

Description of land categories

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Arable land

'Arable land' means land that was in an arable crop (or lying fallow as part of a normal crop rotation) in one or more years during the five calendar years prior to the year of submission of the application for AECS.

Note: Applicants applying for the organic conversion or organic maintenance options with fields entered on the application with the fruit and vegetable rate must meet the arable land definition referred to above.

Improved grassland

'Improved grassland' means either land used for grazing (other than arable land) where over one third of the sward comprises, singly or in mixture, ryegrass, cocksfoot or timothy, or land that has been improved by management practices such as liming and top dressing, where there is not a significant presence of sensitive plant species indicative of native unimproved grassland.

Current management will affect its condition; the sward may be retained as 'improved grassland' or it may revert to 'unimproved grassland' where, for example, the grazing regime is more extensive and no fertiliser or lime is applied.

Unimproved grassland

'Unimproved grassland' means land used for grazing or mowing which is not normally treated with mineral fertiliser or lime and does not constitute either improved grassland or rough grazings. Unimproved grassland contains a significant presence of sensitive plant species indicative of native unimproved grassland.

Use this method to establish whether there is a significant presence of sensitive plant species indicative of native unimproved grassland. The list of species in the document below shows the typical range of indicators of unimproved grassland found on different soil types.

Locate ten random points within the field or the area of land under consideration, excluding field margins, headlands and obvious areas of different vegetation. At each point, examine a circle of one metre in diameter and note the presence of the species from the list. In 'unimproved grassland' you will find five or more of the species from the list at more than half of the sample points.



[Typical range of indicators of unimproved grassland \(MS Word, Size: 18.8 kB\)](#)

doc_external_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Indicators-of-unimproved-grassland---Feb-2016.docx> Table of species

Rough grazings

'Rough grazings' means land containing semi-natural vegetation including heathland, heather moorland, bog and rough grassland used or suitable for use as grazing.

Just as improved grassland may revert to unimproved grassland on the in-bye, so reclaimed hill ground may gradually revert to rough grazings where managed more extensively and without fertiliser or lime application.

In-bye land

1. 'In-bye' is that part of the farm which is used mainly for arable and grassland production and which is not hill and rough grazings
2. 'In-bye' land has fields that are bounded by a fence, a dyke or a hedge
3. 'In-bye grassland' will be conserved for winter feed (e.g. as hay or silage) or grazed by livestock
4. 'In-bye grassland' will be either 'improved' or 'unimproved'. Both 'improved grassland' and 'unimproved grassland' are classified as 'in-bye'

To classify as 'in-bye' clauses (1) and (2) must be satisfied and, where the land is managed for grassland production, clauses (3) and (4) must also be satisfied.

Please note that the 'in-bye' definition applies to that part of the farm where the bulk of the land is used for arable or grassland production. Uncultivated field corners and field margins (such as water margins and hedgerows) within this area are included as 'in-bye'.

Although 'in-bye land' has traditionally meant the enclosed grass and arable fields close to the house and steading and below the 'hill or moorland dyke', it is quite possible to have an area of 'in-bye' land above the 'hill dyke' (e.g. a tugging or bull park) – an enclosed area of improved or unimproved grassland once reclaimed from the hill, moorland or heath.

Additional support

If there is any doubt about the classification of the land in question, you should contact your local Rural Payments and Inspections Division office. Staff will be able to advise on the correct classification, as well as which areas of the holding are 'in-bye'.

[Contact us](#)

Recent changes

Section	Change
Arable land	Additional guidance added to section

Previous versions

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