



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

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**Talmhaíochta agus
Forbartha Tuaithe**

MÁNNYSTRIE O

**Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin**

FAS news

Farm Advisory System

newsletter

Autumn 2015

Issue 03

Foreword

Martin McKendry,
Head of Development Service, CAFRE

I am pleased to introduce the third edition of the 'Farm Advisory System' (FAS) newsletter. This issue focuses on the key messages to help you meet the requirements of EU schemes and Directives.

What is FAS?

It is an EU mandatory requirement for all member states to have a Farm Advisory System to provide training and support for farmers in the following five areas:

1. Cross-Compliance regulations
2. Greening regulations and Land Eligibility
3. Rural Development Programme
4. Water Framework Directive
5. Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive

This issue contains articles on all five aspects of FAS including two articles on the new Rural Development Programme. Please read the bulletin carefully and consider how your farm can use the information to avoid financial loss.

In addition to this newsletter FAS is delivered to farmers through information on the DARD website, industry training, online decision support programs and regular press articles & publications.

Forthcoming CAFRE events

**The Agronomy and Business
Management Conference for
Arable Growers will take place at
CAFRE, Greenmount Campus on
12 January 2016.**

**For further details contact:
Development Service Administration,
CAFRE, Greenmount Campus,
45 Tirgracy Road, Antrim, BT41 4PS.
Tel. 028 9442 6770**

**Places are limited so advanced booking
is essential.**

A list of FAS training courses is provided in a reply paid postcard so please register your interest to find out more about the various topics.



**Weed wiping demonstration at the recent
Rush Control event at Greenmount Hill
Farm.**

2014 – 2020

Steven Millar - Agri-Food Support Services Unit

The European Commission approved the Rural Development Programme in August, paving the way for up to £623m in funding to become available for improving farming and agri-food businesses, protecting the environment and supporting rural development projects through to 2020.

The breakdown of funding is as follows; £261m to support the competitiveness of the agri-food industry, £245.2m to support schemes that protect the rural environment; £80m to develop rural economies thus enabling them to thrive and prosper, and up to £37.2m for Technical Assistance to support the implementation and delivery of the Programme.

The Programme will be funded with a European Union contribution of approximately £186.5 million and match funded from DARD's own budget to maximise the drawdown of EU funds available. In addition following agreement secured with the Executive, an additional £250m has been allocated to fund the proposed Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS) requested by the Agri-Food Strategy Board to deliver on the aims and objectives in the Board's Going for Growth strategy. The FBIS will comprise a range of measures aimed at knowledge transfer, innovation, co-operation and capital investment.

All proposed budgets are subject to the necessary business case approvals and industry uptake, but work is ongoing to develop the various schemes within the Programme for opening when the necessary approvals are in place.

The first phase of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS) relating to knowledge transfer has opened recently. This will result in the establishment of Business Development Groups (see the article by Robert Hull on opposite page), and delivery of training for farmers on farm safety and business planning topics. Other FBIS Schemes will follow in a co-ordinated manner.

The main capital intervention for those who wish to invest to grow their businesses sustainably is the Business Investment Scheme (BIS). It is aimed at improving on-farm resource and production efficiency, resilience to adverse weather events, climate change mitigation, animal and plant health and Health and Safety on farms. Selection criteria, scoring, delivery options and rollout strategy are currently under consideration. BIS will be administered under two separate tiers and will open next year.

In addition, Co-operation Schemes to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the agri-food sector through co-operative action, and Innovation and Technology Adoption Schemes to support organisations and individuals demonstrate and experience new technology/systems, will also be available within the FBIS. It is anticipated that these Schemes will also open next year and readers should view the DARD website for most up to date information.



Farm Business Improvement through Development Groups

Robert Hull Rural Training and Development Branch

Farmers across Northern Ireland now have the opportunity to join a locally based farm business development group. This is because Business Development Groups (BDG) is the first scheme within the new Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 to be opened.

