

EVIDENCE FROM THE FARMING FORUM

The five-hour window: what farmers said about SFI26 Window 2

An analysis of 926 contributions by 174 members across 11 conversations

16 September to 2 October 2026

Prepared by Agri Web Media, publisher of The Farming Forum

Offered as evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee · 2 October 2026

SUMMARY

The evidence at a glance

926

Contributions analysed

174

Members who contributed

33,786

Views of the
conversations

1,612

Reactions from members

299

Votes cast by members in
two polls

- Tone was heavily critical. 373 contributions were negative (40.3%) against 42 positive (4.5%).
- 67 members described what happened to their own application. 20 said they had nothing submitted when the window closed, and 10 more submitted a cut-down application because of errors or time pressure.
- Of those 20, 8 blamed a fault in the application service, 6 an agent who ran out of time, and 5 being at work, away or tied up with stock.
- Asked how a limited budget should be shared, 59 of 102 members voting chose a return to a BPS-type payment.

Figures describe these conversations only. Contributors chose to take part and the results are not a representative survey of farmers. Views counted on 2 October 2026 for the eight conversations that began on or after 16 September.

Who is speaking

75,136

Registered members of The Farming Forum

174

Members who contributed to these conversations

12 years

Median length of membership among contributors

90.8%

Of contributors have been members five years or more

150 of 152

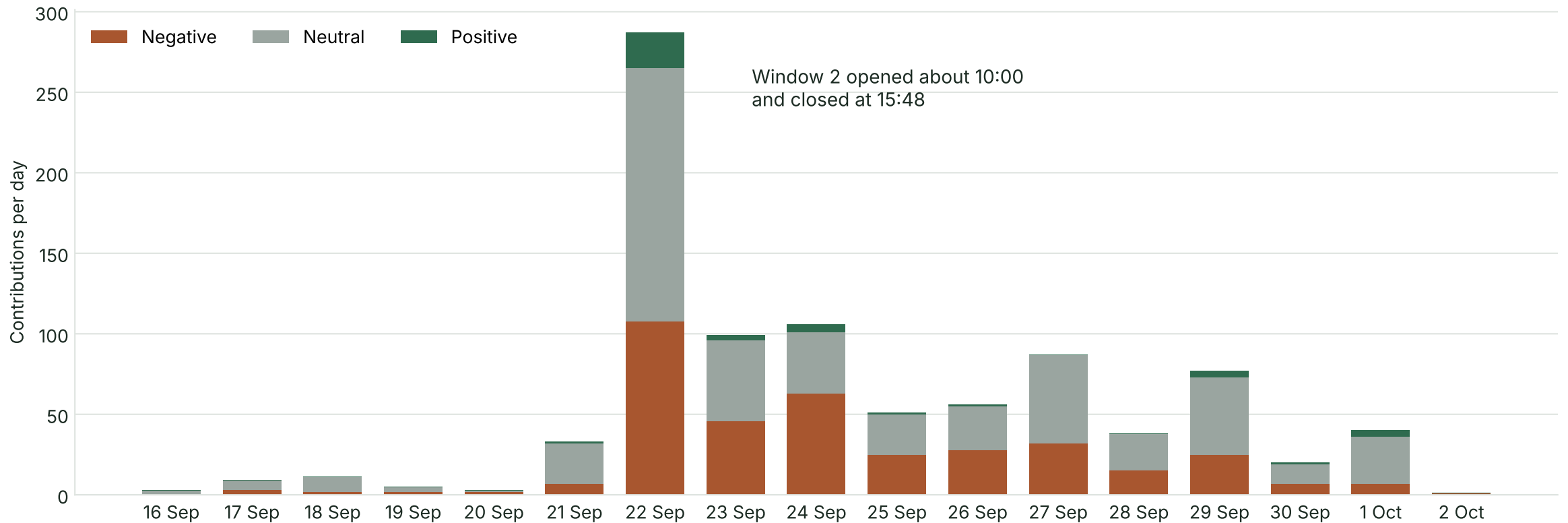
With a recorded country are in the UK

- These are established members, not accounts created for the occasion. 119 of the 174 contributors joined ten or more years ago, and the median contributor has written 2,801 contributions on the forum.
- Contributors include farmers who applied themselves, farmers who used an agent, and land agents submitting for clients. They appear under the screen names they use on the forum.
- The Farming Forum is public and moderated. Accounts of individual applications are first-hand statements by members and have not been independently verified.

