



## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme 'ACRES'**

As proposed in Ireland's draft CAP Strategic Plan

### **in implementation of**

Council Regulations (EU) No 2021/2115 & 2021/2116

**DATE: June 2022**

It is proposed that payments in respect of ACRES will be co-funded by the National Exchequer and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) of the European Union under Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027

## Information on the proposed Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme ('ACRES')

### Frequently Asked Questions

June 2022

- Ireland's draft CAP Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027, which lists the range of interventions currently being proposed, is currently being considered by the EU Commission.
- One of the interventions proposed therein is an agri-environment climate measure (AECM), to be known as the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme ('ACRES').
- €1.5 billion has been allocated to this flagship agri-environment scheme which will be the successor to the Green Low Carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) which was available under Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.
- ACRES has been designed to deliver significant long-term environmental improvement through participation by a significant number of farmers on the most appropriate land, with each making a strong improvement on their farm. This will build on, and complement, achievements under Conditionality and the Eco-Scheme.
- The purpose of this document is to provide responses to questions which may arise in relation to the proposed scheme.
- **All information is subject to the approval of Ireland's draft CAP Strategic Plan (CSP), the finalisation of the relevant implementing regulations, and the subsequent publication of finalised ACRES Terms & Conditions and Specifications.**

Information is provided, on this basis, on the following areas/topics:

### Contents

<b>GENERAL OUTLINE</b> .....	3
<b>PROPOSED REQUIREMENTS</b> .....	5
<b>APPLICATION PROCESS</b> .....	7
<b>ACRES GENERAL</b> .....	9
<b>ACRES CO-OPERATION</b> .....	9
<b>ACRES ACTIONS</b> .....	10
<b>ACRES TRAINING</b> .....	11
<b>ACRES CONTACT INFORMATION</b> .....	11

## ACRES Scheme Details:

### GENERAL OUTLINE

#### **1. A General approach and a Co-operation approach have been mentioned. What is the difference between them?**

It is proposed that, similar to GLAS, all farmers will have access to the ACRES. There will, however, be two approaches within the Scheme, namely:

- an ACRES General approach available nationally (outside of the high priority geographical area as defined for the ACRES Co-operation approach below), while will offer a range of actions for individual farmers (both targeted and general) to be undertaken;

and

- an ACRES Co-operation approach, available to farmers in defined high priority geographical areas, which will involve results-based payments, as well as bespoke farm and landscape actions. Farmers participating in this approach will have the assistance of a Local Cooperation Project (CP) Team, who will assist with implementation of the scheme at local level.

Either approach will require the preparation of a Farm Sustainability Plan by an approved FAS advisor accredited for ACRES.

#### **2. Do I have a choice of ACRES General or ACRES Co-operation? Can I transfer between approaches?**

No, eligibility for the two approaches in the ACRES has been predetermined, based on geographical location and priority environmental assets on a farmer's farm.

#### **3. How will I know which approach I am eligible for/may apply for?**

- You may only apply for the ACRES General if their holding falls outside of the high priority geographical area as defined for the ACRES Co-operation approach.
- You may only apply for the ACRES Cooperation approach if you have 3 hectares or more **or** 20% or more of your farm holding (whichever is the lower) declared as forage/habitat in the 2021 BPS within ACRES Co-operation area.

A copy of the ACRES Co-operation map is accessible on the Department's website.

[gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - [The CAP Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-resources/publication/the-cap-strategic-plan-2023-2027/)

#### **4. How will I know if my land falls within the ACRES Cooperation approach?**

There will be **3** ways in which you can find out if you are in one of the eight Co-operation zones. It is proposed that this information will be accessible in the following ways from the end of June 2022:

- On AgFood - a farmer may log directly onto AgFood where, under 'ACRES Access Agreement' tab, there will be an information page which will indicate what approach s/he is eligible for ACRES.
- Through their advisor - a farmer's advisor, who has signed up to the ACRES Access Agreement, may also view on AgFood which ACRES approach his/her client may apply for.
- By SMS – a Farmer may send an SMS to DAFM where they will receive a response indicating what approach they are eligible to apply for ACRES. When the farmer sends the SMS to DAFM, it has to be in a specific format, i.e., DAFM ACRES Herd Number/ Partnership ID – for example DAFM ACRES A1234567

#### **5. How long will the contract be for?**

It is proposed that that duration of the ACRES contract will be for 5 years from the commencement date of your contract.

