

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:

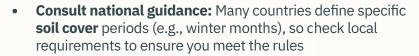
- Prevent soil erosion caused by wind and water
- Reduce nutrient leaching into groundwater and nearby watercourses, helping to protect water quality
- **Improve soil structure,** moisture retention, and fertility over time
- Support soil biodiversity and contribute to organic matter regeneration



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



- Combine practices: Using cover crops can help meet GAEC
 8 (non-productive features) and may also qualify for ecoscheme support or other agri-environmental measures
- Avoid disturbing soil during the minimum cover period ploughing or tilling could breach compliance unless specifically authorized

