



**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



**'The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas'.**

Sheep Improvement Scheme Year 2 Terms and Conditions

IMPORTANT

- Please read and familiarise yourself fully with these Terms and Conditions.
- Actions undertaken are in respect of all animals in your flock to which the actions apply.
- Actions must be completed in full for the duration of the scheme.
- All actions must be recorded in the Scheme Action Record Book.
- Applicants should familiarise themselves the Action Record book guidance document available at gov.ie - Sheep Improvement Scheme (www.gov.ie)
- All invoices, receipts and supporting documents must be retained for the duration of the scheme plus one year.
- If a query arises as to the receipt by the Department of correspondence/documentation for the Scheme, which was submitted by post, an applicant will be required to produce proof of postage in the form of a Registered Post receipt or a SwiftPost receipt. Certificates of postage will not be accepted as proof of postage.
- Please ensure you submit your completed Sheep Census Return as required.

Postal returns for the Sheep Census must be returned to the Department by Wednesday 31 January 2023.

The closing date for submission of online Sheep Census returns is Wednesday 14 February 2023.

- Ovine flocks must be tagged in line with the DAFM IDR requirements. Requirements are noted here gov.ie - [Animal Identification & Movement \(AIM\) \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie)

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1. Introduction

The Sheep Improvement Scheme is funded under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan. It provides support to sheep farmers for carrying out actions that improve animal health and welfare in the sheep sector. It builds on the progress made by the Sheep Welfare Scheme (SWS), which has now come to an end.

The Sheep Improvement Scheme will complement some of the elements provided for in the Sheep Welfare Scheme, while also building on other actions beneficial to sheep health and welfare, including through the targeted application of genomic technologies in the sheep sector.

2. Eligibility requirements

In order to be eligible for the Scheme, applicants must:

- 1) Have a valid ovine active DAFM Herd Number or meet the definition of a new entrant as per Section 5. Applications/New Entrants and keep breeding ewes.
- 2) Submit a valid Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) application for each year of scheme participation and meet active farmer requirements.
- 3) Submit a Sheep Census return within the specified timeframe for each year during the lifetime of the scheme (exception for new entrants in year of entry).

Note: Applicants who have been found guilty of an offence under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 for animal cruelty and welfare offences will be excluded from the scheme.

3. Obligations of Scheme Applicants / Participants

Each scheme participant is obliged to –

Comply with the Terms and Conditions of the scheme. It is the responsibility of the applicants to familiarise themselves fully with the scheme Terms and Conditions, their obligations under same and the consequences for any compliance failures or breaches of the Scheme.

Applicants must:

Fully complete their two chosen actions, including completing the Genotyped Ram action in the selected year or years.

Year 2 of the scheme will run from the 1st January 2024 to the 31st of December 2024. Actions chosen by applicants on entry to the scheme must be completed within this time period.

Must submit an accurately completed annual Sheep Census return to the Department for 2023 and a sheep census return as required for each subsequent year of scheme participation.

Must maintain the requisite number of breeding ewes in line with an applicant's Sheep Improvement Scheme reference number for the scheme year.

Where the number of eligible breeding ewes reduces below the reference number, an applicant must immediately inform the Department of this in writing.

Failure to do so in advance of payment or prior to receipt of a notification of an administrative and/or on the spot inspection may result in an administrative penalty being applied. The reduced number of eligible breeding ewes will then become the eligible number for payment.

Must maintain a Scheme Action Record Book, which will be provided to all applicants by the Department, to record and demonstrate the completion of the two actions chosen for the scheme.

The Scheme Action Record Book must be made available on request for inspection and /or administrative checks by the Department.

Must maintain all receipts, documentation and other evidence to prove compliance with scheme actions for the duration of participation in the scheme plus one year.

All applicants must co-operate fully with Department staff, or its Agents, in relation to any inspection or any request for documentation.

All applicants must comply with Conditionality requirements, as set down in relevant EU legislation (Directives and Regulations), and the standards for Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC), in the areas of environment, climate, public health, plant health and animal welfare. Articles 12 & 14 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 refer.

All applicants accept when they submit a Sheep Improvement Scheme application, that all the personal data and information supplied on the application form and any other supporting documentation may be used by Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine or made available to other Government Departments/Agencies/Local Authorities/contracted parties but only where there is a valid legal basis to do so and where appropriate, a Data Sharing Agreement will be in place. The purpose of this sharing of data is to facilitate, among other things, the fulfilment of the obligations placed on Member States and objectives of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP). This includes but is not limited to management, controls and audit purposes, monitoring and evaluation purposes, controls relating to the legislation underpinning Conditionality and all Rural Development measures and as appropriate, in accordance with requirements under the relevant Data Protection legislation in force and the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

It must be noted that an application will not be accepted, or approval may be withdrawn if, in the opinion of the Minister or his officials, it is established that an applicant artificially created the conditions required to obtain aid with a view to obtaining an advantage contrary to the objectives of the Scheme.

The obtaining of aid or the attempt to obtain aid under the Scheme by fraudulent means by the applicant or others acting alone or together may, in addition to any scheme penalty, render such persons liable to prosecution.

4. Actions and Options Available

The Sheep Improvement Scheme will contribute to improved sheep welfare through targeted intervention actions as set out in the following table of actions:

| Lowland Flock | Hill Flock |
|--|--|
| <u>Category A Action</u> | <u>Category A Action</u> |
| Lameness Control | Mineral Supplementation Ewes Post Mating |
| Mineral Supplementation Ewes Post Mating | Meal Feeding Lambs Post Weaning* |
| Parasite Control (Faecal Egg Count) | Parasite Control (Faecal Egg Count) |
| <u>Category B Action</u> | <u>Category B Action</u> |
| **Genotyped Ram | **Genotyped Ram |
| Scanning and recording of results. | Scanning and recording of results. |
| Flystrike Control | Mineral Supplementation Lambs Pre Weaning* |

* Hill flocks may not choose both Mineral supplementation of lambs Pre Weaning and Meal feeding of lambs Post Weaning.

** Applicants must select the year(s) in which they will carry out the ram genotyped ram action.

A description of each possible action under the scheme is outlined in Annex 1.

In the first year of application, all applicants will choose one action from the list of Category A actions and one action from the list of Category B actions (either Scanning and Recording of results/Flystrike Control/Mineral Supplementation Lambs Pre Weaning) as appropriate to their flock type when completing their online application form.

In addition, all applicants will be required to carry out the Genotyped Ram action within the first three years of scheme participation. Applicants will indicate the year in which they will carry out the Genotyped Ram action when completing their online scheme application form.

Applicants who have a scheme reference number greater than 150 breeding ewes will have to carry out the Genotyped Ram action twice over the five years of the scheme, once within the first three years and then any year after the first year selected.

In the year or years in which the applicants will complete the Genotyped Ram action, the Genotype Ram action will be their Category B action.

Applicants are required to carry out one Category A action and one Category B action in every scheme year.

The scheme actions are applicable to flocks of breeding ewes and are separated into **Lowland** and **Hill** flock actions.

The decision as to which category an applicant belongs to is based on the type of stock (Lowland or Hill) held, or where there is a mix, the ratio stock type held and as reported in an applicant's most recent sheep census return.

- Applicants with greater than 50% lowland ewes in their most recent census return must choose from the options for Lowland flocks
- Applicants with greater than 50% hill type ewes in their most recent census return must choose from the options for Hill flocks.
- Applicants who deem that they have been incorrectly designated as lowland or hill should notify the Department promptly regarding their position.
- If an applicant did not submit a sheep census return, the category will be based on a review of the applicant's stocking information held by the Department at the time of application.

In general, it will not be possible for an applicant to change the year(s) selected by them to carry out the Genotyped Ram action.

Two exceptions to this principal will apply. These are:

- In the case of Force Majeure where an applicant is required to change the year selected, for example in the event of the death of an existing ram or ram availability issues. Applicants will be required to advise the Department as soon as possible. Such requests to amend the year(s) selected to carry out the Genotyped Ram action will be reviewed by the Department on a case by-case basis.
- If a review of the availability of genotyped rams indicates there may be a shortage of supply of four or five star genotyped rams, the Department reserves the right to amend the year(s) selected by applicants to carry out this action. Any such change will be notified to scheme participants by the Department as soon as possible.

The requirement to carry out the Genotyped Ram action within three years of joining the scheme will not apply to new entrants to sheep farming as defined in Section 5 joining in Year 4 or Year 5 of the scheme.

5. Applications:

All applications for participation in the scheme must be made online on www.agfood.ie.

All existing sheep farmers who wish to participate in the scheme must apply to participate in Year 1 of the scheme. It will not be possible for existing sheep farmers who do not satisfy the definition of a new entrant as per set out below to apply to join the scheme in later years.

Applications for Year 2 of the scheme are only open to New Entrants as defined in Section 5 of this document.

When completing the online application form, applicants will be required to:

- Select the actions they wish to carry out over the lifetime of the scheme.
- Applicants should consider carefully the actions which they will choose to carry out during their participation in the scheme. Once applicants have selected their actions and submitted their application, it will not be possible to change the actions they have selected over the lifetime of the scheme, except in exceptional or duly justified cases.
- Select the year(s) they wish to carry out the Genotyped Ram action. All applicants to the scheme will be required to carry out the Genotyped Ram action at least once over the first three years of the scheme.
- Confirm they have read and understood the terms and conditions of the scheme.
- Applicants registered under Farm Partnership Registration are required to submit one application for participation in the Sheep Improvement Scheme using the Farm Partnership Number.
- In the case of Partnerships, subject to compliance, a single payment will issue to the partnership as appropriate.

If a farmer intends to submit their application via their registered FAS advisor, the FAS advisor must be associated to the farmer for the Area Based & Livestock schemes, which incorporates the Sheep Improvement Scheme.

If a new association is required, or the farmer is changing their FAS advisor, the farmer can request their new FAS advisor to commence the process and the new association can be confirmed by the farmer using the SMS authorisation facility. Paper form authorisations must be submitted in the case of Joint Ventures/Registered Farm Partnerships. The authorisation form (DAFM Auth 1) is available on the Department's website at the following location gov.ie - [Online services offered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

New Entrants

There is provision for new entrants to sheep farming to apply to participate in the scheme.

A new entrant is defined as a person who is setting up a holding for the first time or during the preceding three years.

Where the head of the holding is defined as being registered on a herd for the first time, or where the herd on which the farmer is registered to for the first time joins a legal person or group of natural or legal persons, the natural person or persons in control of the legal person are also in control as head of the holding for the first time’.

Where a New Farmer joins a legal person or group of natural or legal persons, all persons in control of the legal person or group of natural persons must meet the definition of New Farmer.

For the purposes of Year 2 of the scheme, a new entrant to this scheme is defined as an applicant who satisfies the above definition of a new farmer and who has applied for a new flock number within the period from 1 December 2020 to 31 December 2023.

A new entrant can also be an applicant with an existing flock number who has not held or traded in sheep for a three-year period from 1 December 2020 to 30 November 2023.

An application for the Sheep Improvement Scheme is made by completing the above referenced application form available on www.agfood.ie.

6. Late Applications

The closing date for New Entrant applications for the Sheep Improvement Scheme is 11.59pm on Thursday February 29th.

There is a 25 calendar day period after the 29th of February 2024 closing date for the acceptance of late applications. However, deductions to payments at a rate of 1% per working day late in respect of SIS will apply to late SIS applications which are received during this period. Applications received after the 25 calendar days period are ineligible. i.e. applications received after March 25th are ineligible.