What is it?

Up to 160 Business Development Groups (BDG's) will be formed across Northern Ireland, each containing between 15 and 20 farmers. Each group will be facilitated by a locally based CAFRE Development Adviser.

CAFRE Development Advisers will be responsible for organising, facilitating and managing the groups. They will plan a programme of training events to support the work of the farmers. The adviser will agree a business development plan with each farmer which will identify the key objectives for that farm business. The training events will be the vehicle to help farmers achieve the objectives they have identified in their business



development plan. All group members will record financial and physical benchmarking data, the results of which will help formulate the areas for group development and discussion.

The training events will also be used to help farmers improve their technical skills for example grass measuring or condition scoring of livestock. A BDG Support Assistant will undertake these duties under the supervision of the CAFRE Adviser.

What are the benefits?

Research evidence from across the world has shown that discussion group members were up to 20% more likely to adopt new technologies and best management practices. This resulted in an improved profit margin of up to 11% when compared to non group members. Farmers also stated that being part of a group greatly improved their technical skills and management ability.

What is involved?

Farmers who participate in the BDG scheme will be required to attend several training events each year and share their farm performance information with other group members. Each farmer will host a visit for the group during which members will discuss technical performance and progress towards meeting business objectives.

As farmers work towards meeting these objectives they will have the opportunity to credit their work and gain a Level 3 agricultural qualification.

How do you find out more?

If you would like more information on how you could join a group in your local area, please e-mail DevelopmentService.Admin@dardni.gov.uk or call CAFRE Development Service Administration on 028 9442 6770.

Cross Compliance - What's new in 2015?

Cathy Kernaghan Area-based Schemes Operational Policy Branch

You will be aware that if you claim funding under EU area based schemes, including the Basic Payment Scheme, you must comply with the Cross-Compliance rules.

There are two aspects to Cross-Compliance. The first of these is compliance with specific articles contained within 13 European regulatory requirements covering the environment; climate change, public health, animal and plant health and animal welfare. These are known as the **Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs)**.

The second aspect of Cross-Compliance is the requirement for claimants to maintain all their land in **Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC)**. The Northern Ireland GAEC Measures have been developed from a framework set out by the European Commission to address the following issues:

- **Protection and management of water** – protect water against pollution and run-off and manage the use of water;
- **Protection of soil and carbon stock** – minimum soil cover, prevention of erosion and maintenance of soil organic matter levels;
- **Minimum level of maintenance** – retention of landscape features and avoiding the deterioration of habitats.

2015 Changes

Many of the standards remain the same and will be familiar to you, but some have been removed and others changed. The most obvious change is that all of the GAECs and most of the SMRs have been renumbered.

What are the main changes to the SMR requirements?

Four SMRs have been removed from the Cross-Compliance standards by the European Commission and they covered the following topics:

- Sewage sludge
- Control of Foot and Mouth Disease
- Control of Specified Animal Diseases
- Provisions for the Control and Eradication of Bluetongue

What are the main changes to the GAEC requirements?

GAEC 4 (Minimum Soil Cover)

- The standard in place up to the end of 2014 relating to late harvested crops has been removed.
- From 2015, after harvesting a crop, you must establish minimum soil cover by ensuring that from harvest until the 15th of January in the following year either the stubble of

the harvested crop remains in the land or the land is sown with a crop that will take up nitrogen. Where soil or weather conditions prevent a subsequent crop from being sown, appropriate measures must be put in place to limit soil erosion which could include chisel ploughing (where soil conditions are favourable) or, where soil conditions are waterlogged, leave the crop residues undisturbed.

- On land used for ploughing matches you need to apply to DARD for permission not to comply with the above requirement.
- An additional exception to the standard has been introduced for land used for practice for a ploughing match.

GAEC 6 (Maintenance of soil organic matter)

- A verifiable standard prohibiting the burning of crop residues has been introduced.