#### **6. How many participants in ACRES General and ACRES Co-operation? How is it split?**

The budget allocation will facilitate the participation of 50,000 participants in ACRES overall. While this is similar to the number in GLAS, it should be noted that a higher maximum level of payment is proposed. It is currently envisaged that the split will be 30,000 participants in ACRES General and 20,000 participants in ACRES Co-operation – this will, however, be ultimately subject to the level of interest in each approach.

#### **7. Will all applicants be accepted into the Scheme at the same time?**

It is proposed that the intake into the scheme will be phased, with at least two tranches, to spread the workload on advisors and enable them to allocate sufficient time for the preparation of applications, and the completion of the Farm Sustainability Plan (FSP) and selection of appropriate actions.

#### **8. What are the payment levels?**

- ACRES General approach is structured as a 'package' and offers a maximum payment of €7,311 per applicant per full calendar year. The level of payment a farmer may achieve will be determined by the payment rates for the actions select and undertaken satisfactorily.
- ACRES Co-operative approach is structured as a 'package' and offers a maximum payment of €10,500 per applicant per full calendar year. This is broken into results-based maximum payment of €7,000 and additional non-productive investment and landscape maximum payments of €3,500. The level of payment you can achieve will be determined by results-based scorecards, non-productive investments, and landscape actions, which will be designed for your land-types and region.

**9. In the ACRES Co-operation approach, what are Non-Productive Investments? What will I have to do?**

If you are in the ACRES Co-operation approach, you will be offered tailored Non-Productive Investments and Landscape Actions. These investments or actions will be determined by the co-operation teams in consultation with relevant stakeholders to assist with the delivery of environmental outputs/improvement at local level.

ACRES Co-operation participants can apply for these investments or actions annually. Examples of possible investments or actions include nest protection, dry stone wall maintenance, pond creation, winterage practices, drinking point provision, water retention measures.

**10. What are the rates payable for each action?**

Payments rates for individual actions in the ACRES scheme will be available in due course as part of the final Terms & Conditions.

**PROPOSED REQUIREMENTS**

**11. Do I need an advisor, or may I submit my own application?**

You must engage an approved FAS agricultural advisor to prepare and submit the ACRES application on your behalf.

**12. As an approved FAS advisor can I prepare a plan for myself?**

No, you may not prepare or submit an application for ACRES or the results-based scorecard(s) as part of the Scheme, in respect of your own holding and Business ID or those of a family member.

**13. How do I qualify for the ACRES scheme?**

To be eligible to participate, an applicant must:

- Be aged eighteen years or over on date of submission of the application for support,
- Be the holder of an active Business ID. Herd 'Owner' status is required as Herd Keeper is not acceptable,
- Have all lands farmed declared in the applicant's name on the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS),
- Have submitted a valid BPS 2021 application,
- All lands brought into the scheme must be declared in the applicant's 2022 BPS and declared on the applicant's BISS application for all subsequent years of participation, and

- With particular reference to each approach:
  - The ACRES General approach will be open to all categories of active farmers eligible in the defined mapped area for ACRES General– this is the uncoloured area in the map accessible on the Department’s website
  - The ACRES Co-operation approach will be open to all categories of active farmers eligible in the defined mapped area for ACRES Co-operation Project (CP) zones – which are shown as colour-coded zones on the website.
- If you are participating in other environmental schemes, you may apply for ACRES, but if approved you may have payments adjusted in either scheme to ensure no double funding takes place. Advice should be sought from the Department if there are any doubts about compatibility of any scheme.

**14. Do I need a Nutrient Management Plan like previous Agri- Environmental scheme?**

While a Nutrient Management Plan may be a requirement under other Departmental schemes, it is currently proposed that it will be necessary, as a participant in ACRES, to take soil samples as part of the Farm Sustainability Plan, with reports to be submitted and uploaded onto system within a certain time period – further details on this will be provided in due course, with scheme specifications.

**15. Can I transform from GLAS to ACRES?**

No, GLAS was provided for under Ireland’s Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 with all contracts due to be completed on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022. It is proposed that ACRES will be provided, subject to Commission approval, under Ireland’s CAP Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027.

**16. Will there be priority access to ACRES available for commonage like previous Agri- Environmental scheme?**

Yes, if you declared at least 0.5 Ha of commonage in your 2021 BPS application, maintain a min stocking density and continue to farm this at the time of application for ACRES in 2022, you may be eligible for Tier 1 priority entry to ACRES. However, you must undertake the ACRES commonage action on all commonage declared in your 2022 BPS application, regardless of whether it gains you Tier 1 access or not. You must be actively farming the commonage to be eligible for payment.

Details of commonage requirements will be announced in due course, with scheme specifications.

