

Agricultural Land Classification 2013

The first comprehensive system of Agricultural Land Classification was introduced in 1966 and a national survey was carried out and published on 1 inch to 1 mile maps between 1967 and 1974. The classification methodology was amended in 1988. It provides a nationally consistent and recognised method for assessing the potential productiveness of agricultural land.

The grades range from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor) and are defined as follows (Source: MAFF (1988) Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales (revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land) Alnwick.):

Grade 1 – excellent quality agricultural land

Land with no or very minor limitations to agricultural use. A very wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown and commonly include top fruit, soft fruit, salad crops and winter harvested vegetables. Yields are high and less variable than on land of lower quality.

Grade 2 – very good quality agricultural land

Land with minor limitations which affect crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. A wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can usually be grown but on some land of this grade there may be reduced flexibility due to difficulties with the production of the more demanding crops such as winter harvested vegetables and arable root crops. The level of yield is generally high but may be lower or more variable than Grade 1.

Sub-Grade 3a – good quality agricultural land

Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals, oilseed rape, potatoes sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops.

Sub-Grade 3b – moderate quality agricultural land

Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops, principally cereals and grass or lower yields of a wider range of crops or high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year.

Grade 4 – poor quality agricultural land

Land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops and/or level of yields. It is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops (eg cereals and forage crops) the yields of which are variable. In most climates, yields of grass may be moderate to high but there may be difficulties in utilisation. The grade also includes very droughty arable land.

Grade 5 – very poor quality agricultural land

Land with very severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing, except for occasional pioneer forage crops.

Natural England is now the relevant government organisation, and they provide relevant data through the “Magic” website. The most recent information is found in the following dataset:

“Post 1988 ALC site data - individual sites surveyed in more detail by MAFF (including subdivisions of Grade 3 Land) between 1989 and 1999; individual sites mapped at varying scales and level of detail from 1:5,000 to 1:50,000 (typically 1:10,000). The most detailed and up to date dataset.”

Since there was never a full resurvey carried out under the new methodology and therefore the information available is not comprehensive. For further information about Agricultural Land Classification, please refer to the Natural England Website www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/geodiversity/soils/default.aspx

This booklet contains maps of the Agricultural Land Classification around the following settlements, using the Post 1988 ALC site data referred to above;

Bovey Tracey

Chudleigh

Dawlish

Kingskerswell

Kingsteignton

Newton Abbot

Teignmouth