GAEC 7 (Retention of Landscape Features)

- If you have received permission from DARD to remove landscape features (dry stone walls, ditches, hedgerows including trees in hedgerows, earthbanks) the requirement to carry out the mitigating action set out in the written permission within the deadline set by DARD has been included as a new verifiable standard.
- Certain trees in hedgerows are now protected.
- The opportunity to apply for a derogation has been introduced which will permit farmers to cut hedges between 15 and 31 August. If granted, such a derogation will apply to arable land only for those individual applicants wishing to plant oilseed rape or reseed grasses or other herbaceous forage (clovers, lucerne, sainfoin and forage vetches).

You are advised to read the Department's guidance thoroughly and ensure that you comply with all of the standards applicable to your farm business. Guidance on the Cross Compliance standards, the various area based schemes and land eligibility can be found at www.dardni.gov.uk/index/grants-and-funding.html or by contacting the Department on 0300 200 7842.



Now the 2015 harvest has been completed many of you will be starting to think about the next crop. Please see the new Minimum Soil Cover rules in GAEC 4 which affects the start date for ploughing for spring crops to help protect soils from erosion.

2014 Inspection Results - Are your Payments at Risk?

Ken Laverty, Area-based Schemes Operational Policy Branch.

As has been the trend since the introduction of Cross-Compliance, a significant number of farm businesses inspected in 2014 had their Single Farm Payment, Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowance payment and other area based scheme support payments reduced because they did not meet the Cross-Compliance requirements.

Cross-Compliance penalties can range from 1% to 5% for breaches caused due to negligence and from 15% to 100% for intentional breaches. The penalty applied will depend on the severity of the breach, whether the effect of the breach was limited to the farm on which it occurred or if it affected others and if the breach can be rectified.

Main Areas of Concern

Cattle recording

As in previous years, there continued to be a very high number of breaches of the requirements to correctly identify cattle and to report their movements, births and deaths and to maintain up-to-date records.

Nitrates

A significant number of breaches were identified against the requirements relating to the correct storage and use of nitrates. These included the entry of silage effluent and livestock manure into waterways which accounted for a high level of breaches. Nitrates breaches in 2014 were often associated with poorly maintained silos and middens and to poor management of silage effluent and livestock manure.

Other areas

Breaches relating to food and feed law and animal welfare continued to be a cause for concern and a failure to keep up-to-date farm records across a range of Cross-Compliance measures was also an issue.

As far as Good Agricultural and Environment Condition (GAEC) is concerned, a high number of breaches were again identified against the measure designed to retain field boundaries and prevent hedge, tree and scrub cutting during the bird nesting season. In addition a significant number of breaches were also identified against the measure designed to protect habitats and archaeological sites.

2015 Cross-Compliance inspection programme

The 2015 Cross-Compliance inspection programme has started and inspectors are again visiting farms to check that the Northern Ireland Cross-Compliance requirements are being met. As before, if breaches are found, penalties will be applied, so it is vital that you familiarise yourself with the Cross-Compliance requirements appropriate to your business and ensure you meet them.

Further information on Cross-Compliance

The NI Cross-Compliance standards are set out in 7 GAEC measures and in 13 Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) covering the environment, climate change, public, animal and plant health and animal welfare. Details of all the requirements can be found in the booklet entitled "Cross-Compliance Verifiable Standards Summary". A copy of this booklet can be obtained by contacting us at 028 9052 5549 or by visiting the Cross-Compliance section of the DARD website at www.dardni.gov.uk/index/grants-and-funding/cross-compliance.

Controlled Burning of Heather

Sinead Mulcahy, CM Operational Management Branch

Well managed heather is a great asset to the farm. It is an important wildlife habitat and is a valuable grazing resource. While controlled burning has long been regarded as a useful tool in the management of heather moorland, such activity requires expert skill and experience. Controlled heather burning encourages the plants to produce nutritious new shoots to improve grazing for sheep and cattle. If left unmanaged, it degenerates growing long and lank with a much reduced nutritional value. Unmanaged tall heather may also become ineligible meaning that the land cannot then be used to claim for direct payments (such as the Basic Payment Scheme).