Member count from The Farming Forum's own statistics on 2 October 2026. Country taken from the forum's member data, where recorded.

ACTIVITY

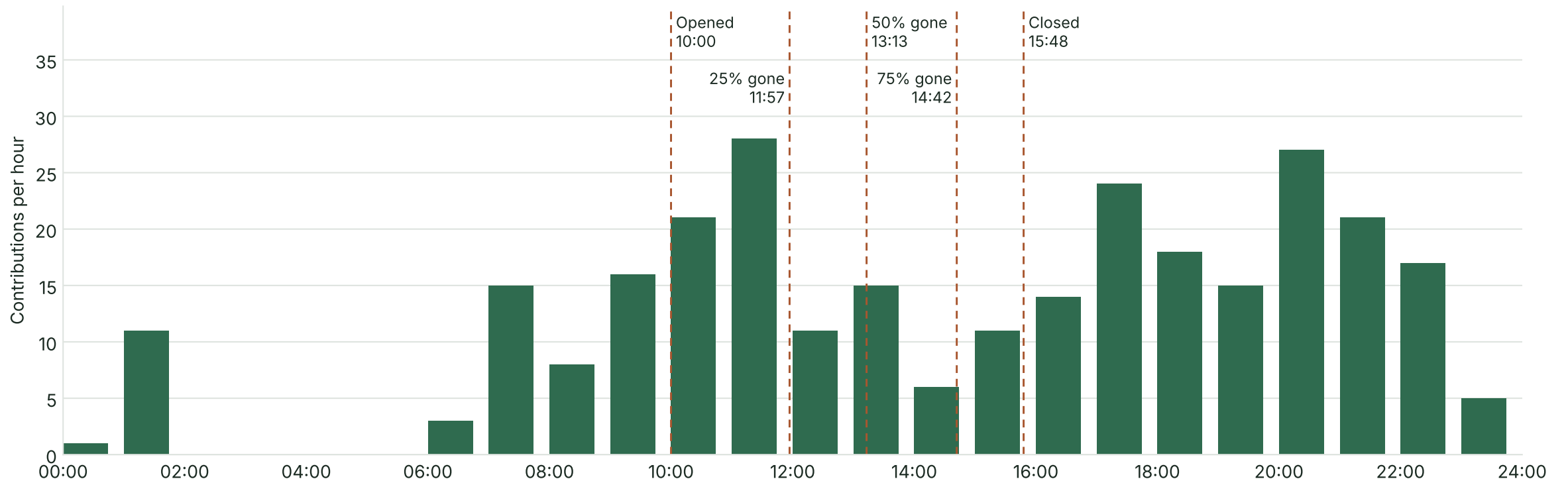
When the conversation happened



Application day, 22 September, carried 287 of the 926 contributions. Discussion ran for a further ten days as members compared outcomes and argued over what should replace the process. Dates are UK time.

22 SEPTEMBER 2026

Application day, hour by hour



Members were posting past midnight and again from 06:00 because no opening time had been published. The 25%, 50% and 75% budget notices are shown at the time a member first relayed each one into the conversation, within minutes of Defra issuing it. Opening time as reported by members, closing time from the Defra Farming blog. UK time.