The Department will not, except in cases of force majeure or exceptional circumstances, accept applications submitted after this date.

| Day | Date | Month | % Reduction to apply per working day | No of calendar days |
|-----------|------|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Thursday | 29th | February | Closing Date | N/A |
| Friday | 1st | March | 1% | 1 |
| Saturday | 2nd | March | 1% | 2 |
| Sunday | 3rd | March | 1% | 3 |
| Monday | 4th | March | 2% | 4 |
| Tuesday | 5th | March | 3% | 5 |
| Wednesday | 6th | March | 4% | 6 |

| | | | | |
|-----------|------|-------|------|----|
| Thursday | 7th | March | 5% | 7 |
| Friday | 8th | March | 6% | 8 |
| Saturday | 9th | March | 6% | 9 |
| Sunday | 10th | March | 6% | 10 |
| Monday | 11th | March | 7% | 11 |
| Tuesday | 12th | March | 8% | 12 |
| Wednesday | 13th | March | 9% | 13 |
| Thursday | 14th | March | 10% | 14 |
| Friday | 15th | March | 11% | 15 |
| Saturday | 16th | March | 11% | 16 |
| Sunday | 17th | March | 11% | 17 |
| Monday* | 18th | March | 11% | 18 |
| Tuesday | 19th | March | 12% | 19 |
| Wednesday | 20th | March | 13% | 20 |
| Thursday | 21st | March | 14% | 21 |
| Friday | 22nd | March | 15% | 22 |
| Saturday | 23rd | March | 15% | 23 |
| Sunday | 24th | March | 15% | 24 |
| Monday | 25th | March | 16% | 25 |
| Tuesday | 26th | March | 100% | |

*Bank Holiday

7. Continuation in the Scheme

Applicants who have been accepted into Year 1 of the Sheep Improvement Scheme will be automatically enrolled in Year 2 and subsequent years of the scheme.

Should an applicant **not wish** to remain in year 2, or a subsequent year of the scheme, they should advise the Sheep Improvement Section of the Department by email or in writing of this as soon as possible using the contact details provided in this document.

Please note that should an applicant opt-out of the scheme, it will not be possible to re-join the scheme.

Applicants/participants cannot opt-out of the scheme in a given year if they have been notified of a pending inspection and/or an administrative control.

Applicants, regardless of flock size, cannot opt out of the scheme in Year 3 where they have not completed the genotype ram task in years 1 or 2.

Where a participant remains in the scheme, the participant is agreeing to comply with the terms and conditions of the scheme for the coming scheme year.

8. Scheme Payment Reference Number:

For applications from existing sheep farmers to Year 1 of the scheme, the scheme payment reference number will be based on the average of three highest census return values in which the highest number of eligible breeding ewes were declared by the applicant in the census returns submitted with respect of the years 2016 – 2021.

Where only two census returns have been made by the applicant over this time period, the scheme payment reference number will be based on the average of the two years census returns.

Where only one census return has been submitted during this time period, the scheme payment reference number will be based on the number of eligible breeding ewes declared in that census return.

In the case of New Entrants, the scheme payment reference number will be allocated following a review of the submitted application.

This review will consider the number of animals held by the applicant at the time of application, and/or, the number of animals declared on the sheep census return for the years prior to the scheme year for which the application is being made.

In the case of an application from a new entrant to sheep farming who has yet to submit a sheep census for the first time, the scheme payment reference number will be allocated following a review of the submitted application.

The scheme payment reference number will form the maximum number of breeding ewes eligible for payment for the duration of the scheme. The scheme payment reference number will not increase for the duration of the scheme, except where an increase in stocking rates is required in the commonage measure for participants in the Agri Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES).

Where applicants are also participants in the ACRES commonage measure and are required to increase their number of breeding ewes in line with obligations under this measure, the increased number returned on the Sheep Census return each year will become the scheme payment reference number until the defined minimum stocking rate is reached or the deadline for reaching same is passed.

If the number of breeding ewes returned on the 2022 or later Sheep Census, Inspection Report or Administrative Control Report is lower than the scheme payment reference

number, then the new lower number will become the scheme payment reference number. It must be noted that where such circumstances occur and a higher number of breeding ewes is returned on the census in a subsequent year, then the scheme reference number for payment will increase accordingly but not beyond the original scheme payment reference number.

Applicants should note that they are required to inform the Department before payment issues or prior to receipt of a notification of an administrative inspection if the number of breeding ewes they hold falls below the scheme payment reference number/most recent census figure. The lower number of eligible breeding ewes will then become the eligible number for payment. Failure to inform the Department of the lower number will result in the application of a penalty.

If applicants retain their own ewe lambs, then these will satisfy any shortfall in ewe numbers once they reach 12 months of age.

In all cases, where an applicant is approved into the scheme based on a particular reference number of breeding ewes, this number of ewes must be retained and made available for inspection where required for that scheme year.

9. Action Record Book

All applicants accepted into the scheme will also be supplied with a Scheme Action Record book which is to be used by participants to record all compliance actions and proofs of same. This Scheme Action Record Book will be used to record compliance with actions undertaken and will have to be maintained throughout the applicant's participation in the scheme. It is essential that the Action Record Book and associated documents are retained and updated to reflect the completion of actions undertaken by applicants under this Scheme.

A new Scheme Action Record Book will be supplied to participants for each year of the scheme, which is also available for download and print from the Department's website. The Department will supplement compliance inspections with Administrative Control checks whereby a percentage of farmers will be required to submit their Action Record Books and associated documentation to the Department upon request at various times in the Scheme year. These records will be examined as a means of checking compliance with actions. It is a requirement of the Scheme that applicants must fully comply with such requests to submit information to the Department.

Failure to produce or forward the Scheme Action Record Book when requested will be seen as a breach of the scheme obligations and will result in no payments for the relevant scheme year. A 20% administrative penalty based on the overall amount which would have been payable in the scheme year will also be imposed

10. Force Majeure/Exceptional Circumstances

Force Majeure/Exceptional Circumstances (FM/EC) is defined under Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2116/2021.

