

APPENDIX 11A: AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION (ALC) GRADE DEFINITIONS

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11A.1.1 The ALC grades and subgrades are described below in terms of the types of limitation which can occur, typical cropping range and the expected level and consistency of yield. In practice, the grades are defined by reference to physical characteristics and the grading guidance and cut-offs for limitation factors in Section 3 enable land to be ranked in accordance with these general descriptions. The most productive and flexible land falls into Grades 1 and 2 and Subgrade 3a and collectively comprises about one-third of the agricultural land in England and Wales. About half the land is of moderate quality in Subgrade 3b or poor quality in Grade 4. Although less significant on a national scale such land can be locally valuable to agriculture and the rural economy where poorer farmland predominates. The remainder is very poor quality land in Grade 5, which mostly occurs in the uplands.

11A.1.2 Descriptions are also given of other land categories which may be used on ALC maps.

a) Grade 1 - Excellent Quality Agricultural Land

11A.1.3 Land with no or very minor limitations to agricultural use. A very wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown and commonly includes top fruit, soft fruit, salad crops and winter harvested vegetables. Yields are high and less variable than on land of lower quality.

b) Grade 2 - Very Good Quality Agricultural Land

11A.1.4 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 in the 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.

c) Grade 3 – Good-to-moderate Quality Agricultural Land

11A.1.5 Land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield. Where more demanding crops are grown yields are generally lower or more variable than on land in Grades 1 and 2.

i. Subgrade 3a - Good Quality Agricultural Land

11A.1.6 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, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops.

ii. Subgrade 3b - Moderate Quality Agricultural Land

11A.1.7 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.

d) Grade 4 - Poor Quality Agricultural Land

11A.1.8 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 (e.g. cereals and forage crops) the yields of which are variable. In moist climates, yields of grass may be moderate to high but there may be difficulties in utilisation. The grade also includes very droughty arable land.

e) Grade 5 - Very Poor Quality Agricultural Land

11A.1.9 Land with very severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing, except for occasional pioneer forage crops.