SCOPE

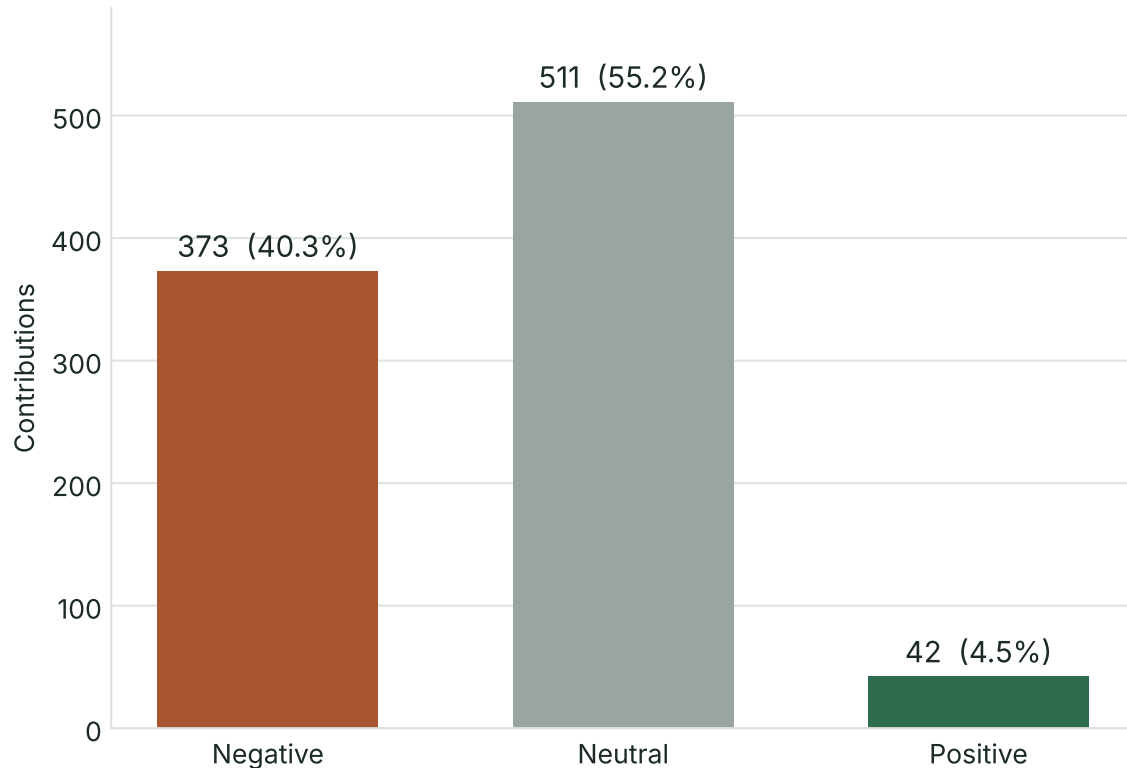
The conversations analysed

Conversation	Contributions	Members	Views	Reactions	Negative
SFI 26, trying to apply but can't	461	105	16,497	822	43.0%
Who missed out?	207	50	7,099	277	41.1%
SFI 27	79	30	2,978	101	45.6%
Sheep farming (or livestock in general) after subs	64	23	2,345	240	12.5%
SFI tomorrows	35	17	1,798	49	31.4%
What is the point of DEFRA?	30	20	1,533	101	83.3%
Looks like Window 2 might be a bun fight - Farmers Weekly article	14	10	917	7	28.6%
Do a little SFI2026, or wait for big renewal in 2027?	11	9	619	4	18.2%
What next and when - what happens after you submit an application... *	12	9	n/a	2	16.7%
SFI '26, can you reduce rotational actions in years 2 & 3 *	8	5	n/a	4	0.0%
Public goods *	5	2	n/a	5	40.0%
All conversations	926	174	33,786	1,612	40.3%

* Longer-running conversations that began before 16 September. Only contributions made from 16 September are analysed and their views are not counted. The member total counts each member once across all conversations. Nine conversations are in the forum's SFI section, with two follow-on conversations elsewhere.

SENTIMENT

Tone of the contributions



Every contribution was read and classified as positive, neutral or negative in tone. Sentiment describes the tone of these conversations, not the stance of farmers generally.