**17. If an action becomes mandatory or I am subsequently required to do it under a new regulation or Statutory Instrument following my entry into ACRES, will I still get paid for it under my ACRES contract?**

Where relevant mandatory standards, requirements, or obligations beyond which the ACRES commitments have to go are adjusted, the ACRES contract shall be changed where necessary

to take account of such changes. If such changes are not accepted by you, the actions in question will cease and recoupment of money already received in respect of that action will not be required.

**18. Can leased or rented land be included in the ACRES scheme?**

Yes, both leased and/ or rented land can be included in the ACRES scheme, as long as you have control of it for the duration of your contract.

**APPLICATION PROCESS**

**19. What is the application process?**

All applications for the scheme must be prepared and completed by an approved FAS Advisor via the Department's online system and the application process includes the completion of a Farm Sustainability Plan in accordance with the ACRES Terms and Conditions and Specification, which will be available in due course.

**20. What is the Access Agreement?**

The ACRES Access Agreement is an online facility to enable advisors submit an Expression of Interest and accept the current scheme rules on behalf of their clients. The Access Agreement also outlines that BPS/BISS data may be used by the Department for the purposes for ACRES.

The Access Agreement is the first step in the ACRES application process and must be submitted by the advisor for each of their clients in advance of the Farm Sustainability Plan and application functions.

To be eligible to submit an application on behalf of their clients, an advisor must be recorded on the Department's Corporate Customer Management (CCM) as an Ag agent for ACRES, and an advisor's clients must be associated with them on CCM for ACRES.

**21. Am I committed to applying to the scheme if I agree to the Access Agreement?**

No, you are not committed to apply for the ACRES scheme by agreeing to the Access Agreement. You are indicating an intention to apply to the scheme and allowing your ACRES advisor access to necessary information with the Department to complete an application.

**22. When do I have to apply by?**

Subject to approval of the draft CSP by the EU Commission, it is currently proposed that ACRES advisors will be able to prepare Farm Sustainability Plans (FSP) for their clients from early August and to submit the scheme applications and the accompanying FSPs from mid October 2022 to end of November 2022 – these are proposed dates and may be subject to change.

**23. When will I know if I am in the scheme or not?**

Ranking and selection criteria will be applied to all applications across both approaches of the scheme. All applications will be assessed in each tranche based on set selection criteria designed to rank the applications in accordance with environmental objectives. Once this process is completed, you will be notified directly if you have been successful or not in your application.

#### **24. What is the Farm Sustainability Plan?**

The Farm Sustainability Plan (FSP) is part of the application process. The purpose of the FSP is to assist in locating 'the right action in the right place'. It therefore is a combination of desk and field assessments whereby advisors assess the environmental assets/risks and conservation targets on the holding.

To complete the FSP, the advisor must complete a series of desk checks, walk all the fields of your farm to identify and address the environmental priorities/risks on your farm, and check fields for suitability for the various actions.

Your advisor must discuss possible actions arising from the FSP process with you and you must then decide which actions are to form part of your ACRES application. The FSP has to accompany the application form.

#### **25. How do I get priority access to ACRES General? Do I have to maintain my priority action throughout the scheme?**

The requirements for priority access to ACRES General will be outlined in Annex II of the document 'Overview of proposed Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme ('ACRES')', which will be made available when the Access Agreement opens at end June 2022. A participant will be required to maintain the priority action(s) throughout the lifetime of the scheme otherwise penalties will apply (details available in due course).

#### **26. Is there priority access for Organic farmers?**

Yes, if you are registered with and approved as an organic operator by one of the Organic Control Bodies and hold a licence at the time of application, you may be eligible for Tier 1 priority entry to the ACRES General approach. Where there is risk of double-funding, your organic farm payment will be reduced accordingly to avoid a double-funding situation.

#### **27. Can I apply for the ACRES scheme when my herd number is in the 'Reps of'?**

Yes, you can apply for the ACRES scheme when your herd number is in the 'Reps of'. It should be noted, however, that payments will not issue until you have applied to transfer the herd number to the person that is eligible to take over the herd number in line with the scheme's terms and conditions.

#### **28. Will my application depend on my 2021 BPS application or my 2022 BPS application?**



You must have submitted a BPS 2021 application to be eligible for the ACRES scheme. All lands brought into the scheme must be declared in your 2022 BPS and declared on your BISS application for all subsequent scheme years.

**29. After I submit my application, can I change my mind on application or scheme actions?**

Up to the closing date of scheme submission, changes and withdrawal of actions can be made when the application is in draft. Once you submit your application, you cannot change your application or actions, you will need to withdraw your application and re-submit the correct version.