A farm business may experience a FM/EC incident that impacts on its ability to satisfy the requirements of the Sheep Improvement Scheme. Cases of FM/EC are determined against their circumstances and on an individual basis and may be recognised in the following cases:

For the purposes of the financing, management and monitoring of the CAP, force majeure and exceptional circumstances may be recognised in the following cases:

- (a) a severe natural disaster or severe meteorological event gravely affecting the holding.
- (b) the accidental destruction of livestock buildings on the holding.
- (c) an epizootic, a plant disease outbreak or the presence of a plant pest affecting part or all the beneficiary's livestock or crops.
- (d) expropriation of all or a large part of the holding if that expropriation could not have been anticipated on the day of lodging the application.
- (e) the death of the beneficiary.
- (f) long-term professional incapacity of the beneficiary.

2. Where a severe natural disaster or severe meteorological event as referred to in paragraph 1, point (a), gravely affects a well-determined area, the Member State concerned may consider that whole area to be gravely affected by that disaster or event.

Where an applicant wishes to rely on FM/EC, the obligation is on the beneficiary to notify in writing, to the Department, the occurrence of such an event. The notification must be submitted, with relevant evidence to the satisfaction of the Department, within fifteen (15) working days from the date on which the beneficiary or the person entitled through him/her, is in a position of doing so.

11. Payments, Reductions and Penalties

Payments made under the scheme are based on costs incurred and income foregone in undertaking the eligible actions underlying the scheme.

Payment will be based on the reference number for breeding ewes as outlined in Section 8 of this document and will be made to each applicant subject to the satisfactory completion of Inspections and Administrative Control checks detailed in Section 13 of this document.

Payment will be per eligible breeding ewe and payment for full scheme compliance will be €12 per ewe.

- Where an action is not fully completed in line with the scheme conditions it will not be eligible for payment.

- Where only the Category A action has been completed payment will be €3.50 per ewe. This is based on the exclusion of the payment for the Category B action for the non-compliance of action B plus a 50% penalty on Action A.
- Where only the Category B action has been completed payment will be €2.50 per ewe. This is based on the exclusion of the payment for the Category A action for the non-compliance of that action plus a 50% penalty on the Category B Action.
- Where neither the Category A action nor the Category B action have been completed no payment will be made and an administrative penalty of 20% based on the overall amount which would have been payable on the two actions in the scheme year will be imposed.
- Where an applicant has not completed the Genotyped Ram action in a year in which they have selected to carry out the action, in addition to the above penalties, the Genotyped Ram action will roll over into the following year and will replace the alternate Category B action for that year. The applicant must then complete the Genotyped Ram action in the following year.
- Where an applicant again fails to complete the Genotyped Ram in the following year, the Applicant will receive no payment for either their Category A action or their Category B action and an administrative penalty of 20% based on the overall amount which would have been payable on the two actions in the scheme year will be imposed. Applicants will also be deemed ineligible for participation in subsequent scheme years and will be withdrawn from the scheme.
- Failure to produce the Scheme Action Record Book on request will result in no payments for the scheme year and an administrative penalty of 20% based on the overall amount which would have been payable in the scheme year will be imposed.
- Failure to correctly complete or maintain the Scheme Action Record book for one of the two actions will result in no payment for the action incorrectly recorded or incorrectly completed and a 50% reduction for the scheme action correctly recorded or completed for the year in question. Where both actions are incorrectly recorded or incorrectly completed, there will be no payment for the year in question and an administrative penalty of 20% based on the overall amount payable in the scheme year will be imposed.
- Where a scheme participant opts-out of the scheme in any year after year 1 there will be no clawback of payments made in preceding scheme year or years except Where it is established that the relevant requirements of the Programme were not fully or partially adhered to by the applicant. In this case, the Department will reduce the amount payable and may seek recoupment of aid paid under the Programme.
- Intentional and serious breaches of the Scheme conditions may result in non-payment for the year in question, administrative penalties of 20% on the overall amount payable and termination of participation for future scheme years.

- Where the number of breeding ewes determined during an administrative and/or inspection review is lower than the scheme payment reference number, a double the difference penalty will be imposed. For example, if your declared scheme payment reference number is 100 and administrative review and/or an on-the-spot inspection shows the action has only been completed on 80, the number of breeding ewes you will be paid on will be 60. ($100 - 20 = 80$. Double the difference $20 * 2 = 40$. $100 - 40 = 60$ payable number.
- Failure to maintain the requisite reference number of breeding ewes in line with most recent census return will result in a reduction of the scheme reference number to the number determined and a pro rata reduction on the remaining payment due, unless notified to the Department.
- Where it is established that conditions were artificially or fraudulently created by the scheme participant, or someone on their behalf, to draw down payment under the scheme the scheme participant will be excluded from the scheme, all monies paid under the scheme for the relevant scheme years shall be reimbursed and administrative penalties of 20% will be imposed.
- The penalties set out are the minimum sanctions that will be applied. In all cases the Department reserves the right to review files to establish whether a breach of the Scheme conditions has occurred which may lead to a sanction, or the termination of scheme participation and reimbursement of all payments made.
- Monetary penalties will include interest payable at the rate provided for under Statutory Instrument Number 497 of 2022. Interest will be calculated for the period elapsing between the notification of the repayment obligation to the farmer, and either repayment or deduction.
- Penalty amounts may be deducted from future payments due to the beneficiary under other EU-financed or co-financed Schemes.
- Where monetary penalties are not paid or recovered within the period requested, the Department may take whatever action is deemed necessary for their recovery.

Sheep Census

The closing date for return of the December 2023 Sheep Census is 31st January 2024 for paper census forms while the deadline for online census submission is 14th February 2024. Sheep Census returns received up to the 14th February 2024 will be considered as valid for the Sheep Improvement Scheme.

The late submission of Sheep Census returns will be accepted as valid for the Sheep Improvement Scheme for a 26 calendar day period after the 14th February 2024. However, deductions to SIS payments at a rate of 1% per working day will apply to late census returns received during this period.

