Introduction

Agricultural land is classified into five grades on a national basis. Each grade is recognised by a separate colour. Existing urban areas and land scheduled for urban use are coloured red. Other areas primarily in non-agricultural use, (woodland and public open spaces etc) are coloured orange. The map is based on the Provisional 1:6,350 series and may be modified in the light of new information. Agricultural land is graded according to the degree to which its productive potential is limited by a combination of climatic, relief and soil. The climate includes, temperature, rainfall, frost and the seasonality of the growing season. Relief includes surface slope, wind and aspect. Soil limitations may affect the range of crops which can be grown, the level of yield, the consistency of yield and the production costs. Ability to grow a wide range of crops (including grass), whether actual or potential, is given considerable weight but does not outweigh the ability to produce consistently high yields of a somewhat narrower range of crops.

The grading of agricultural land is on the basis of physical quality alone and the main physical factors taken into account are climate, relief and soil. Less importance is attached to the economic factors of management, farm structure and accessibility. Grade 1 land is defined as that which is capable of giving reasonable yields under average management. Grass and cereals are therefore the principal crops. Grade 2 land is generally only suitable for low output enterprises. A high proportion will be under grass, but there may be occasional fields of oats, barley or forage crops.

For further information on the method of classifying agricultural land see Technical Report 11 (Agricultural Land Classification).