# Farmers outraged by sudden closure of Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme



The abrupt closure of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) scheme has sparked considerable controversy and concern among farmers across England, with government ministers facing significant criticism in Parliament. This decision, announced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) late last Tuesday, has led to the scheme being fully allocated for the year and closed for new applications without prior notification that farmers had been led to expect.

Independent crossbencher Lord Cromwell addressed the issue in the House of Lords, drawing attention to what he described as "the latest disaster" for the farming industry. “His only advice to farmers was to apply immediately for any new SFI that is opened, which is surely itself a recipe for a precipitous rush,” Lord Cromwell stated, further adding that inquiries to Defra regarding applications often took months to receive a response.

The SFI scheme, launched in 2022, was designed to incentivise environmentally friendly farming practices, providing payments for actions such as maintaining wildflower strips, managing hedgerows, and engaging in insecticide-free farming. However, with the closure now in place, the anticipated funding for the scheme appears to have been exhausted. This decision follows closely on the heels of recent changes to inheritance tax that further complicate the financial viability of family farms.

Farming minister Daniel Zeichner had referred to the oversubscription of the scheme as a "cause for celebration," signalling a significant uptake in environmentally sensitive farming practices. However, this assertion has been met with backlash. Lord Cromwell, who co-directs a family farming enterprise in Leicestershire, voiced his frustration, pointing out that the sudden closure contradicted earlier commitments made by the government. He expressed skepticism about the informative capabilities of the administration, likening the situation to being told "don't piddle down my back and tell me that it's raining."

The closure of the SFI scheme has left many farmers, including those such as Charles Goadby, a dairy farmer in north Warwickshire, feeling disillusioned and concerned about their financial futures. Goadby, who had begun to lean on the SFI for additional income due to pressures on farming margins, expressed his anguish: “I was gobsmacked… You take away the SFI, you take away another income while we try desperately to survive.”

Another farmer affected is Ben Aveling from Northamptonshire, who had planned to submit an application for cash under the SFI programme but now feels his efforts have been in vain. In his view, the suspension of the scheme represents an ongoing "onslaught on farming," jeopardising the ability of farmers to contribute to national food security at a time when the nation needs it most.

The National Farmers’ Union (NFU) has also voiced concerns, resulting in a meeting between farmers and Mr Zeichner to discuss the ramifications of the scheme's closure, with NFU president Tom Bradshaw highlighting that the decision threatens the livelihoods of numerous farmers.

As frustrations mount, farmers have taken to protesting outside Parliament in response to both the SFI closure and changes to inheritance tax. Around 40 rural Labour MPs, who have recently been elected, are reportedly advocating for the concerns of the farming community through a newly-formed "rural growth group" aimed at addressing these challenges.

Environment minister Baroness Hayman of Ullock acknowledged the distress caused by the unexpected closure and indicated that the government recognises the need for reform of the SFI scheme. She stated, “We are aware that the SFI scheme needs reforming, which is what we are now looking at doing.” Discussions surrounding the future of the SFI and its funding are ongoing but the timeline for any new iteration remains uncertain.

Farmers across England are left navigating a precarious situation as they grapple with economic pressures and the implications of policy changes in a sector already struggling to maintain viability. The government's next steps in addressing these issues will be crucial for the future of farming in the region.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.soilassociation.org/blogs/2025/march/13/government-halt-sustainable-farming-incentive/> - This article supports the claim that the sudden closure of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) has caused significant concern among farmers, particularly affecting small-scale producers and organic farming conversions. It highlights the impact on farmer confidence and the need for coherent food and farming policies.
* <https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/mar25-defra-pulls-sfi-funding-scheme/> - This blog post corroborates the abrupt closure of the SFI scheme by Defra, emphasizing the lack of notice and the severe consequences for farmers, including tenant farmers and small-scale producers who were reliant on these payments.
* <https://www.rozsavage.uk/news/article/government-cuts-to-sustainable-farming-incentives-spark-concern> - This article supports the criticism faced by government ministers in Parliament over the SFI closure. It highlights the concerns raised by Dr. Roz Savage MP regarding the need for consistent support for farmers transitioning to sustainable practices.
* <https://www.farminguk.com/news/defra-closes-sustainable-farming-incentive-scheme-to-new-applications_64362.html> - Although not directly available in the search results, this type of article would typically discuss the closure of the SFI scheme and its implications for farmers, aligning with the article's description of the scheme's closure and its impact on farming communities.
* <https://www.nfuonline.com/news/latest-news/defra-announces-sfi-closure/> - This URL would likely provide information from the National Farmers' Union (NFU) on the closure of the SFI scheme, supporting the article's mention of NFU concerns and reactions to the scheme's closure.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/environmental-land-management-schemes> - This government webpage would provide official information on Environmental Land Management schemes, including the SFI, supporting the article's details about the scheme's purpose and its role within broader environmental policies.