



THE SINGLE PAYMENT SYSTEM



Up until 2005 farms in the European Union (EU) have been given money (subsidies) to grow particular foods or keep particular animals. This scheme was set up after World War 2 to make Europe self sufficient in food. However, it resulted in over production and massive surpluses of food (food mountains) in the 70's and 80's. This food was sold cheaply on the world market and put some poorer farmers out of business. With the EU expanding, this system (which costs ½ of the EU total budget) would not be sustainable. It was also damaging the environment.

The new system is based on a flat rate payment for each acre of land farmed. It is linked to how the land is farmed, not how much is produced. This means farmers are now free to produce what the market demands and change when necessary (this is called decoupling). It also means some farmers, such as poultry farmers and vegetable farmers will now receive payments. However, many of the UK's farms will be paid less. Livestock farmers, cereal and mixed farms are likely to lose out. Currently some of the largest farms in the EU claim up to £2 million a year in subsidies. Within 10 years no farm will be able to claim more than £200,000.



To get full payments for each acre of farmed land farmers must meet a series of standards (called cross compliance). The idea is to improve animal welfare conditions, encourage diversity and promote environmentally friendly farming. Some key criteria farmers must meet are:-

- Meet current regulations for food safety, animal welfare and plant health.
- Leave no area of land out of production for more than 12 months.
- Meet current laws to protect the environment, e.g. for hedgerow protection, grass burning, SSSI.
- Make a protection zone of at least 2 metres around hedges, streams and ditches to protect them from pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides.
- Must keep all rights of way open.
- To protect and manage soil quality.
- Limits put on numbers of animals grazing to prevent overgrazing.
- Stone walls must not be removed and hedges not trimmed between 1st March to 31st July.
- Include set-aside land on farms with greater mixes of seed types to enhance biodiversity.
- Permanent pasture must remain more than 5% of total farm land.



Farms will be inspected yearly to decide the payment they will get for each acre of land. More money can be gained by farmers joining the Environmental Stewardship Scheme or Diversification Scheme (more about these can be found at [w.w.w.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)).