

# Upstream Thinking Newsletter

for the

## Otter Catchment



## Upstream Thinking in the Otter Catchment

Welcome to the latest update from the Upstream Thinking Project (UST) in the Otter catchment. This round runs until 2025. Since 2010 the rationale for this project is to improve water quality and biodiversity within the catchment. We will work with farmers in different ways to achieve this and you can find out what is available on the following pages.

Please check out the back page for our contact details.

## Confidential Farm Advice and Farm Plans

Free visit from a farm advisor to offer advice on management of nutrients, soil, pesticides, yard infrastructure, watercourse management, NVZ's, and habitats.

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Visit [wrt.org.uk/project/upstream-thinking-3/](http://wrt.org.uk/project/upstream-thinking-3/)

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## Upstream Thinking in the Otter Catchment - What's On Offer

### Free use of the Catchment Aerator and Soil Health Analysis

If you find you have compaction in the top layer of your soil (<15cm/6 inches), aerating and then resting the field can significantly improve soil health. The action of aerating damaged soils can improve rainfall infiltration, access to nutrients, water and oxygen, whilst in turn improving crop yields. If you would like to use the catchment aerator please contact David Rolls at: [drolls@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:drolls@devonwildlifetrust.org) / 07976513132

Before ordering the aerator - it is important to first identify the depth at which there is a compaction problem – this can be done by digging out spits of soil and determining any limiting (compacted) layers. The Project offers free soil health analysis, if you are interested please contact the Project team.



### Soil Samples and Soil Health Pits

As like previous years, WRT are offering free soil samples for 6 fields, this includes pH, P, K, Mg and Soil Organic Matter. We can also offer some soil health pit analysis, if you would like to ascertain if you have any compaction issues on the farm. Please contact [yog@wrt.org.uk](mailto:yog@wrt.org.uk) if you would like to book in for this, we carry out this work during the autumn, winter and spring.

## Pesticide Amnesties

Find out if you are eligible for our free and confidential farm Pesticide Amnesty scheme. Please see the contact details on the last page.



## PESTICIDE AMNESTY

WHAT'S IN YOUR BARN?

FREE DISPOSAL  
OF BANNED AND OUT OF DATE ON-FARM PESTICIDES

 Upstream Thinking  Westcountry Rivers Trust

## Upstream Thinking Grants

The application window is now open. Previous successful applications have funded for scrub removal, ditch and pond restoration, natural flood management measures, water course fencing, guttering and tanks, tracks, gateway resurfacing, mire and habitat restoration for example. Typically grants are up to £5000 but can be higher for larger infrastructure projects, (averaging £3000) at a 50% rate. Grants are available from DWT and WRT. [Please get in touch with your ideas.](#)

## Free Fertiliser Spreader Calibration

WRT are offering a free calibration of your fertiliser spreader under the Upstream Thinking Project. You will need to bring your machinery to a specified location (TBC) where there will be a calibration contractor carrying out the service. Once we know attendance numbers we will send out an email with dates and the location. [Please get in touch with \[yog@wrt.org.uk\]\(mailto:yog@wrt.org.uk\)](#) to let us know if you would like to participate in the event.



## Meadow creation and restoration

We have lost 97% of our nation's hay meadows which is having a huge impact on the numbers of pollinators and water quality.

If you are interested in restoring or creating a wildflower meadow, however big or small, [please get in touch with the UST team.](#)

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## Updates / things to think about:

### Countryside Stewardship: Your last chance for this guaranteed income and capital investment opportunity

The River Otter catchment is High Priority for Water Quality, so applicants are well placed to maximise the Scheme. Last year saw a reported 40% increase in applications with many attracted by the generally higher, payment rates. **2023 is the last year for Capital, Mid and Higher tier applications.**

The Grant Scheme has a number of options:

- **Mid-Tier:** A five-year scheme with capital and annual payments.
- **Wildlife offer:** A streamlined version of the Scheme.
- **Higher Tier:** A 5, 10 or in some cases 20 year Scheme. It covers the more environmentally significant sites, commons and woodlands. Preparation for applications need to commence now.
- **Capital Grants:** The maximum grant available for any application is now £60,000. However, there is a limit of £20,000 for certain items within this. **New rolling application window.**

Scheme details can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management>

Please get in touch with [drolls@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:drolls@devonwildlifetrust.org) if you have any queries.

#### A few top tips:

- **Get in touch – free** on farm advice and support with applications to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, Capital, Mid and Higher Tiers.
- **February opening for the application window for Mid Tier and Higher Tier**
- **Commence planning early.** Many of the options, such as orchards, and items, for example concreting, will need RPA recognition prior to the application window opening
- Make sure all your fields, yards and hedges are **correctly registered and mapped** with the RPA to be eligible for funding as soon as possible
- **Expiring** HLS agreements, **Mid tier**, and **Higher tier** are typically given the option to **extend** on a yearly basis
- Any agreements that have not expired before 2025 will be given the option to enter into the **new E.L.M.S** (Environmental Land Management Scheme) **without penalty**
- Farm Wildlife Package. These specific combinations will bring you 'bonus' points and are well worth considering in your application as each application is scored.

## ELMS – Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) Improved Grassland Soil Standard

The SFI (Sustainable Farming Incentive) scheme is now open to applications. SFI is the first of 3 new environmental schemes being introduced under the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). SFI aims to help farmers manage land in a way that improves food production and is more environmentally sustainable. In 2022, SFI aims to encourage actions that improve soil health, and for the new SFI Improved Grassland Standard payments will be made at either an Introductory level of £28 per hectare, or £58 per hectare for those joining the Intermediate level.