Average reactions per contribution, by tone

2.32

Negative

1.21

Neutral

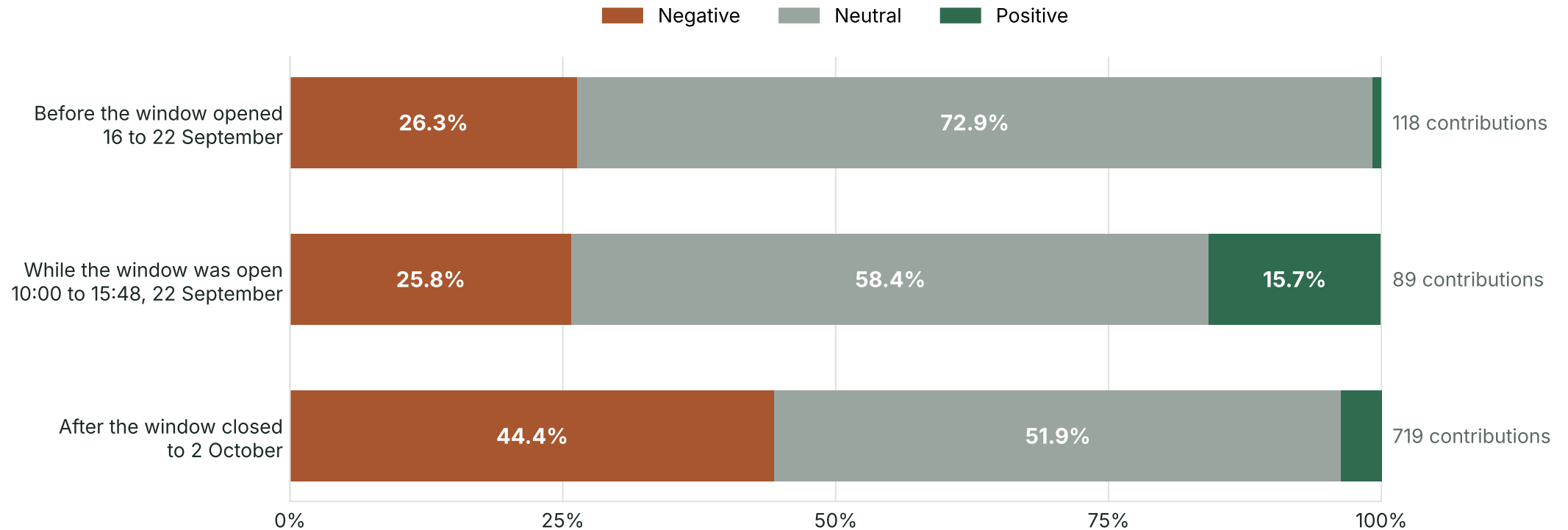
3.05

Positive

- Negative contributions outnumbered positive by almost nine to one.
- Neutral contributions were mostly practical: how to apply, what the rules allow, how to redesign it.
- Positive contributions were few but drew the most reactions.