Farmers and land owners who are in receipt of EU area-based scheme payments (which again include the Basic Payment Scheme and other area related schemes such as the NI Countryside Management Scheme) are required to comply with the rules of Cross-Compliance. Under Cross-Compliance requirements the burning of heather, gorse, whin or fern between 15 April and 31 August is prohibited. Whilst there are benefits to controlled burning, it should only be used when all other methods of land management have been exhausted. This is due to the associated hazards and the potential risk of starting a wildfire.

Therefore, if you are planning a controlled burning which will be visible to passers-by, you must inform Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) by calling 028 9266 4221 to prevent unnecessary mobilisations of fire appliances. The NIFRS will want to know the following information:

- What time will you start burning?
- The exact location of your fire.
- A contact number for you, or whoever will be responsible for the burning.
- When the fire has been extinguished.



Consider carefully if you need to burn and if yes then plan carefully to protect life, wildlife and property.

If you have no other option and decide to burn, then use the following basic fire safety advice and procedures:

- Choose a site which is clear and free from buildings, trees, overhead cables etc.;
- Prepare the land correctly by cutting/flailing fire breaks into the boundary of the area you wish to burn. Fire breaks must always be downwind in order to contain the fire;
- Keep fires as small as possible to prevent them getting out of control;
- Make sure you have an emergency escape route available at all times;
- Do not use fuel to start fires; explosive vapour given off by the fuel can cause serious injuries;
- Never leave a fire unattended; ensure you have sufficient people and extinguishing media available to control the fire;
- Always ensure a fire is completely out before you leave it.

Weather conditions:

- Previous - several days of dry conditions will mean greater risk of fire spread.
- Current - check weather forecast for wind strength and direction.
- 20/20 Rule – never burn in winds above 20 mph or in temperatures above 20°C.

If a fire gets out of control then you should contact the N.I. Fire & Rescue Service immediately, by dialling 999 giving details of location and access.

For further information on the controlled burning of vegetation and wildfires please see the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue website at www.nifrs.org or discuss your proposals with a DARD Countryside Management Adviser at 0300 200 7842.

Requirements under the EU Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides

Deirdre O'Reilly, Environmental Policy Branch

Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012 brought into operation a number of provisions aimed at achieving the sustainable use of pesticides.

The key requirements of the Sustainable Use Directive are:

1. Certificate of competence for sprayer operators

All operators who apply pesticides such as weed killers, herbicides, fungicides, insecticides or slug pellets must be in possession of an accredited certificate of competence. Alternatively they must work under the direct and personal supervision, of a person who holds a specified certificate, where such supervision is being provided for the purposes of training.

The exemption for 'Grandfather Rights' holders (those born on or before 31 December 1964), will cease on **25 November 2015**.



Health and Safety is of vital importance in relation to the use and management of pesticides. Therefore, an effective system of training and certification is necessary to protect operators applying pesticides, bystanders, wildlife, plants and the environment from adverse effects.

Pesticide training, assessment and certification are available from CAFRE and other providers. CAFRE provides training, assessment and certification by City & Guilds at Greenmount and Loughry Campuses. While CAFRE provides free training to farmers, farmers must pay for their registration and certification with City and Guilds and for the assessment.

Training can be arranged by:

- Enrolling online at: os.cafre.ac.uk/website/onlineservices/courses.aspx and then select Industry Training - Agriculture

or

- Contacting the Industry Training Administration Team directly by Email: industry.trainingadmin@dardni.gov.uk or Telephone: 028 9442 6880

2. Sprayer application equipment

From **26 November 2016** all pesticide sprayer application equipment, excluding handheld and knapsack, must have a certificate showing that it has passed an independent inspection before it can be used.