### As part of the scheme you are expected to:

- Complete a soil assessment and produce a soil management plan
- Test soil for organic matter
- Minimise bare ground over winter
- Establish and maintain herbal leys (Intermediate level)

### Upstream Thinking Catchment Advisors can help with:

- Assist with SFI applications
- Help with completing a soil assessment
- Help with producing a soil management plan
- Assist with soil organic matter testing
- Advise on herbal ley establishment and management
- Calculate the % of BPS reductions that can be made up by joining the current SFI standard

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## Slurry Infrastructure Grant

DEFRA have recently announced that they will be accepting applications to the **Slurry Investment Scheme this Autumn (2022) as part of the Farming Investment Fund**. This is for farmers interested in providing six months of slurry storage to improve the use of manures on agricultural land and to reduce the risk to watercourses from dilapidated storage facilities or being applied when conditions are poor such as when fields are saturated, or before heavy rain. Improved storage should reduce the use of artificial fertilisers.

Current Silage Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil regulations (SSAFO) require all stores to have a minimum of 4 months storage. There are exemptions to those store built before 1991 and so the Slurry Investment Fund is for an increase in storage capacity. **Grants will be available at 50% of costs for projects between £25,000 and £250,000**. The grant can be for new stores, extensions i.e. extra rings on a tank, lagoons and can be combined with onsite SAAFO compliant stores to ensure 6 months storage. Non-compliant or exempt stores must be decommissioned. All grant funded stores must also be fitted with an impermeable cover. This to prevent rainfall entering stores increasing storage capacity and to reduce air pollution.

Farmers can apply through a 2-stage process, starting with an online eligibility checker (opening in the autumn) followed by a full application (over the winter), but **demand is likely to be very high, so early planning is paramount**.

### It is recommended that you:

- Start planning your storage capacity need.
- Thinking about what sort of store you might build.
- Choosing where on the farm to put your store.
- Checking if you need to apply for planning permission.
- It is essential to get early support from the Environment Agency.



## Slurry Infrastructure Grant Cont.

Recent catchment inspections by the EA have shown an infrastructure failure rate of up to 95% in some catchments in the SW and combined with pressure from Red Tractor will mean some farmers will need to upgrade their slurry storage. Consider this scheme and other means of support from Countryside Stewardship (CS) and Upstream Thinking (UST).

**There is free advice under the Upstream Thinking Project offering guidance on slurry storage including full infrastructure audits, calculating on farm slurry storage requirements, help with the Slurry Investment Scheme, CS Capital Grants and signposting to advice funding opportunities.**

## Farming Rules for Water – Update

In order to prevent manures, fertilisers and soil getting into water courses, please follow the **Farming Rules for Water**, which have been in place since 2018. Many of you will be aware the restrictions that were in place for **autumn/winter 2021 have been amended**. The details of which can be found at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rules-for-farmers-and-land-managers-to-prevent-water-pollution#environmental-benefits> and
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-the-farming-rules-for-water/applying-the-farming-rules-for-water>

Please be aware most dirty water and parlour washings are now considered as slurry. All farm waste applications will require a crop need justification.

### **In summary, the rules are based on the following:**

1. You must take steps to prevent manure, fertiliser and soil getting into watercourses
2. Assess pollution risk (ground cover, slope angle, soil type and condition, land drains and distance from watercourses/coastal waters/springs, wells, boreholes)
3. Soil test every 5 years
4. Adhere to rules about:
  - a. Applying fertiliser and reducing associated pollution, particularly on fields with high phosphate indices.
  - b. Using and storing manure
  - c. Preventing erosion – managing livestock and soil

## What has been happening in the catchment:



### Soil Mineral Nitrogen (SMN) Testing

Extensive SMN testing was carried out in the lower Otter valley on ground that fell with drinking water safeguard zones. The Farmers involved were asked to give their planned nitrogen applications and then after receiving the soil mineral nitrogen results, what their new plans were (the same, more or less nitrogen applied).

Initial results have shown significant financial and nitrogen savings. A reduction of more than 7500kg nitrogen was made and based upon current prices that equates to more than £7,000 on July 21 prices and over £18,500 at July 2022 prices. Adjustments made varied significantly between arable, forage and grassland crops, with arable having the greatest adjustments. The cost of sampling and analysis was justified for arable fields, at current and July 2021 prices.

Organic farmers also found the sampling useful as it allowed them to redistribute their limited nitrogen reserves more efficiently if fields showed higher than expected residual nitrogen.

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## Porous Pot Sampling

WRT have continued the work of Dr Matt Holden, who, during his PhD project looked at soil nitrogen leaching using porous pot analysis. Ten porous pots were dug into six fields in the Colaton Raleigh area of the Otter catchment with the pots emptied every two weeks over the winter/early spring. The samples were analysed at the SWW lab for nitrate concentration. The aim was, and continues to be, to collect data on nitrogen leaching and identify if there are any correlations or conclusions that can be drawn, with respect to the influence of land management, soil type or crop type on levels of nitrogen leaching. We are waiting on some additional data before providing the results, but we hope to update you in the next newsletter.



**We look forward to working with you over the coming years, and please feel free to get in touch.**



### Otter

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