Ouse, Cuckmere and Waller's Haven catchments. We welcome applications for projects likely to have a positive effect on water quality or water resilience in the catchment and can provide grants for up to £10,000 or 50% of project costs. We have a list of set items we may fund, but are also open to special projects which fall outside of that list.

Successful projects from previous years include putting in place a network of sediment ponds, installing pesticide handling areas with biofilters, contributing towards roofing of livestock feeding areas, or cross-slope planting of hedgerows to intercept water flow.

All applicants should contact Anne for an initial visit before applying. **The application deadline is the 12th of February.**

Using cover crops to improve soil health and groundwater quality

This November, we hosted a virtual farm workshop alongside FWAG South East on the role cover crops play in improving groundwater quality by absorbing leftover nitrogen.

Based on extensive trials at farms near Basingstoke, Hampshire, we spoke to more than 60 farmers and agronomists about the results so far.

Farm Manager David Miller discussed the benefits he's seen from using cover crops on his farm while entomologist Sally-Ann Spence talked in depth about the role of beneficial insects in arable fields.



To find out more about our Hampshire cover crop trials and watch a recording of the workshop, visit our website corporate.southeastwater.co.uk/covercrops.

Learning resources

One upside of most in-person events being cancelled this year is that many of the online events have been recorded so you can catch up when you find a spare moment.

Here are a few recommendations for a rainy day:

- Groundswell – the Regenerative Agriculture Event: <https://www.youtube.com/groundswell-agriculture>
- Cereals event: <https://www.Cerealsevent.co.uk/welcome> (scroll down to 2020 videos)
- Innovative Farmers' labs – catch up on the latest findings here: <https://www.innovativefarmers.org/news/>
- Quick video on the benefits of cover crops: <https://bit.ly/3daaWpZ>
- Evening webinars starting on 28 October about the key principles learned from wildlife-friendly farming at RSPB's Hope Farm: <https://farmwildlife.info/events/> [farmwildlife.info]

South East Water takes looking after your data as seriously as we take looking after the environment. Your data is only used by us so we can email, call, write or text you about our catchment work. This includes advice about grants, events and campaigns.

We hope you want to hear from us but you can change your preferences at any time by emailing us. For more information: www.southeastwater.co.uk/privacy