Subsequent testing requirements are:

- every five years from 26 November 2016 and every 3 years from 26 November 2020 for boom sprayers, air assisted broadcast sprayers and sprayers attached to aircraft,
- every 6 years from 26 November 2016 for boom sprayers less than 3m wide, foggers, misters, batch dippers and applicators for granular pesticides.

New spray equipment must be inspected within 5 years of the date of purchase. Handheld equipment and knapsack sprayers should be regularly checked and maintained. A person who owns or leases sprayer application equipment must ensure that such equipment is not used unless it has passed inspection.

The Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA) currently runs the National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS) and for more information please contact:

Website: www.nsts.org.uk/

Email: info@nsts.org.uk

Telephone: 084 5644 8748

3. Use of pesticides

Pesticide users must:

- take 'all reasonable precautions' to protect human health and the environment,
- confine pesticide applications to the target areas,
- ensure that the amount used and the frequency of use should be as low as is reasonably practicable,
- so far as is reasonably practicable, where there is more than one product authorised for a particular situation, preference should be given to using products that do not represent a risk to the aquatic environment and/or drinking water supplies.



4. Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

IPM is a sustainable approach to managing pests by combining biological, cultural, physical and chemical tools in a way that minimises economic, health, and environmental risks.

From **1 January 2014** professional pesticide users are expected to apply the general principles of IPM and to maintain records to demonstrate the application of these principles. A guide has been produced to assist farmers with understanding the requirements of IPM and it is available on the DARD website at: www.dardni.gov.uk/integrated-pest-management.

The Voluntary Initiatives Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPMP) is available online at www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk/en/vi-schemes/ipm-plans. The Voluntary Initiative has also produced a guide on 'Insecticides: Best Practice advice for farmers and operators' which includes information on IPM and is available at: <http://voluntaryinitiative.org.uk/media/631411/insecticides050115.pdf>.

5. Purchases and sales of pesticides

From **26 November 2015**, anyone purchasing pesticides must ensure that the intended user has a certificate of competence, or will use the product under the supervision of someone who has a certificate of competence. It will be an offence if this legal requirement is not met. From **26 November 2015** suppliers of pesticides are required to have qualified staff available at the time of sale to provide specialist advice to customers on pesticide use, health and environmental risks and safety instructions to manage those risks for the product in question.



Pesticides must be stored securely to prevent leakage of chemicals to the environment.

6. Handling and storage of pesticides and treatment of their packaging and remnants

Reasonable precautions must be taken to ensure that storage, handling and disposal of products, their remnants (old products and unused tank mixes) and packaging; and cleaning of equipment do not endanger human health or the environment. The following steps would help in satisfying the requirement to take "reasonable precautions":

- In the case of professional products, identifying and mitigating any risks; and following good filling, storage and disposal practice such as that detailed in the DARD Code of Practice;
- in the case of non-professional products, following instructions on storage and disposal of the product in accordance with instructions on the product label;
- For those storing products for placing on the market, staff must have undergone the BASIS Nominated Storekeeper Training Course or an equivalent qualification.

7. Aerial spraying for bracken control

Aerial spraying can only be carried out in very limited circumstances and with permission from the Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD). Aerial spraying on environmentally designated sites also requires the consent of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

More information about aerial spraying permitting arrangements can be found on the CRD website at: www.pesticides.gov.uk/guidance/industries/pesticides/topics/using-pesticides/General/Aerial-Spraying.htm

Code of Practice

Comprehensive advice on all aspects of using pesticides is contained in the DARD Code of Practice for Plant Protection Products. The Code explains how to use plant protection products safely and so meet the legal conditions which cover their use. A summary A3 wall chart provides users with a quick reference guide. Both documents can be downloaded from DARD's website: www.dardni.gov.uk/code-of-practice-for-using-plant-protection-products.