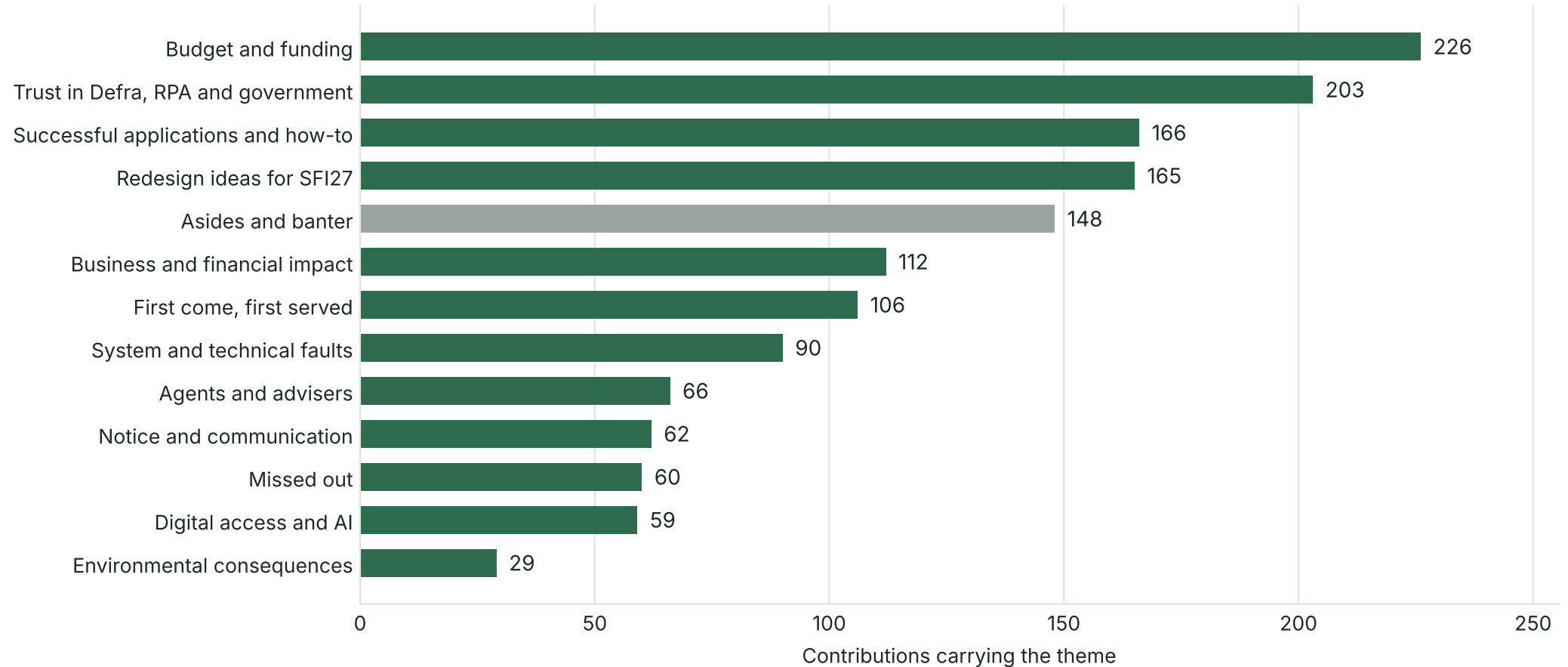
SENTIMENT

How the tone changed



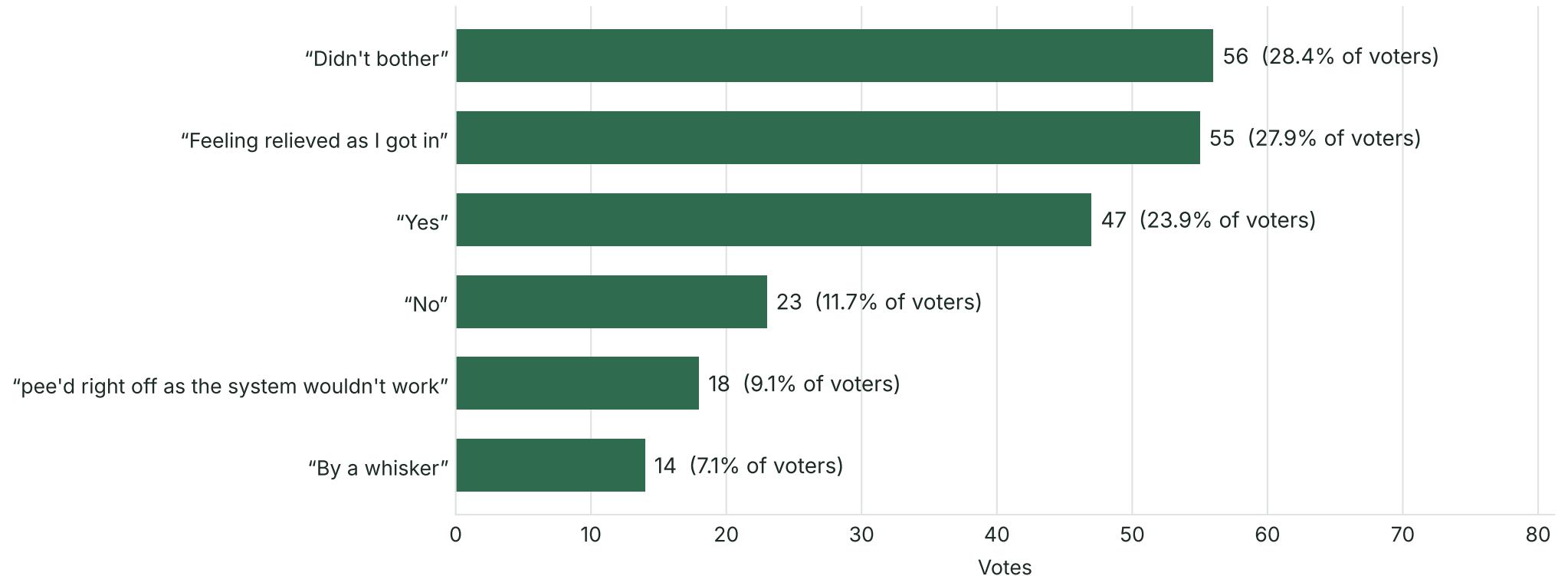
Positive contributions peaked at 15.7% while the window was open, as members reported applications going in. Once it closed, negative contributions rose to 44.4% and positive fell to 3.8%. 112 of the 319 negative contributions after the close came from members who had got an application in.

What members talked about



Each contribution was given up to three themes, so counts do not sum to the total. Asides and banter, shown in grey, covers jokes, spats and unrelated chat.

Members' poll: who missed the boat?

