

Tackling Water Quality with ASSAP



The Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory programme was set up by the dairy industry, in collaboration with state bodies to address the issue of declining water quality status due to agricultural pressures.



An ASSAP assessment is non regulatory, and any recommendations and follow up actions are on a voluntary basis. The three main areas that are looked at on farm as part of an ASSAP assessment are:

- 1. Improved nutrient management with more targeted use of slurry and fertiliser.
- 2. New approaches to land management to reduce nutrient losses in critical source areas.
- 3. Better farmyard management and practices.

If you have dry free draining soil, you are more susceptible to nitrate leaching. If you have wetter ground, the risk of overland flow and phosphorus issues are greater. The ASSAP advisor will advise on farm specific measures, putting the right measure in the right place to suit each farm.

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At the end of a visit the advisor and farmer agree on where the farmer should focus improvements or actions, if any are required, on the farm. The practical advice is designed to 'break the pathway' and prevent nutrients from entering water.

- 1. Use protected Urea as your main source of Nitrogen and in particular, the first and last 2 rounds of fertiliser - protected urea converts to ammonium form of nitrogen when applied to soil, and this is more stable in soil than nitrate and less susceptible to leaching. It is also a more cost-effective form of nitrogen.
- 2. Empty all slurry tanks after 2nd cut or by 1st of September at the latest. The earlier the nutrients are applied, the better the response. Check the weather forecast before spreading fertiliser or slurry. Ensure there is no heavy rain within 48 hours of spreading nutrients. When grass growth levels start to slow down it is necessary to adjust slurry rates accordingly. If slurry is being spread after 1st September, and for the first few weeks of the open period next year, target the lowest rate possible or 1500 gallons per acre, target silage fields, and fields with low P&K indices.
- 3. If spraying herbicides, stay 20 metres away from any drain. Glyphosate can travel 20 kilometres downstream.
- 4. Maintain buffer zones near watercourses when spreading nutrients. The buffer zone for slurry is 5 metres during the main growing season and extends to 10 metres for the last 2 weeks before the closed period comes into effect. The buffer zone for chemical nitrogen is 2 metres, which extends to 5 metres for the 2 weeks before the closed period.
- 5. Ensure watercourses are fenced off 1.5m back from the top of the bank.
- 6. Ensure all water troughs are at least 20m away from any watercourse.
- 7. Fix gutters and down pipes during the summer months.
- 8. Inspect yard on a wet day to ensure excess water is not entering tanks.
- 9. Are there smarter ways to reduce animal traffic in your yard? This could help reduce soiled water production.
- 10. Camber farm roadways situated next to watercourses or consider relocating the farm roadway.
- 11. Soil test at the end of the year and target nutrients accordingly.
- 12. Apply lime in September to build pH which will help make better use of all the other nutrients applied.
- 13. When reseeding, consider using minimum tillage techniques to reduce the loss of nitrates from the soil. All farmers should consider this option at this time of year, and derogation farmers should only plough grassland between 1st March and 31st May.

REMEMBER THE 4 R'S:



Carbery ASSAP advisors are currently arranging visits with all suppliers signed up to the FutureProof Programme.





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