Information on pesticide regulations can be found on the DARD website at: www.dardni.gov.uk/dard-pesticide-legislation.

An article in the next edition of the FAS Newsletter (Spring 2016) will provide more detail on Integrated Pest Management.

The Water Framework Directive

Siobhan Bowers, Environmental Policy Branch

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is an important EU Directive which aims to deliver long term sustainability for the water environment. It is overarching and covers all sectors which have an impact on water including industry, water abstraction and treatment, agriculture and forestry.

The WFD is implemented through River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) which contain measures for the different sectors. There are three main River Basin Districts: the Neagh-Bann, the North Eastern and North Western and each has its own RBMP.

Agricultural Measures for the WFD

In Agriculture, the main measures for WFD are the Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) and Phosphorus Regulations. These Regulations apply to all farms and aim to prevent and reduce water pollution from agricultural sources. They ensure a baseline of controls for good practice in the management of manures and chemical fertilisers.

Additional agricultural measures in the RBMPs include actions to improve water quality through Agri-environment schemes, the Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme (METS) to support advanced slurry spreading equipment and CAFRE's training and support for Nitrates and Nutrient Management Planning.

WFD Objective – Good Ecological Status

The primary objective of the WFD is to achieve at least 'good ecological status' for all water bodies by 2015. However, in NI, we are well short of that standard as are many other EU member states.

Achieving good ecological status is more challenging than simply reducing the levels of nitrogen and phosphorus in rivers and lakes. Ecological status takes into account a range of additional biological factors including the levels of invertebrates and fish.

Current WFD Status

Although the measures introduced since 2007 under the NAP has improved the chemical status of our waterways, there has not as yet been a significant change in overall WFD status of rivers and lakes in NI. Farming is still a significant source of water pollution, both diffuse, such as from manure, fertiliser and pesticides spread on the land, and point sources such as run-off from farmyards.

Based on current assessments, for 575 river bodies, 23% were classed as high or good WFD status in 2013. Approximately 38% of river water bodies show that nutrient enrichment pressure from agricultural run-off is a problem. Only 5 out of 21 lake water bodies in NI are at good status. Therefore, continual progress in improving water quality is required.

Agricultural Pressures on Water Quality

The main agricultural pressures on our rivers and lakes are:

- Nutrient enrichment (pollution) arising from excess phosphorus and nitrogen from manures and fertilisers applied to agricultural land;
- Point source pollution arising from farmyards;
- Sediment loss caused by river bank erosion and poaching by livestock;
- Pesticide contamination is also a problem in some catchments.

What can farmers do to improve water quality?

In addition to complying with the NAP and Phosphorus Regulations, there are some other key actions farmers can take to help improve the WFD status of our rivers and lakes. They are:

- Remain vigilant at all times, paying particular attention to check the waterways/streams on your farm for signs of pollution;
- Check all storage facilities including effluent tanks for any defects;
- Prevent cattle damaging river banks and causing sedimentation;
- Avoid creating flushes of sediment if cleaning out drains;



The Water Framework Directive aims to achieve good ecological status for all water bodies which will be a significant challenge. One way to improve water quality is to fence off riverbanks to prevent soil erosion from cattle poaching at the water's edge which leads to nutrient loss to the water.

- Carry out soil sampling and nutrient management planning. This could potentially save on fertiliser costs by ensuring that manures and chemical fertiliser applications are matched to crop requirements;
- Calculate your farm Phosphorus Balance. Is your farm operating at a high phosphorus surplus? High soil phosphorus levels lead to excess phosphorus losses to waterways. You can calculate your farm Phosphorus Balance using the CAFRE Farm Nutrient Calculators at: www.dardni.gov.uk/onlineservices;
- If applying pesticides, take great care to avoid contamination of rivers and lakes. Follow the DARD Code for Plant Protection Products which can be viewed at: www.dardni.gov.uk/code-of-practice-for-using-plant-protection-products;

There will be more information on the WFD in the next issue of FAS News.