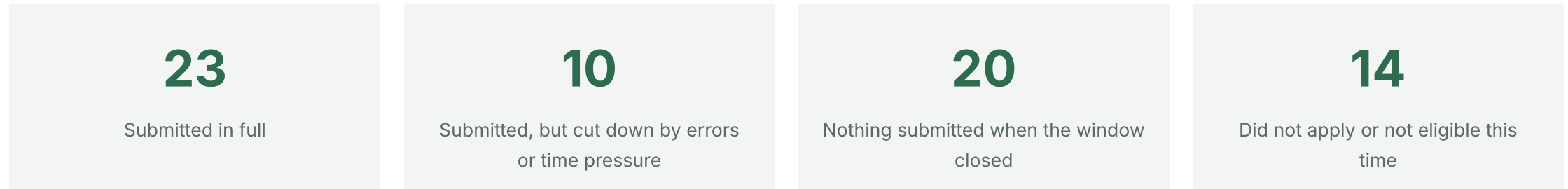


197 members voted in a poll opened by a member on the evening of 22 September. The question was "Who missed the boat then" and each voter could choose up to two of the member-written options, so votes total more than voters. 47 said yes and 18 chose the option blaming the system; 55 were relieved to have got in. The wording is informal and the options overlap, so read it as a show of hands, not a measurement.

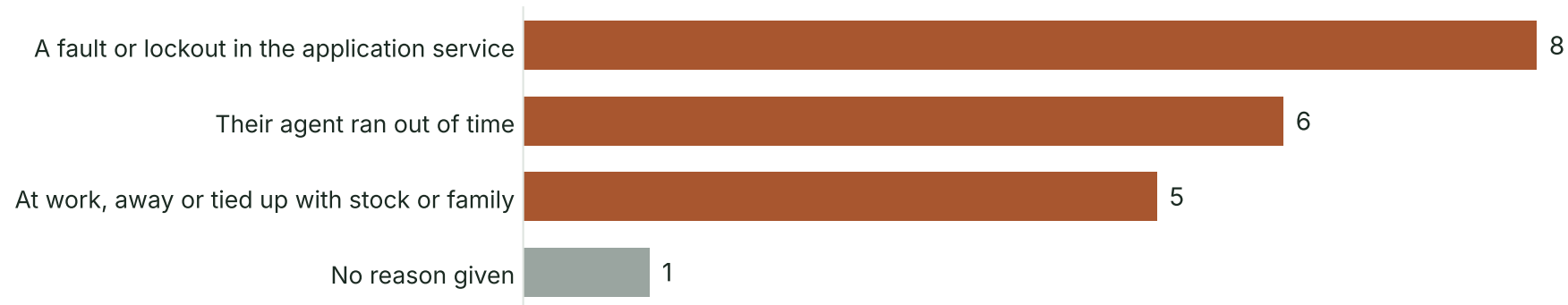
BARRIERS

What stopped members applying

What 67 members said had happened to their own Window 2 application



The reason given by the 20 with nothing submitted



Counts are of individual members, each counted once, from first-hand statements about their own application. One of the eight reporting a service fault was later told by the RPA that he could complete his application as a technical exception. These members chose to speak and are not a sample of applicants.

In their own words: shut out

"it just needed someone to do an admin check to clear the issue and let me do my application, but it seems that all the people that could have done the check had clocked off earlier in the afternoon"

HallFarmBill · 4 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"He phoned just after 4 to say he got half of his done. Guess which half mine was in."

Gander · 2 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"But the £24k/yr on 300ac of tenanted land would've made a huge difference to me if I hadn't been busy working a 2nd job so missed the window by an hour."

NorthFenFarm · 6 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"Our carefully prepared application was submitted around 15 minutes too blasted late to get in."

Primmiemoo2 · 1 reaction · 26 Sep 2026

"I've just spent 10 minutes trying to resolve 'check answers' message to get an email saying it's closed now."

Nick. · 0 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

Notice, budget updates and the helpline

"I know of many farmers (and agents) who stayed up until midnight and then woke up a few times overnight in case the system opened."

Selou · 16 reactions · 23 Sep 2026

"Son started checking at 3 this morning to see if it was open."

britt · 3 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"It simply defaulted to the callback option."

Badshot · 0 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

- 62 contributions dealt with notice and communication. The date was known in advance but not the hour, so members and agents checked through the night.
- The 25%, 50% and 75% budget notices were seen: members relayed them into the conversation at 11:57, 13:13 and 14:42. They reached those at a screen. Those at market, testing cattle or at work found out when they got home.

