Flower power of low-input grassland

Here's how your REAP payment is calculated

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If you are one of the 5,000 farmers who have been accepted into Results-based Environment Agri Pilot (REAP), you must choose an area of between 2ha and 10ha of grass fields on your farm. Tillage fields or peatland with heather are not eligible.

Your advisor will walk suitable grass fields with you this summer and score each field using one of two scorecards: one for Low Input Grassland (LIG), or one for Multi Species Ley (MSL). The score determines the level of payment. The advisor will also discuss with you the option of planting trees or hedges.

Here, Catherine Keena describes how low-input grassland is scored with payments ranging from €0 to €400 per hectare based on nine questions. The field's score is based on: the number and abundance of non-grass species; the extent of field boundaries including hedges, stone walls, earth banks and watercourses; and the length and width of grassy margins – either 1m, 2m or 3m.

Q1: How many positive indicators are present?

<2	2-4	5-8	9-12	>12	Score:
0	5	10	15	20	

Tick if present:

- ☐ Marsh cinquefoil
- ☐ Sorrel (Common & Sheep's)
- ☐ Bird's foot trefoils
- ☐ Vetches and vetchlings
- ☐ Marsh marigold
- ☐ Cowslip & Primrose
- ☐ Ox-eye daisy
- ☐ Tormentils (Common & English)
- ☐ Yellow Composites
- ☐ Yellow rattle
- ☐ Meadowsweet
- ☐ Eyebrights
- ☐ Large Umbels - Angelica, Valerian, Hogweed
- ☐ Small Umbels - Pignut, Yarrow, Wild carrot
- ☐ Bedstraws and Stitchworts
- ☐ Marsh pennywort
- ☐ Lady's mantle
- ☐ Sedges
- ☐ Woodrushes, Spike rushes
- ☐ Lady's smock (or Cuckooflower)
- ☐ Wild thyme
- ☐ Louseworts
- ☐ Ragged robin
- ☐ Meadow thistle and Marsh thistle
- ☐ Common knapweed
- ☐ Scabious (Devil's-bit & Field)
- ☐ Selfheal and Bugle
- ☐ Orchids
- ☐ Mints
- ☐ Violets
- ☐ Forget-me-nots

High quality Positive Indicators:

- ☐ Kidney vetch
- ☐ Carline thistle
- ☐ Harebell
- ☐ Greater knapweed

Q2: What is the combined cover of positive indicators throughout the field?

- **Negligible (<5%):** a few, scattered or very small patches. The entire sward appears grassy.
- **Low (6-10%):** occurring in small patches or very scattered over the field, not highly visible when looking down on the sward (you must search to find them) and missing from most of the field. Most of the sward looks 'grassy'.
- **Medium (11-20%):** occurring scattered, or in patches over the entire field, occasional occurrence when looking down or across the sward. Much of the sward looks 'grassy'. You encounter a positive indicator every couple of steps.
- **High (2-40%):** visible over the entire field. Much of the sward may look 'grassy'. But with frequent yellow and pink flowers present. You encounter a positive indicator with every step.
- **Very high (>40%):** very visible throughout the sward and providing a high amount of ground cover. Good diversity of leaf shapes and flowers (look for different shapes and colours) apparent in the sward when looking down onto it. Only small patches of the field may appear 'grassy'. You encounter multiple positive indicators with every step (and in between steps).

negligible	low	medium	high	very high
<5%	6-10%	11-20%	21-40%	>40%
0	10	15	20	25

Q3: What is the vegetation structure or litter levels?

A meadow closed off or recently mown for hay or silage is scored as 'good' structure.

- **Poor:** can be over-grazed or under-grazed. Most of the field (>75%) has either very tall or very short, even, vegetation or litter levels are greater than 50%
- **Moderate:** between 25% and 50% of the field has tall and/or short sward with occasional intermediate sward height spread patchily through the field or litter levels are 25% to 50%.
- **Good:** tall/medium and short vegetation throughout and litter levels are less than or equal to 25%.

poor	moderate	good
-10	5	10

Q4: What is the combined cover of negative indicators throughout the field?

Negative indicators include ryegrass, docks, ragwort, nettles, bracken and thistles (creeping and spear).

- **Very high (>40%):** occurring in dense patches or abundant throughout the field. Very visible in the sward.
- **High (30-40%):** occurring in medium to large patches in the field and not limited to previous feeding sites, trackways, field boundaries, water troughs and gateways. Readily visible in the sward.
- **Medium (11-30%):** occurring in several small- to medium-sized patches throughout the field and also around trackways, field boundaries, water

very high	high	medium	negligible to low
>40%	31-40%	11-30%	<10%
-15	-10	-5	0

Forget-me-not flowers.

troughs and gateways.

• **Negligible to low (<10%):** if present, scattered or small clumps of weeds only. Where present at gateways, water troughs, field boundaries and along well-used trackways, this cover should be less than 10% and the weeds should not extend into the main body of the field.

Q5: What is the score for field margins?

The score for field margins varies is based on their density and the width fenced as outlined below. An additional five points will be awarded for any field margin along a watercourse or drain (subject to a maximum of 30 points for this question. For a very high-quality species rich field with a combined score of 35 for Q1 and Q2, the margins do not need to be fenced.

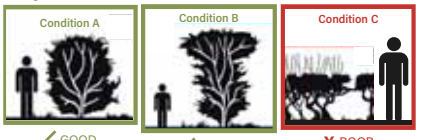
Margin width:	Densities per hectare: 50-200m/ha	201-300m/ha	>300m/ha
3m	20	25	30
2m	15	20	25
1m	10	15	20

Q6: What is the score for field boundaries?

The score for field margins varies is based on their density and their condition as outlined at the top of the next column..

Condition / management:	Densities per hectare: 40-100m/ha	101-160m/ha	>160m/ha
A or B	5	10	15
C	0	0	0

Hedgerows/treelines:



✓ GOOD >1.5m in height

✓ GOOD

X POOR <1.5m in height

Q7: What is the combined cover of negative indicators/invasive alien species throughout the field boundaries and margins?

Negative indicators include ryegrass, docks, ragwort, nettles, bracken and thistles (creeping and spear). Invasive alien species include Himalyan balsam, Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and giant rhubarb.

very high >40%	high 31-40%	medium 21-30%	negligible to low <20%
-15	-10	-5	0

Q8: To what extent is the field poached?

• **Very high (>50%):** extensive damage from poaching across most of the field. Often extensive rutting and compaction from machinery

• **Med high (26-50%):** soil disturbance around water sources extends for 3m. Extensive areas of bare ground noticeable and not confined to regularly used routes. Can be medium extent of rutting and compaction from machinery.

• **Med low (11-25%):** unvegetated bare areas noticeable in wetter soils during summer. Patches of bare ground not limited trackways/gates or thin soil. Soil disturbance around water features extending 1-3m.

• **Negligible to low (0-10%):** low impacts on the field. Small patches of bare ground possibly along well-used trackway/gates. Very small areas of poaching away from routes and gates. Grassland as a whole is well vegetated in summer. No poaching or dunging at wet features

very high >50%	med-high 26-50%	med-low 11-25%	negligible to low 0-10%
-30	-20	-10	0

Q9: Is there evidence of damaging activities to soil/vegetation/water?

Damaging activities include: bare soil and erosion; damage to watercourses; inappropriate use of herbicide; burning; dumping/littering; fertiliser (organic or inorganic) application at boundaries; evidence of field boundaries having been removed or damaged by machinery; and extensive areas of bare or disturbed ground along field boundaries.

high >50%	medium 6-50%	low 1-5%	none none
-30	-20	-10	0