Ditch the calculator and start using the online Farm Nutrient Calculators which are available at the DARD website to check if your farm is nitrates compliant.

Farm Nutrient Calculators - Helping you work it out!

Gráinne McCarney, Crops, Horticulture and Sustainability Branch

To date over 3,500 farmers have used the five online computer programmes called the Farm Nutrient Calculators to help them manage their farm businesses within the Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) measures on nutrient limits, manure storage and record keeping.

These Calculators are free, easy to use, available 24 hours per day, secure and confidential. The reports generated can also be used as part of the record keeping requirement for NAP.

The Calculators can help you to work out:

- 1. Nitrogen Loading**
 - Is your farm below the limit of 170kg/N/ha/year or do you need to apply for a derogation to operate up to 250kg N/ha/year?
 - How much slurry do you need to export to comply with the 170 limit or for less intensive farms how much slurry could you import onto your farm?
- 2. Manure Storage**
 - Do you have the required 22 or 26 weeks slurry storage on the farm?
 - If not how much additional storage do you require?
- 3. Nmax for Grassland**
 - How much chemical nitrogen you are applying to the grassland area on the farm?
 - Is this rate within the NAP limits?

4. Phosphorus Balance:

- What is the P Balance for your farm?
- Is your farm below the limit of 10kgP/ha/year? This limit is a requirement for farms in the nitrates derogation, however it is a useful measure of farm nutrient efficiency for all farms.

5. Crop Nutrient: using soil analysis

- How much N, P & K do your crops need to grow successfully?
- Are you getting the most value from slurry & farmyard manure?
- Are you using the right type of fertiliser and at the right rate?
- Are you improving soil fertility and maximising crop yields?

Calculator Updates

The Calculators have been updated to take account of changes within the revised NAP for 2015-2018. For those of you that have previously used the calculators you will notice a new layout for these latest versions and we hope that you will find them easier to use.

If you're not one of those farmers using the calculators to check if your farm business is NAP compliant, then log on to www.dardni.gov.uk/online-services to start working it out!

Training

CAFRE offer training courses to help farmers understand the requirements of the Nitrates Action Programme and nutrient management planning. To register your interest on this or for any of our courses please contact CAFRE by calling 028 9442 6770 or go online www.cafre.ac.uk/industry-support/industry-training/agri-environment-topics/.

Alternatively complete the reply paid postcard that is enclosed with this bulletin to register interest in CAFRE's FAS courses.

For more information on soil analysis please see the following article by Jayne Mooney.

Nitrates Action Programme update on Inspection results and the revised NAP for 2015 - 2018

Jayne Mooney Countryside Management Delivery Branch

The Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) aim is to improve water quality and to ensure a more efficient use of nutrients in manures and chemical fertilisers. Each year a number of farm businesses are inspected by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to assess compliance with the NAP.

NAP Inspection Results

The results from the 2014 NAP inspections show improved compliance with the record keeping, the nitrogen loading limit, the required capacity for slurry storage and the non-spread zones for fertiliser and manures near waterways. However, compliance levels dropped in relation to



Silage clamp with well maintained channels draining to effluent tank.

nitrate pollution and effluent storage as a higher number of cases of pollution from slurry and effluent were found. Together these two issues accounted for 88% of all recorded NAP breaches. Therefore, it is important that farmers take action on these issues to minimise the risk of water pollution and to avoid cross-compliance penalties.

NAP and Cross-Compliance

All farmers claiming under area-based schemes, including the Basic Payment Scheme, must meet the NI Cross-Compliance conditions. NAP forms part of these requirements and where farmers do not comply with NAP, their area-

based payments may be reduced. Farmers therefore need to remain vigilant at all times, paying particular attention to checking waterways on their farms for signs of pollution and checking all slurry and silage storage facilities, including effluent tanks for any defects.

