

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 28th May 2021

Ten Things to Know about the new Signpost Programme

1. The Signpost Programme is a partnership of farmers and over 40 companies and organisations from across the Irish agriculture sector working with farmers to reduce greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions, reduce nutrient losses, enhance biodiversity, save costs and improve the efficiency of food production.
2. The Signpost Programme builds on existing joint programmes between Teagasc and industry partners.
3. Signpost demonstration farmers will be central to the programme and will point the way forward for all farmers (100 in total). Kilkenny and Waterford have already four Signpost Dairy Farms (Shane Fitzgerald and Steven Fitzgerald, Waterford; Cathal Moran and Francis Nolan, Kilkenny), one suckler beef farmer (Ruairi Cummins) and 2 calf to beef farms (Peter O'Hanrahan, Kilkenny and Richard Long, Waterford). These Signpost Farmers will be supported to change how they farm, so as to reduce emissions while at the same time maintaining, or improving profitability.
4. How will they do this? Making the following changes, and some more, will allow the Signpost Farmers to reduce emissions, save costs and maintain or improve profitability.
 - Make better use of nutrients in cattle slurry
 - Incorporate clover into their grassland swards
 - Use protected urea as their source of fertiliser nitrogen
 - Reduce the quantity of fertiliser nitrogen spread
 - Reduce the finishing age of beef animals
 - Manage and enhance their hedgerows and other biodiversity features
 - Breed more efficient animals
5. The primary objective of the programme is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 10 to 15% by 2025 on the Signpost Farms and by 2030 for all farms. The Signpost Programme is an important first step in the move towards net zero. Other changes, including policy/regulation changes, incentives (payment) and new research will be required to achieve net zero emissions.

6. A Farm Sustainability Plan will be prepared for each Signpost Farmer, listing actions agreed which, once implemented, will reduce emissions, and improve the overall sustainability of food production on the farm.
7. Each Signpost Farmer will be enrolled in the National Farm Survey. Data will be gathered throughout the year to allow for the preparation of a set of financial statements and a Sustainability Report at the end of each year. In this way, we will be able to track progress made in terms of farm performance, farm profitability and also progress made in terms of environmental indicators including, for example, total emissions, emissions per hectare, emissions per kilogram of product etc.
8. Each Signpost Farm will be part of the National Agricultural Soils Carbon Observatory (NASCO). This means that soil samples will be taken from each farm to build up a picture of the amount of carbon sequestered (stored) in the soil over time.
9. The Signpost programme will take a holistic view of sustainability. In other words, while the primary focus of the programme will be on reducing emissions from agriculture, the programme will also highlight practices that can reduce nutrient losses/ improve water quality, manage and enhance biodiversity, improve profitability and improve social sustainability (both work/ life balance and animal welfare).
10. The Signpost Advisory campaign will be the second element of the Signpost programme. This campaign is relevant to all farmers in the country, across all enterprises. To support all farmers, the Signpost Advisory campaign will be supported by Teagasc Advisory and Education staff as well as industry and private advisers. The programme will be delivered via a network of discussion groups, events, one to one consultations as well as media – traditional and digital. Farmers will have the opportunity to track the progress of their own local Signpost Farm through our website (www.teagasc.ie/signpost), local, regional and national events as well as other communications. Hopefully, farmers be inspired by the Signpost farms to make a change to how they farm to reduce gaseous emissions. The education of the next generation of farmers as well as training of all farmers will be a key priority of this programme over the next couple of years.

For further details on the programme click on www.teagasc.ie/signpost