

FARMWEEK –CROPS

Farm Share Agreement provides a good alternative to conacre

Michael Hennessy
Crops Specialist
TEAGASC
Oak Park

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This Thursday sees the long awaited introduction of a Farm Share agreement which allows the landowners and farmers to share in the costs and profits of tillage farming (it will incorporate livestock shortly). This legal agreement allow both the grower and the landowner to farm as separate entities but share in the risks and rewards of growing crops. Ben Roche from Teagasc has worked over the past two years on the Farm Share agreement and with the help of solicitors he has secured the approval of the Department of Agriculture (Single Farm Payments section, Cross Compliance section, Livestock section and the REPS arm), and the Revenue Commissioners. The agreement will allow a landowner to claim the Single Farm Payment and REPS and preserve his/her status as a farmer (thereby preserving short and long term tax entitlements as a farmer). This agreement will give a solid basis for the landowner and grower to farm part or the entire pieces of land in the future. This is not and cannot be a defacto conacre arrangement as both parties must share risks and rewards.

All tillage growers and landowners who are currently involved in conacre should familiarise themselves with this agreement and assess whether it is a viable option for the future. The Farm Share agreement will be presented at the Share Farming and Partnership Conference in the Horse and Jockey, Tipperary this Thursday, the 26th November. The conference starts at 10am and all are welcome.

The continued rain and flooded fields have put a halt to all field work. There are still crops of maize, potatoes and fodder beet to be harvested and growers can only look on and wait for a drier spell. Ground at this stage will need a number of weeks to dry out as springs are starting to appear where they would normally never be seen. The next few days is a good opportunity to check the outfall of land drains around the farm for blockages. Some simple shovel work may be worth while to save a crop from scalding due to unavoidable ponding.

A consequence of a very water logged soils is the subsequent effect it has on soil pests. Leather jackets, for instance, love these conditions and can have the ability to move more freely and cause additional problems. Many would think slugs would also like these conditions but they prefer a damp environment rather than water logged soils. In very water logged conditions, such as now, they tend to stay closer to the surface of the ground out of the wet. As a result they can be seen more easily and will also attack the nearest food source (your crop).

Many growers are reporting serious damage over the past few weeks mostly from slugs with a few fields damaged by leatherjackets. Where a crop is not past early tillering then damage can be more severe and monitoring this slug grazing is critical. Heavy leaf shredding to a young plant will damage tiller numbers later in the season.

Establish numbers by baiting to minimise the overall application of slug pellets to the field. Generally an overnight assessment will work best. In the afternoon, sprinkle some slug pellets or breakfast muesli and cover with a damp sack or boards (covering at least six inches by six inches) in a number of areas throughout the field. In the morning lift the objects and check for the presence of slugs. Where there are three or more slugs found over a two day period then control is warranted.

The main products on the market contain one of two active ingredients. Metaldehyde (Barclay Tracker, Wipe out Mini Pellets, etc.) will destroy the mucus secreting cells and dehydrates the slug. The active has a low toxicity and will not kill earthworms, etc. Methiocarb (Draza Elite, etc.) acts on the nervous system of the slug giving a rapid kill however it also kills earthworms and field beetles if ingested.

Slug pellets are made using different processes from bran or durum wheat. The type of manufacture can affect the performance of the pellet in wet or dry conditions. Growers should check the likely rainfall for the first week after application before purchasing a slug pellet and choose the pellet most suitable to those conditions.