After the closing date of scheme submissions, no changes can be made to an application. If you want to withdraw an action or an application, you will need to write directly scheme contact details below. Depending on the action, a withdrawal of a particular action, may lead to an unsuccessful application to the scheme.

Once the scheme commences 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 no changes are allowed to an action. Any withdrawal from the scheme or withdrawal of an action, will lead to recoupmnt of monies received to date.

## ACRES GENERAL

**30. Are the actions the same as GLAS?**

While the details of the actions are being finalised, an indicative list of the actions was provided during the CAP Information evenings held in March 2022 – available at this link:

[gov.ie - The CAP Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027 \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

The actions of the ACRES scheme will also be outlined in the Overview of proposed ACRES document. Details of those actions and what is required will be provided for in the scheme specifications, which will be available in due course.

## ACRES CO-OPERATION

**31. What are the Co-operation zones? How are they defined?**

The ACRES Co-operation zones were defined by a cross government working group, as high priority geographical areas which include areas dominated by semi-natural vegetation (both privately owned and in commonage), Natura 2000 lands and priority water catchments, etc. These areas are of high nature value, hold significant carbon stores and are home to some of the most pristine waters in the country. These areas were grouped, for the purposes of the ACRES Co-operation approach, into 8 zones based on the geographical area and number of potential scheme applicants in those areas.

**32. What is the Co-operation team?**

A participant in the ACRES Co-operation approach will have the assistance of a Local Cooperation Project (CP) Team, in relation to implementation of the scheme at local level. They will facilitate cooperation between specialist local teams, farmers, advisors, State agencies and Government Departments to co-create and implement a range of solutions that improve the local environment and the viability of these high priority rural areas.

The CP teams will provide expertise on, and assist with, the implementation of actions at a farm and landscape level.

CP Teams will be multi-disciplinary teams with expertise from ecologists, hydrologists ornithologists as well as project managers. They will engage with farmers with advice and best practice to maintain or improve the habitats on their holdings. They will also act as a conduit for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who will administer payments.

### **33. Do I have to liaise with my local co-operation team? If so, how often?**

Yes, you will have to liaise with your local Co-operation team, who will guide you and your advisor where appropriate, in the selection of suitable measures to achieve the objectives of the Local Action Plan. How often this will take place will be decided by the CP Teams.

## **ACRES ACTIONS**

### **34. Can I drop an action throughout the lifetime of the scheme?**

If you choose to drop an action throughout the duration of the scheme, you will have repay monies received to date. It may also affect your participation in the scheme. Detail of any penalties will be outlined in the Scheme's terms and conditions, which will be available in due course. In cases where force majeure is applied for and approved, no penalty will apply. If land hosting an action is lost there will be appropriate recoupment of funds already paid.

### **35. What if I lose land during the scheme?**

Owned, leased and rented land is allowed into the scheme; there is an onus, however, on the farmer that they will have control of the land for the duration of the 5-year scheme.

### **36. Can I move the location of actions throughout the ACRES scheme?**

It is proposed that a certain number of actions may be rotated around the farm each year. The actions that may be so rotated will be as stated in the ACRES specifications. All other actions must remain in the location selected as part of their ACRES contract for the duration of the contract.

### **37. How do I increase my score in a results-based action?**

Results-based agri-environmental schemes reward farmers for committed environmental effort by linking payments to the quality of environmental outcomes delivered. The higher the environmental quality the higher the payment a farmer receives. The farm advisor should explain the scoring system to the farmer and advise what can be done to improve the score

but ultimately the farmer can choose the means by which they manage their lands in order to achieve the result.

**38. In the ACRES Co-operation, when will I know what bespoke actions I can undertake as part of the ACRES scheme?**

The local CP Teams will begin developing their Local Action Plans in 2022. These plans will develop further in 2023, when the CP Teams have more information on the farmers that are participating in ACRES. This information, along with discussions with individual farmers will facilitate decisions on bespoke actions taken by farmers.

**39. Will I get a choice of ACRES Co-operation actions I can undertake?**

Decisions on bespoke actions will be taken following discussions with the CP Teams, based on the Local Action Plan. Farmers that have land outside the CP Zone, may choose to carry out actions selected where appropriate from the ACRES general actions list.

#### ACRES TRAINING

**40. When will training for ACRES participants take place?**

Your ACRES training is expected to take place within your first year of participation in the scheme.

**41. Is there any additional training for ACRES Co-operation participants?**

Yes, if you are in the ACRES Co-operation approach, you must attend any additional mandatory training as organised by the ACRES CP Teams from time-to-time.

#### ACRES CONTACT INFORMATION

**Address:** ACRES Scheme,  
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