Revised NAP for 2015-2018

NAP was subject to a review in 2014 and a revised NAP for 2015-2018 took effect from 1 January 2015. The main changes you need to be aware of are:

- Records relating to the exports of organic manures must be submitted annually to NIEA by 31st January the following year;
- The nitrogen excretion rates for some categories of pigs, poultry and goats have changed as well as the nitrogen and phosphorus contents of cattle and pig slurry and some types of farmyard and poultry manure. If you rely on exports of any of these manures to comply with the nitrogen loading limit you are strongly advised to recalculate as the change in nutrient content affects the quantity that needs to be exported to remain below the limit of 170 kg N/hectare/year. Farmers importing manure should also check that they remain under the 170 kg N/hectare/year limit. Further advice, a sample record sheet and details of how to submit organic manure export records can be found in the NAP Guidance booklet;
- Silage bales must be stored at least 10m from any waterway and manage them to prevent seepage into the waterway; and
- Farmyard manure (FYM) and poultry litter can now only be field stored for a maximum of 120 days. Only the amount of FYM and poultry litter that can be spread on that field can be stored in the field heap.



Sewage fungus, the grey coating on the stones in the upper part of this picture, grows where water is polluted by organic matter such as slurry or silage effluent.

Farm phosphorus surplus and water quality

Since 2007, when the NAP became applicable to all farmers in NI, good progress has been made in improving chemical water quality. However, recent analysis highlights that there is a significant risk to the positive progress that has been achieved because of excess phosphorus (P). Farm phosphorus surpluses on about half of all dairy farms are now between 10 kg P/ha/yr and 40 kg P/ha/yr. Concentrate feeding is one of the main sources of P on the farm.

Other intensive farms which rely on feed imports such as pig, poultry and intensive beef units generally also have high phosphorus surpluses. However many intensive farms export manure to other farms and in that way reduce their phosphorus surplus.

An imbalance occurs when manure is applied to land which already has sufficient phosphorus to meet crop requirements. Over time this leads to a build up of soil phosphorus to excess levels and this poses a risk to water quality as phosphorus is more likely to be lost from soils that contain excess levels of phosphorus. Therefore, you should analyse soils on a regular basis and apply organic manures or inorganic fertiliser only to crop needs, in addition to reducing the quantity of any surplus phosphorus being brought onto the farm.

If this imbalance continues we may not meet the European Water Framework Directive requirements and that could result in unwelcomed restrictions being imposed following the next review of both the NAP and Phosphorus Regulations.

Soil analysis through DARD

DARD has recently agreed a new contract with Lancrop Laboratories and all samples handled by DARD offices are now analysed by this company. This means an improved service to farmers as the price is reduced to £7.00 plus vat per sample for the standard

agricultural analysis and the improved reports now have colour coding and nutrient recommendations. To get accurate results soils should only be sampled at least 3 months after slurry or fertiliser application and after livestock grazing. Therefore, the peak time for soil sampling is January and February. To avail of this service call into your nearest DARD Direct office to borrow a soil auger and get sampling instructions and a supply of sample bags. When you bring the auger and your soil samples back to the DARD office the paperwork will be completed and the samples will be sent to the lab with your cheque.

New NAP 2015 – 2018 Guidance Book

The new NAP 2015 – 2018 guidance book and the summary document is available on the DARD website www.dardni.gov.uk/index/farming/countryside-management/water-quality-home/nitrates-action-programme.htm. Further information about Cross-Compliance is also available on the DARD website www.dardni.gov.uk/index/grants-and-funding/cross-compliance.htm.

Training

CAFRE offer training courses to help farmers understand the requirements of the Nitrates Action Programme and nutrient management planning. To register your interest on this or for any of our courses please contact CAFRE by calling 028 9442 6770 or go online www.cafre.ac.uk/industry-support/industry-training/agri-environment-topics/. Alternatively complete the reply paid postcard that is enclosed with this bulletin to register interest in CAFRE's FAS courses.



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