

9.1 Ungrazed Grass Margins

Definition: an ungrazed grass margin is a strip of land, a minimum width of 2 metres, from which livestock are excluded. A margin can extend from the edge of (a) a hedge, stonewall, woodland, designated Area of Special Scientific Interest or to provide a corridor between two existing wildlife areas OR (b) from the edge of a watercourse, which can be either a lake, river or stream, but must be at least 1 metre in width and have running water for the greater part of the year.

Margins alongside stone wall or hedgerow field boundaries may be up to a maximum of 6m wide; stone walls or hedges must either **not** require restoration, or, if they require restoration, they must be **entered** under the field boundary restoration option.

All other ungrazed grass margins, alongside watercourses more than 1m wide, woodlands or ASSI, may be up to a maximum of 25m wide. No more than 1ha or 5% of the total grass area (whichever is greater) may be entered as ungrazed grass margin. Total grass area is unimproved grassland plus improved grassland, excluding land used for arable crops or arable options. The minimum area is 0.01ha in any one field.

Aim: to provide additional habitat and food source for a range of farmland birds and mammals.

Biodiversity objectives: this option contributes to the NI Biodiversity Action plan targets for the Irish hare. The NI Priority species - linnet, tree sparrow the Barn owl, bats and invertebrates - will also benefit.

Management requirements

- Margins must be created on improved or unimproved grassland only.
- Margins must have a minimum width of 2m and a maximum width of 25m.
- Grass on ungrazed grass margins must be cut and removed once in three years, cutting to take place after 15 July.
- If cutting/mowing, the cut vegetation should be disposed of in a manner which does not harm the environment.
- The margin must not be grazed.
- Margins are permanent and must be retained in the same field(s) for the duration of the scheme agreement.
- No cultivation, fertilization, liming, ploughing, reseedling, cutting silage and/or hay, or application of herbicides, pesticides or any other material is permitted.

- The area must not be used for regular access, supplementary feeding sites or for the storage of round bale hay or silage.
- It is possible to combine the field boundary restoration of hedgerows with an ungrazed grass margin.

Further advice

Margins should not be situated on habitat such as grassland with wild flowers, heather moorland or woodland. Noxious weeds such as thistles and ragwort may be controlled with herbicides, applied using a weed wiper or spot sprayer. Margin fences and positioning of gates for access should be sited to permit grass management.

Management plans are provided for participants in the
Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Management Schemes