Where an applicant submits a Sheep Census return after the 26-calendar day period has expired, i.e. after 11th March 2024, the applicant will not be eligible for payment for year 2 of the Sheep Improvement Scheme.

NOTE: The approval or payment of aid under the Scheme does not imply the acceptance by the Minister of any responsibility as regards the obligations undertaken by the participant.

12. Right of Entry

The Minister reserves the right to carry out inspections at reasonable times of any land, premises, plant, equipment, livestock and records of participants/applicants.

In applying to participate in the Sheep Improvement Scheme applicants agree to permit officials or agents of the Department to carry out on-farm inspections, with or without prior notice at any reasonable time(s) and without prejudice to public liability. Failure to do so may lead to loss of payments and/or termination from the Scheme.

Every on-the-spot inspection will be the subject of an interim notice of compliance and the participant/applicant or their representative if present will be given an opportunity to sign the interim notice of compliance indicating their presence at the inspection and to add their observations if they so wish. Signing this document does not imply that the participant/applicant or their agent accepts the inspection findings.

The Department reserves the right to carry out audits, assessments, research, monitoring, and evaluation at reasonable times, of animals/lands farmed by participants. This right also extends to other suitably qualified persons, or other agencies, appointed for the purpose by the Department and to Department personnel auditing the Scheme. To facilitate checks and on-farm inspections, participants shall co-operate with Department personnel, or other agencies, reply to all queries, and provide any documentary evidence that may be requested in relation to the participation in the Scheme. Failure to do so may (except in cases of force majeure) lead to loss of payments and/or termination from the Scheme.

13. Inspections and Administrative Controls

- Scheme applicants will be subject to a minimum level of Inspection to ensure compliance with scheme conditions.
- Scheme applicants will also be subject to a minimum level of Administrative Control checks to ensure compliance with scheme conditions.

- Inspections and Administrative Controls will verify compliance with the terms and conditions through checks on data recording of treatments and actions undertaken by scheme applicants. Inspections will take place throughout the year.
- Inspections will generally be notified up to a maximum of 48 hours in advance.
- Ewes must be penned for Inspection.
- Inspections and Administrative Controls will verify compliance by examination of applicants' animal remedies, feed and mineral supplement records and where applicable flock register and dispatch dockets to ensure animal treatments and other requirements are in accordance with the scheme.
- Information verified at Inspection and Administrative Controls should be recorded in a Scheme Action Record book e.g., showing dates meal feeding commence/end, mineral supplementation and must be available on request by the inspector.
- Inspections will verify all receipts/invoices and other evidence for meal/mineral supplement purchases appropriate for the flock size around time of weaning.
- Completed Scheme Action Record books shall be returned to the Department on request within the specified timeline for administrative checks.

14. Conditionality

Penalties for breaches of the Conditionality requirements and the standards for Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition of land will apply to payments under the Sheep Improvement Scheme.

Sheep farmers are subject to the full suite of Conditionality requirements (SMRs) including but not limited to :

- Council Directive 96/22/EC of 29 April 1996 concerning the prohibition on the use in stock farming of certain substances having a hormonal or thyrostatic action and beta-agonists, and repealing Directives 81/602/EEC, 88/146/EEC and 88/299/EEC (OJ L 125, 23.5.1996, p. 3)
- No. 178/2002 of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and Laying down procedures in matters of food safety - OJ L 031 of 10/02/2002
- Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes (OJ L 221, 8.8.1998, p. 23)

15. Appeals

This scheme comes under the remit of the Agricultural Appeals Office. In all relevant cases applicants will be advised of their rights in this regard.

16. Data Protection Notice

General Data Protection information applicable to all Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine customers is available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/ef9f6-data-protection/>

Information specific to the personal data being collected:

The following data is specific information in relation to the personal data processed for the Sheep Improvement Scheme

1. Information and Data Protection:

The following information relates to the processing of personal data under the ‘Sheep Improvement Scheme’. This sets out the ways in which the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (the Department) collects, stores and uses personal data. Such data may be received directly from data subjects, authorised agents acting on their behalf or indirectly from third parties where there is a legal basis to do so.

The rights of data subjects may be exercised pursuant to the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation and The Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019. Further information in respect of data protection may be accessed on the Department’s website: <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/ef9f6-data-protection/>

2. Specified purpose:

The personal data sought from, or previously furnished by applicants is required for the purpose of making an application to join this scheme or for ongoing processing of your application under relevant CSP schemes. Failure to provide all the personal data required to facilitate the processing of the application, under this scheme will result in the Department being unable to process the application further. Failure to provide certain information required under the terms and conditions of this scheme may result in the necessity to repay monies already paid under this scheme.

The purpose for the processing of personal data is to, among other things, receive, analyse and process data from applicants. To communicate with applicants and/or their authorised advisors and where applicable other authorised third parties. To subsequently receive and process the data of the approved participants for the fulfilment of their applications and make payments to them.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine may also use data submitted in an application under this scheme for the purposes of facilitating the processing of an application for participation in other schemes operated by the Department or where a compatible purpose exist.

The personal data sought from you, the applicant, is required for the purpose of making an application under the “Sheep Improvement Scheme”. Failure to provide all the personal data required to determine eligibility and facilitate the processing of the application, including data testing, under the scheme will result in DAFM being unable to process the application.

The operation of this scheme may also result in the sharing of data, where required, within the Department. This is to facilitate, among other things, the fulfilment of the obligations placed on Member States, including Ireland, and objectives of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP). This may cover areas such as management, control, audit and compliance, monitoring and evaluation obligations, and statistical purposes. The use of the data in this way is considered compatible with its original purpose of collection.

3. Legal basis:

Article 6(1)(c) of the General Data Protection regulation (GDPR) provides for processing of personal data where it is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation to which the controller is subject; while Article 6(1)(e) provides for processing of personal data where it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller.

