



**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 1:63,360 series and may be modified in the light of new information. Agricultural land is graded according to the degree to which its physical characteristics impose long-term limitations on agricultural use. The 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 permanent factors such as standard and adequacy of fixed equipment, level of management, farm structure and accessibility have not been considered. The grades give no indication of the relative values of farms located on them, either as a source of income or capital. The range of land quality is narrowest in Grades 1 and 2 and widest in Grade 3.

**Description of the grades**

**Grade 1**

Land with very minor or no physical limitations. The soils are deep, well drained loams, sandy loams, silt loams or peat, lying on level sites or gentle slopes and are easily cultivated. They retain good reserves of available water, and are either well supplied with plant nutrients or highly responsive to fertilisers. No climatic factor restricts their agricultural use to any major extent.

Yields are consistently high on these soils and cropping highly flexible. Most crops can be grown, including the more exacting horticultural crops.

**Grade 2**

Land with some minor soil limitations which exclude it from Grade 1, though minor climatic or site restrictions, such as exposure or slope, may also cause land to be included in the grade.

These limitations may hinder cultivations or harvesting of crops, lead to lower yields or make the land less flexible than that in Grade 1. A wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can usually be grown, though there may be restrictions in the range of horticultural crops and arable root crops.

**Grade 3**

Land with moderate limitations due to the soil, relief, climate (or some combination of these factors) which restrict the choice of crops, timing of cultivations, or level of yield. Soil defects may be of structure, texture, drainage, depth, stoniness or water holding capacity. Altitude, slope or rainfall, may also be limiting factors. Land over 122m (400ft) which has more than 1015mm (40in) annual rainfall (1145mm (45in) in North West England, Western Wales and the West Country) or land with a high proportion of moderately steep slopes (1 in 8 to 1 in 5) will generally not be graded above 3.

The range of cropping is comparatively restricted. Less demanding horticultural crops can be grown. Towards the bottom of the grade arable root crops are limited to forage crops. Land in the middle range of the grade is capable of giving reasonable yields under average management. Grass and cereals are thus the principal crops.

Some of the best quality permanent grassland may be placed in this grade where the physical characteristics of the land make arable cropping inadvisable.

**Grade 4**

Land with severe limitations due to adverse soil, relief or climate, or a combination of these. Adverse soil characteristics include unsuitable texture and structure, wetness, shallow depth, stoniness or low water holding capacity. Relief and climate restrictions may include steep slopes, short growing season, high rainfall or exposure. Land over 183m (600ft) with over 1270mm (50in) annual rainfall or land with a high proportion of steep slopes (between 1 in 5 and 1 in 3) will generally not be graded above 4.

Land in this grade 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.

**Grade 5**

Land with very severe limitations due to adverse soil, relief or climate, or a combination of these. The main limitations include very steep slopes, drainage, shallow depth of soil, excessive stoniness, low water holding capacity and severe plant nutrient deficiencies or toxicities. Land over 305m (1,000ft) which has more than 1525mm (60in) annual rainfall or land with a high proportion of very steep slopes (greater than 1 in 3) will generally not be graded above 5.

Grade 5 land is generally under grass or rough grazing except for occasional pioneer forage crops.

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

The classification is mapped and published at the following scales : 1 : 63 360, 1 : 250 000, 1 : 625 000. Available from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Lion House, Willowburn Estate, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 2PF.

**Agricultural Land**

- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5

**Non-Agricultural Land**

- Land predominantly in urban use
- Other land primarily in non-agricultural use

# Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales

