

Climate change series

General adaptations for farmers and growers

The climate is changing and reacting to these changes is crucial for the future of farming. Farmers can take advantage of the opportunities offered by climate change by being ahead of the game and taking early action to adapt their businesses to the changes ahead.

Warmer weather/droughts

- Collect rainwater for use in dry periods for crop irrigation and drinking water for livestock
- Improve soil structure to increase water uptake and reduce erosion by adding organic matter
- Alter irrigation systems for efficiency and repair any leaks
- If possible, spray crops at night to reduce evapotranspiration
- Investigate drought resistant varieties of crops or alternative livestock breeds
- Apply manure or compost to improve soil water availability
- Consider planting shade belts to protect livestock
- Ensure all ventilation, heating and cooling equipment is correctly specified for its role, clean and working efficiently

- Investigate acquiring more abstraction licences in your catchment
- Join or initiate an abstractor group to facilitate liaison with regulators, or look into other collaborative approaches to share resources
- Investigate building an on-farm reservoir to secure water supplies

Extreme weather events

- Consider planting shelter belts to protect crops and livestock
- Ensure buildings are maintained and prepared for more stormy weather
- Consider adjusting growing practices to take account of more winter soil erosion events
- Improve field drainage and soil water retention capacity where appropriate, taking into consideration seasonality and diffuse water pollution



- Promote and undertake good soil management
- Reduce run-off with contoured hedges or vegetated buffer strips
- Extreme events may lead to more yield variability increasing the need to plan, extend the range of crops and potentially increase 'speculative' planting (in the hope there could be a 'good' year for a particular crop)
- Maintain the efficiency of existing drainage systems
- Consider increasing investment in infrastructure (e.g. drainage systems, storage capacity) in preparation for more intense weather events
- Undertake best practice to reduce soil erosion and retain nutrients, such as avoid placing gateways at the bottom of fields, plough across slopes if possible or use cover crops to reduce soil exposure

Flooding

- Improve drainage capacity by digging drainage ditches where appropriate
- Collect excess rainwater for use in drought periods
- Contact the Environment Agency to sign up for flood alerts or call the Floodline on 0845 988 1188
- Ensure livestock are away from fields at risk of flooding
- Consider entering into higher-level stewardship agreements (if possible) where payment may be available to farmers who accept additional flooding on their land

Changes in seasonality

- Be flexible and adapt plans as necessary
- Consider the advantages of longer growing seasons for double-cropping or using a greater number of varieties
- Plan resources for optimal harvesting/planting periods

Pests/diseases/weeds

- Be extra vigilant for new pests, diseases and weed invasions to enable early action as necessary
- Undertake an integrated pest management plan to identify the risks associated with pests and find options to reduce them
- Consider investigating greater crop rotation and using field margins to encourage pest predators



For news, events, and links to stories about how other farmers are managing climate change on their farms, please visit: www.farmingfutures.org.uk

With thanks to: ARF, BBRO, BPC, BPEX, Carbon Trust, CLA, Defra, EBLEX, Forum for the Future, HDC, HGCA, MDC, NFU, PGRO and UKCIP