The ‘Sheep Improvement Scheme’ is implemented pursuant to the CAP EU Regulations, including Regulations (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council as well as relevant secondary legislation. Article 151 (1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 and Article 101 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2116 (Processing and Protection of Personal Data), places a legal obligation on Member States to collect personal data to facilitate the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan.

The Department may, for the purpose of aiding administrative efficiencies, use existing customer data for other purposes such as to claim and receive payments under CSP Schemes. The use of the data in this way is considered compatible with its original purpose of collection. Existing customer data means data that is submitted for the Sheep Welfare Scheme and/or its successor scheme the Sheep Improvement Scheme which was implemented pursuant to EU Regulation 1306/2013 while Sheep Improvement Scheme is implemented pursuant to Regulations (EU) 2021/2115 and as well as relevant secondary legislation.

The proposed further processing of the personal data for the purpose of this scheme is considered compatible with its original purpose of collection, this includes the making of payments in respect of participation in schemes administered by the Department funded under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This is to facilitate, among other things, the fulfilment of the obligations placed on Member States and objectives of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP). This may cover areas such as management, control, audit and compliance, monitoring and evaluation obligations, and statistical purposes.

4. Recipients and data sharing:

As noted in the “Specified purpose” section above, information and personal data provided as part of this scheme may be shared with other Divisions within the Department for the purposes of aiding administrative efficiencies when processing other related scheme

applications. This sharing shall be done in compliance with the CSP legislative framework and relevant data protection legislation.

Data may also be shared with approved third-party approved labs in order to verify compliance with the scheme actions by the applicant.

Personal data may also be sought from and made available to other Government Departments/Agencies/Local Authorities/contracted parties/LIFE Projects, but only where there is a valid legal basis to do so. Anonymised data may also be shared between public bodies to support the achievement of government objectives.

Where appropriate, a Data Sharing Agreement will be put in place. The purpose of this sharing of data is to facilitate, among other things, the fulfilment of the obligations placed on Member States and objectives of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP). This includes, but is not limited to management, control and audit purposes, monitoring and evaluation purposes, cross compliance controls, controls relating to the legislation underpinning cross compliance and all Rural Development measures, as required by Article 65 of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 809/2014 and for the performance of the CAP Strategic Plan as required by Article 128 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Also, personal data may be released as required by relevant Data Protection legislation and the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Personal data may be used for, among other things, statistical, research and analysis purposes in some circumstances, but will only be done so in compliance with the Data Protection legislation and the legislative measures under the CSP. Data used for such purposes will be anonymised, as appropriate, to protect to the security and confidentiality of the data. The use of the data in this way may facilitate the Department in informing policy decisions into the future, which would benefit the Irish farmer and the Agriculture Sector.

Data may be released under The INSPIRE Directive (Directive 2007/2/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2007 establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community Directive) came into force on 15 May 2007.

Personal data is also shared with Teagasc for the purpose of facilitating the National Farm Survey as per Regulation (EU Reg 1217/2009) and meeting Ireland's statutory obligation to provide data on farm output, costs and income to the European Commission.

The Department is also currently obliged by law to provide information concerning applicants in response to requests received from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, An Garda Síochana, and other bodies and this will take place in accordance with Data Protection legislation.

As part of this scheme, if approved into the scheme, you may be requested by the Department or relevant agents acting on its behalf, to supply data in relation to your participation to this Scheme, and facilitate on-farm inspections/assessments, where required for the purpose of assessment, verification, evaluation or research purposes as provided for under the CSP Regulations (e.g., EU Regulation 2021/2115 and EU Regulation 2021/2116). Not to supply such information may invalidate/cancel your application.

5. Publication of data

Article 98 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2116 (Publication of information relating to beneficiaries) obliges Member States (MS) to publish beneficiaries' data in certain circumstances, but not where the amount is less than €1,250.

6. Transferred outside the EU:

Personal data, in respect of an application under this scheme, will not be transferred outside of the EU.

7. Retention Period:

Personal data in respect of an application under this scheme will be retained by the Department for 7 years plus the current scheme year in line with the purpose for which it was collected. After this time, it will be marked for destruction and will be destroyed in line with internal guidelines or guidelines for destruction received from the National Archives Office or associated permissions received from them.

8. Data provision being statutory or contractual obligation:

The data provided for this purpose is being requested under the requirements of the CAP (EU) Regulations 2021/2115, including relevant secondary legislation, as well as the CAP Strategic Plan, its Strategic Environmental Assessment, and Appropriate Assessment. If the applicant chooses not to provide necessary relevant information their application for this scheme cannot be processed further.

9. Automated Decision Making, including profiling:

Personal data provided in the submission of an application under this scheme will be processed automatically for the purpose of the efficient running of this scheme, and the timely payment of participants.

Automated decision making may be used for the purposes of selecting participants for inspection in accordance with the CSP legislative framework and relevant data protection law. Article 65 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2116, obliges member states including Ireland, to set up and operate an integrated administration and control system, which among other things, includes an area monitoring system for systematic observations and tracking of agricultural activities and practices.

10. Information from Third Party:

Information from third parties will be received under the Sheep Improvement Scheme. Information may be received from approved third-party labs.

Data may be provided to this Department by a third party on behalf of an applicant, for example from a DAFM approved advisor, where it can be shown that authorisation has been given by the applicant for this to take place.

In addition, the Department may be in receipt of data from third parties, to facilitate, among other things, the fulfilment of the obligations placed on Member States and objectives of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) and other legislative provisions. This may cover areas such as management, control, audit and compliance, monitoring and evaluation obligations, and statistical purposes.

11. Technical information on data collected:

Technical information on the cookies used on the Gov.ie website is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/help/privacy-policy/?section=cookies>

Annex 1. Scheme Actions

All animals in a participant's flock to which an action applies must be treated accordingly. The two actions chosen when a participant joined the scheme must be adhered to by the participant for the full duration of the scheme. It is therefore not possible to change actions once they have been selected, except in exceptional or duly justified cases.

