

142

tonnes of nitrate prevented from reaching aquifers through Affinity Water funded cover crop schemes



Building a greener future with the farming community

For the fourth consecutive year, we ran an innovative scheme in Hertfordshire, incentivising farmers to grow cover crops over the 2022/23 autumn and winter period. Farmers can bid competitively for funding through the EnTrade environmental trading platform.

The aim is to work with farmers to improve groundwater quality and protect chalk streams by reducing the amount of bare agricultural soil during winter. Cover crops have a range of benefits, including nutrient and carbon capture, reduced run-off into rivers, increased water-holding capacity to support flood and drought resilience, soil health and improved biodiversity.

The auction was successful, with funding for over 500 hectares of farmland to grow cover crops this autumn and winter. Over the past four years, we have funded over 3,000 hectares of cover crops in vulnerable catchments, saving an estimated 142 tonnes of nitrate that could leach into groundwater aquifers or run off into precious chalk rivers.

A natural-capital evaluation of the scheme demonstrated that for every £1 invested in cover crops, over £6 of environmental benefit is realised, with particular benefits for soil health and climate regulation.

We also ran a programme of successful pesticide-reduction schemes across our supply area, providing funding for measures such as over-winter cover crops, taking land out of arable production with full-year cover crops, companion cropping in oilseed rape, and switching to water-friendly break crops that use fewer pesticides. Funding for these water-friendly measures has influenced crop rotations and been targeted on high-risk areas for water, covering over 1,000 hectares of eligible arable land. These schemes have significantly reduced pesticides lost to water and provided enhanced resilience to drinking-water quality and protection of aquatic ecology in our rivers.

Furthermore, we have funded pesticide-reduction field trials to investigate the multiple benefits of companion cropping oilseed rape and how farmers can reduce their

doses of problematic herbicides while still maintaining grassweed control and protecting water.

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Alister Leggatt

Senior Asset Manager

UNSDGs

Our alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