What missing out means on the farm

"I am now falling off a financial cliff as my CS finishes in December."

AnnaMooMoo · 1 reaction · 22 Sep 2026

"we are effectively losing £15k p/a after December."

Wood field · 1 reaction · 29 Sep 2026

"Will have a look at them and either spray the legumes out and mow for hay, or top and plough in."

teslacoils · 1 reaction · 22 Sep 2026

"Yep, 35 acres tussocks grass going to be ploughed up here, madness."

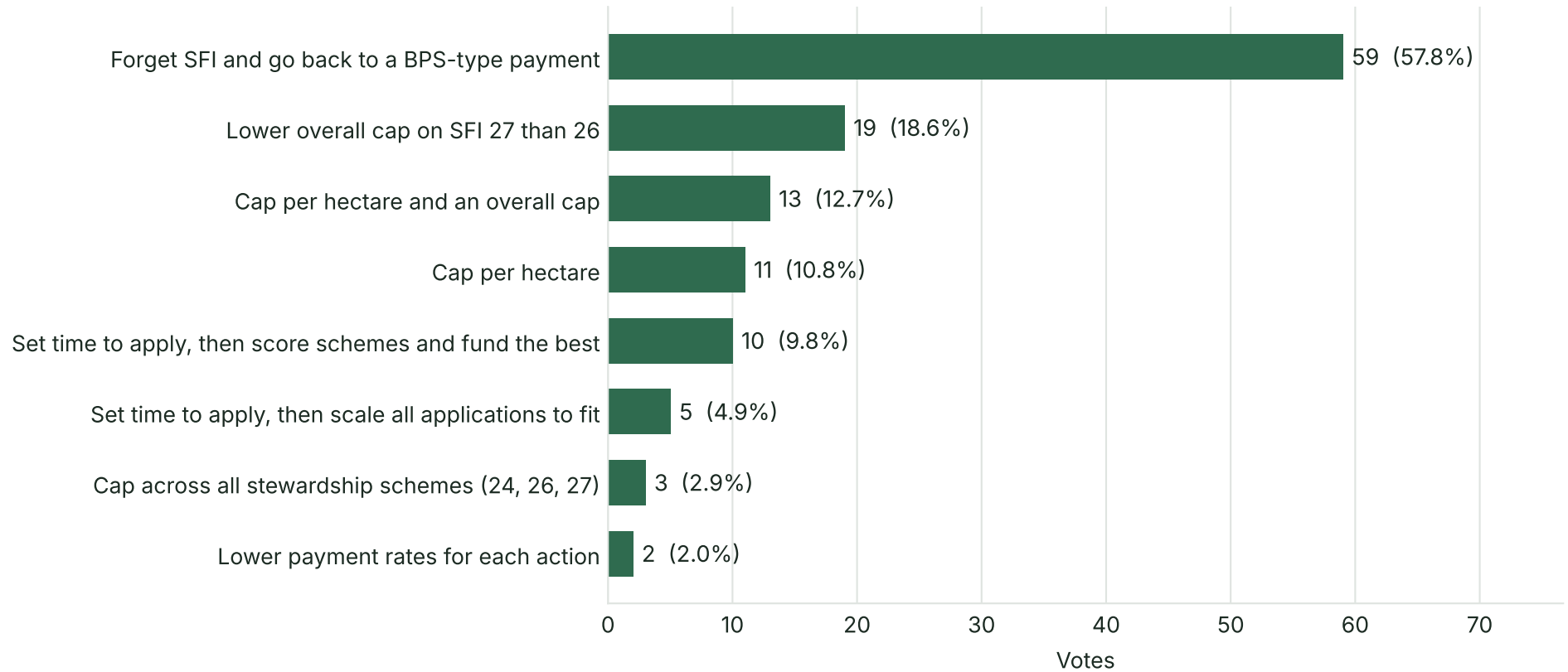
B R C · 1 reaction · 26 Sep 2026

"You can't just turn a tap on or off for wildlife."

Grass And Grain · 2 reactions · 30 Sep 2026

- 112 contributions dealt with business and financial impact and 29 with environmental consequences. Members described lost income from January, pressure on rents, and habitat created under earlier agreements going back under the plough.

Members' poll: how should a limited budget be shared?



102 members voted. The question, set by a member on 22 September, was "How should a limited budget be shared out fairly without the stress of the SFI 26 application". Voters could choose more than one option, so votes total more than voters. Option wording shortened for the chart.