Lameness Control (lowland flocks only)

Under this action scheme participants must carry out a minimum of 5 lameness examinations per scheme year and complete the relevant section for Lameness Control in the Scheme Action Record Book.

Flock lameness assessments must be carried out 5 times during the calendar year:

1. At least once between mating and lambing
2. May/June
3. July/Aug
4. Prior to mating (Aug – Sept/Oct)
5. And at one other time which the flock owner may chose depending on the requirements of the flock.

Scheme participants must then treat all identified incidences having firstly identified the cause(s) of lameness to prevent animals becoming sick/injured as a result of lameness.

Footbathing must be carried out where appropriate.

Receipts and invoices for any products used must be retained and made available for inspection and/or administrative check.

Mineral Supplementation Ewes Post Mating

Under this action scheme participants must supplement all ewes (including hoggets out to the ram) with mineral feeding stuffs post mating. Mineral Supplementation is required to be administered to ewes to ensure the duration of cover provided by the minerals includes at least the first 60 days from the date of ram turnout.

Supplementation may take the form of bagged mineral feeding stuffs (dry minerals), mineral blocks, drenches and liquid minerals, injectables or boluses.

Where compound feeding stuffs are being fed at this time, a mineral feeding stuff may be included in the ration by the feed mill at the time of manufacture. Otherwise, dry mineral feeding stuffs (bagged minerals) may be dusted on the silage or fed with feed materials ('straights'). Where boluses are used these can be administered pre mating to allow for rumen breakdown of the bolus.

The label of the product used must clearly state the product is suitable for ewes, it must specify a duration of cover for ewes, and it must also specify a dose rate.

Applicants who chose this action should ensure the recommended product is administered as per label guidelines. This will be subject to verification by Department officials on inspection.

Receipts and invoices of all mineral feeding stuffs and/or compound rations containing the mineral feeding stuffs purchased must be retained and made available for inspection and/or administrative check.

All mineral feeding stuffs must be sourced from feed business operators approved or registered within the European Union.

A listing of these can be found here [gov.ie - Feeding Stuffs - Lists of FBO's \(Feed Business Operators\) Registered and Approved \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

Mineral feeding stuffs must be administered in accordance with the appropriate instructions.

Meal Feeding Lambs Post Weaning (Concentrate feeding to lambs post weaning) (hill flocks only)

Lambs must be supplemented with compound feeding stuffs containing appropriate mineral and vitamins for 4 weeks post weaning.

Participants may feed purchased compound feed containing minerals or supplement feed materials ('straights') with a suitable mineral feeding stuff.

Receipts and invoices of all compound feeding stuffs and/or mineral feeding stuffs purchased must be retained and made available for inspection and/or administrative check.

All mineral feeding stuffs must be sourced from feed business operators approved or registered within the European Union. A listing of these can be found here [gov.ie - Feeding Stuffs - Lists of FBO's \(Feed Business Operators\) Registered and Approved \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

Minerals must be administered in accordance with the appropriate instructions.

Participants will be required to retain dispatch documents for any lambs sold to verify lambs were fed for 4 weeks post weaning and record date of weaning.

Where groups of lambs are weaned on different dates record the different weaning dates for each group.

The level of supplementation must be at an adequate rate to provide the required level of nutrition. Participants should supplement in accordance with manufacturers label recommendations. Please refer to the Action Record book for recommended concentrate feeding rates.

Parasite Control (Faecal Egg Count)

Under this action scheme participants with lowland flocks must take and submit to the laboratory for testing a minimum of 2 Faecal Egg Counts per annum between 1st of June and 30th September on lambs. The second test must be carried out at least 7 days after the first. This action is to establish the worm burden in order to make an informed decision in relation to a dosing regime, which will ensure treatment of internal parasites is carried out on a targeted basis.

Scheme participants with hill flocks must carry out 1 Faecal Egg Count on lambs for the presence of worms **within 4 weeks post weaning**.

This task is for **Lambs only**, not ewes.

Applicants should discuss their FEC results with their agricultural adviser/veterinary surgeon when drawing up an appropriate worm control programme.

Further guidance on the FEC procedure and interpretation of results can be found in Annex II of the scheme action record book.

Applicants should note that only laboratories from the list of Department approved laboratories for the purposes of the Parasite Control (Faecal Egg Count) Task of the Sheep Improvement Scheme are to be used. This list is available on the Sheep Improvement Scheme Section of the Department's website under: [gov.ie - Sheep Improvement Scheme \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

Failure to use a laboratory from the list of Department approved laboratories for the purpose of the Parasite Control Task (Faecal Egg Count) within the set deadlines, will mean this action will be not fully completed in line with the scheme conditions and will therefore not be eligible for payment.

Flystrike Control

Under this action participants must incorporate a flystrike programme for the prevention of flies during the months of flystrike risk. They must incorporate mechanical means for the

prevention of flies in addition to any chemical control used. They must record the times of intervention and the number of sheep with dags removed.

Faecal material can build up around a sheep's hindquarter for several reasons and can result in increased risk of fly strike and negatively impact on sheep welfare.

Sheep must be assembled at least once in the period 1st of June to 30th September and dags should be removed from any affected sheep

Mineral Supplementation Lambs Pre Weaning (hill flocks only)

Under this action participants must supplement lambs at least once with a mineral feeding stuff during the grazing season pre weaning which will assist in addressing mineral deficiencies in lambs on hill flocks.

Supplementation may take the form of injectables, boluses, drenches or liquid minerals.

Records of all mineral feeding stuffs purchased must be retained and made available for inspection.

All mineral feeding stuffs must be sourced from feed business operators approved or registered within the European Union. A listing of these can be found here gov.ie - [Feeding Stuffs - Lists of FBO's \(Feed Business Operators\) Registered and Approved \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie)

Minerals must be administered in accordance with the appropriate instructions.

Scanning and recording of results - Management of pregnant ewes

Ewes must be scanned approximately between 70 and 100 days post ram turnout.

