



# Shielding your soil when it matters most

Good agriculture and environmental condition 5 (GAEC)- Minimum soil cover

## What's it about?

Keeping fields protected during critical periods

Under **GAEC 6**, farmers must ensure that **arable land** is kept covered during **sensitive periods**, especially after harvest, throughout the winter months, or any time when soil erosion or nutrient leaching risks are heightened. This **protective cover** can be provided by **growing vegetation** such as cover crops, or by leaving **appropriate crop residues on the field**.

- The objective is to **prevent bare soil** exposure, especially in areas with high rainfall, wind, or slope, which increases **the risk of soil degradation**
- The **cover helps reduce erosion** and **protect water quality** while supporting long-term soil health
- This is a **basic requirement** for all farmers with **arable land** receiving CAP support

## What do you need to do?

How to keep your soil covered and protected

To comply with GAEC 6, you need to:

- Ensure that soil is **covered** with either **vegetation** or **residue cover** during **vulnerable periods**, such as:
  - After harvest
  - During winter months
  - During other periods of high erosion risk or nutrient leaching
- **Follow national rules** on specific cover periods (e.g., winter months) and ensure cover is maintained throughout these times



In some cases, you can **combine this GAEC** with other practices (e.g., **catch crops** under GAEC 8) to meet multiple environmental requirements.

# Why is this good practice?

## Practical guidelines for its management

**Leaving soil exposed** during vulnerable periods makes it **susceptible to degradation**. By maintaining soil cover, you:

- **Prevent soil erosion** caused by wind and water
- **Reduce nutrient leaching** into groundwater and nearby watercourses, helping to **protect water quality**
- **Improve soil structure**, moisture retention, and fertility over time
- **Support soil biodiversity** and contribute to **organic matter regeneration**

Maintaining soil cover is one of the most **cost-effective** and **impactful measures** to protect soil and water quality for future generations.



## Practical tips

### Making the most of soil cover rules and support schemes

- **Consult national guidance:** Many countries define specific **soil cover** periods (e.g., winter months), so check local requirements to ensure you meet the rules
- **Combine practices:** Using cover crops can help meet **GAEC 8** (non-productive features) and may also qualify for **eco-scheme** support or other agri-environmental measures
- **Avoid disturbing soil** during the minimum cover period—ploughing or tilling **could breach compliance** unless specifically authorized