What members want changed

"Surely it would be better for applications to be allowed in advance."

Thomas Cropper · 9 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"I think the easiest way is to have a four week period for applications then have scalebacks if budget exceeded."

Flatland guy · 3 reactions · 23 Sep 2026

"just invite people to apply, 6 weeks before their existing agreements ended?"

Jackov Altraids · 3 reactions · 23 Sep 2026

"Bps style payment with 25% reduction which you could get back on a points style basis (like the old entry level scheme) for certain environmental options."

Stw88 · 3 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

- 165 contributions proposed changes. The common ground was an application period long enough for everyone to apply, with the budget rationed afterwards by cap, scale-back or scoring. Members split on a cap per farm against a cap per hectare.

On allocating support by speed

"As someone just said on a WhatsApp thread, 'it's like throwing coins in the street for the poor and watching them all scrabble in the mud for them!'"

Daniel · 25 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"But how the future of a medium sized arable farm can depend on what time you pressed send is utterly appalling."

frederick · 10 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"they may have the most environmentally friendly farm for miles around and get nothing owing to it, this is meant to be environmental land management not who knows best to use a computer."

Henarar · 9 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"A farmer who had a hospital appointment. had stock to sell at the mart, had an RPA eartag inspection, TB testing & many other reasons found the scheme closed when they got home."

upnortheast · 11 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"The issue is, Defra have created farming/ environmental support, to be a race."

Jackov Altraids · 16 reactions · 24 Sep 2026

Not every member was critical

"TBH it is no more difficult to apply than operate a mobile phone or tractor guidance system."

snarling bee · 3 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"I've never been on the RPA website until this year and more importantly today. Managed just fine."

principal skinner · 4 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"Praise be where praise is due they sorted it quickly."

Rossymons · 0 reactions · 22 Sep 2026

"there's not enough money left in the pot to divvy it up across everyone and still make it appealing enough for farmers to apply."

Farmer Keith · 1 reaction · 23 Sep 2026

- Some members found the form simple, credited preparation, or praised RPA staff for resolving a query within the day. Others argued that with a fixed budget any design leaves someone out. Several of the same members still called the first come, first served process wrong.

Method and limits

- Source: 11 public conversations on The Farming Forum, read in full through the forum's own data. 926 visible contributions dated 16 September to 2 October 2026.
- Selection: every conversation in the period that was wholly about Window 2, the in-period contributions to three longer-running SFI conversations, and two follow-on conversations started by members in direct response. News items and long-running general policy debates were left out.
- Classification: each contribution was read and given a tone and up to three themes. Quoted reply text was ignored so that repeated quotations are not double counted. All counting is done by script from those labels.
- Outcomes: counted only where a member made a first-hand statement about their own application. The reasons for the 20 with nothing submitted were checked one by one.
- Quotations: reproduced exactly as written, each checked by script against the original contribution. Contributions are attributed opinion and first-hand account, not verified fact.
- Limits: contributors chose to take part, people with a grievance are more likely to speak up, and poll options were written by members. This is evidence of what was said by a large, long-standing group of farmers. It is not a representative survey.

SOURCES

Read the source material

Conversations on The Farming Forum

SFI 26, trying to apply but can't

Who missed out?

SFI 27

Sheep farming (or livestock in general) after subs

SFI tomorrows

What is the point of DEFRA?

Looks like Window 2 might be a bun fight - Farmers Weekly a...

Do a little SFI2026, or wait for big renewal in 2027?

What next and when - what happens after you submit an appli...

SFI '26, can you reduce rotational actions in years 2 & 3

Public goods

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/446344/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/446597/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/446605/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/447095/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/446473/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/446660/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/446183/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/446023/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/440434/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/439388/

thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php?threads/392100/

Agri Web Media reporting on these conversations

Five-hour SFI window leaves farmers locked out (23 September)

SFI window fallout puts farm agents on the spot (27 September)

SFI Section Summary: week of 21 to 27 September 2026

agriwebmedia.co.uk/five-hour-sfi-window-leaves-farmers-locked-out/

agriwebmedia.co.uk/sfi-window-fallout-puts-farm-agents-on-the-spot/

agriwebmedia.co.uk/sfi-section-summary-week-of-21-sep-27-sep-2026/

Contact: Agri Web Media · agriwebmedia.co.uk