Scanning results must be recorded and the receipt and copy of scanning results from the scanner must be retained and made available for inspection or Administrative Control check.

Ewes must be grouped and managed post scanning in accordance with litter size.

Records of scanning results and grouping and management of ewes must be recorded in the scheme Action Record book and retained for inspection / administrative check.

Genotyped Ram

Under this action **all** applicants to the scheme will be required to **purchase and use a genotyped** ram within the scheme year(s) that they have selected for this action on their application.

For **Lowland flocks** the ram must be four or five star on the Replacement or Terminal Index and have a genomic evaluation with Sheep Ireland **at the time of purchase**, and be a type one, two or three for Scrapie. No type 4 or 5 scrapie genotyped rams will qualify.

For **Hill flocks**, if the ram is a hill flock breed, the ram only needs to be DNA Sire verified by Sheep Ireland and be a type one, two or three for Scrapie at the time of purchase.

Alternatively, hill flock participants may purchase a four or five star ram on the Replacement or Terminal Index and have a genomic evaluation with Sheep Ireland **at the time of purchase**, and be a type one, two or three for Scrapie. No type 4 or 5 scrapie genotyped rams will qualify.

Applicants with 150 breeding ewes or less will only have to complete this action once in the first three years of the scheme.

Where an applicant is determined at the time of application to have a reference number of greater than 150 breeding ewes, then they will be required to carry out the action twice over the lifetime of the scheme, once within the first three years of the scheme participation and once in any subsequent year in which they wish to carry out the action for the second time.

Applicants may be required to submit evidence that they have successfully completed the genotyped task. For example, a copy of the catalogue from the sale or a copy of the animals details from the www.ramsearch.ie and a copy of the dispatch docket that shows the purchase of the animal.

In the year, or years, chosen by the applicant to carry out the Genotyped Ram action, this action will replace the standard Category B action chosen by the applicant at the time of application. They will revert to the standard action B in the following year following completion of the Genotype Ram action.

For example, if an applicant with a reference number of 100 breeding ewes selected the Lameness control action as their Category A action and the Scanning and Recording of Results action as their Category B action, and selected year 2 of the scheme to carry out the Genotyped Ram Action, then the application would be required to carry out their actions as follows for the duration of the scheme:

- Year 1: Lameness control (Category A action), Scanning and Recording of Results (Category B action)
- Year 2: Lameness control (Category A action), Genotyped Ram (Category B action)
- Year 3: Lameness control (Category A action), Scanning and Recording of Results (Category B action).

- Year 4: Lameness control (Category A action), Scanning and Recording of Results (Category B action).
- Year 5: Lameness control (Category A Action), Scanning and Recording of Results (Category B Action).

Where an applicant fails to complete the Genotyped Ram Action in the year selected:

- Applicants will not receive payment for the Genotyped Ram Action for the year in question and will receive a 50% penalty on their Action A payment.
- The Genotyped Ram Action will roll over into the following year, replacing the standard Action B which would have been due for completion in that year. Applicants will only be required to do one Action A and one Action B in any scheme year.
- Where the applicant fails to do the Genotyped Ram Action in the following year, the applicant will receive no payment for either Action A or Action B for that year and an administrative penalty of 20% based on the overall amount which would have been payable in the scheme year will be imposed.
- The applicant will also be deemed ineligible to participate in subsequent scheme years and will be withdrawn from the scheme
- Where an applicant has a reference number of 150 eligible breeding ewes or greater and is obliged to carry out the Genotyped Ram Action twice over the lifetime of the scheme, the above arrangements will apply for both years.
- E.g. Applicant with a reference number of 160 eligible breeding ewes selects year 1 and year 3 of the scheme to do the action. Applicant:
 - Does the action in Year 1 – receives full payment on both actions and does standard Action B in Year 2.
 - Does not do the Genotyped Ram Action in Year 3 - receives no payment on Action B and a 50% penalty on Action A. Genotyped Ram Action rolls into the following year for completion.
 - Applicant does not do the Genotyped Ram Action in Year 4, applicant receives no payment for either Action A or B and a 20% administrative penalty is imposed. Applicant will be deemed ineligible for participation in Year 5 of the scheme and is withdrawn from the scheme.
- Applicant with a reference number of 160 eligible breeding ewes selects year 3 and year 4 of the scheme to do the action. Applicant:
 - Does not do the Genotyped Ram Action in Year 3 - receives no payment on Action B and a 50% penalty on Action A. Genotyped Ram Action rolls into the following year for completion. Therefore, the Genotyped Ram Action selected for Year 4 will be rolled over into Year 5 automatically.
 - Applicant does not do Genotyped Ram Action for the first time in Year 4, applicant receives no payment for either Action A or B and a 20% administrative penalty is

imposed. Applicant will be deemed ineligible for participation in Year 5 of the scheme and is withdrawn from the scheme.

- E.g., Applicant with a reference number of 160 eligible breeding ewes selects year 2 and year 4 of the scheme to do the action. Applicant:
 - Does not do the action in Year 2 – receives no payment on Action B and a 50% penalty on Action A. Genotyped Ram Action rolls into the following year for completion.
 - Applicant completes the action subsequently in Year 3 – gets full payment for both actions as standard. Remains in the scheme.
 - Applicant does not complete action in Year 4 – applicant receives no payment on Action B and a 50% penalty on Action A. Genotyped Ram Action rolls into the following year for completion.
 - Applicant does not complete Genotyped Ram Action in Year 5 – applicant receives no payment for either Action A or B and a 20% administrative penalty is imposed. Should there be an extension to the scheme as was the case with the Sheep Welfare Scheme, the applicant will be withdrawn from the scheme in year 5 and will be deemed ineligible for participation in any subsequent extension to the scheme.

- New entrant applicants to the scheme in Year 4 and Year 5 will not be required to select the Genotyped Ram Action in either Year 4 or Year 5 but will be free to choose any action B, including the Genotyped Ram Action, from the menu of available actions.