

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 9th October 2020

Water Quality, Nitrates Regulation and Derogation

All farmers irrespective of enterprise and stocking rate are required to have a Nutrient Management & Fertiliser plan in place for their farm. The NMP and fertiliser plan outlines the fertiliser recommendations and allowances of nitrogen and phosphorus for the farm based stocking rate, soil sample results if available and concentrate use.

Ireland's Nitrates Derogation allows farmers to farm at higher stocking rates, above 170 kg organic nitrogen per hectare and up to 250 kgN/ha. This Derogation in 2020 is subject to additional conditions which are designed to protect the environment.

If you have applied for a derogation in 2020, there are eight additional changes that affect you. You will need to discuss the changes with your agri-advisor and put a plan in place to meet these requirements in 2020 and beyond. By not meeting these new rules you may well not be eligible for derogation to farm at higher stocking rates. The changes include:

1. Liming Programme
2. Low Emission Slurry Spreading
3. Reduction in Crude Protein % to dairy cows of meals at grass
4. Attendance at compulsory environmental training course
5. Grassland Management
6. Inclusion of Clover in Grass Seed Mixtures
7. Exclusion of commonage / rough grazing
8. Improve Farm Biodiversity

The Regulation

The Current Nitrates Regulations SI605/2017 was introduced starting 01/01/2018. From the 1st January 2021, changes will be required on many farms with regard to bovine exclusion from waters, fencing waters, water trough location and farm roadways in order to meet and comply with these regulations.

Nitrates Rules Regarding Farm Roads

Every farm regardless of stocking rate with farm roadways must comply with a new rule from the 1st January 2021. There shall be no direct run off of soiled water from farm roadways to waters. This is applicable irrespective of stock type and it also includes tillage farmers. The aim is to prevent direct run-off from farm roadways to waters/surface waters. Waters/surface waters are defined as: any watercourse, stream, drain, dry drain and any dry channel that could convey water. There are a range of potential options to prevent run-off to waters/surface waters which include:

- Cambering the roadway to direct water away from the watercourse and into the nearby field/paddock.
- The Implementation of measures such as cross-channels on roadways that reduce the speed of water flow & divert any runoff to nearby paddocks/fields.

- Earth bunding along the road between road & watercourse as per DAFM Farm Road Specification S199. This specification gives guidance on the construction of new farm roadways & sets out how existing farm roadways can be modified to comply to meet the requirements.

For the construction of new farm roads, follow the DAFM specifications and the minimum distance recommended for fences from waters is a minimum of 1.5metres in this instance.

Nitrates Rules regarding fencing of Waters

Starting from the 1st of January 2021, all farmers who had a grassland stocking rate of greater than 170kgs organic N/ha in 2020 will be required to have all watercourses fenced off at 1.5m from bovines.

In situations where there are existing fences that currently prevent direct access to waters and they are not the required 1.5m distance. These fences will satisfy the requirement for now but this may change at a future date where the fences may have to be moved out to 1.5m. Therefore, even in situations where farmers export slurry to other farmers and reduce their overall stocking rate under 170 kgsN/ha for the year, they will still have to implement this measure on their farms from the 1st of January 2021. Fencing of waters will help to reduce the nutrient sediment loss to watercourses as well as allow vegetation to recover on river banks, helping to break the nutrient loss pathway into waters.

If animals are crossing a bridge there is no requirement to have the fence 1.5m across the bridge as animals have no direct access at this point. Watercourses that are crossed at a culvert for daily for access to paddocks must be fenced at a minimum to prevent continuous access or may need to be bridged in future to prevent access by bovines to the watercourse.

Moving Water Troughs back from Watercourses & Waterbodies

This measure only applies to farms with a GSR of >170kgN/ha in the previous year (2020) and it is also to be in place on 01/01/2021. Water troughs are to be located at LEAST 20 metres away from waters/surface waters. This applies regardless of there being a farm road or any barrier between the water trough and the waters. The aim of this measure is again to prevent direct run-off to waters. Ideally, Water troughs should be placed in the centre of paddocks to allow multiple access points.

Given that the new additions to the Nitrates Regulations are complex and may vary in how they are applied on individual farms, it is recommended to contact your Teagasc advisor to discuss the various aspects of these measures and the requirements going forward.

Slurry Exports

The Deadline for the completion and submission of slurry export forms as printed on the form is October 31st 2020. However, due to the unprecedented circumstances this year, The DAFM nitrates section will continue to accept Record 3 Forms from Derogation applicants up to and including December 31st 2020. The DAFM do encourage the submission of the forms as early as possible from all farmers involved.