

Annex II H: Country Report Ireland

Heike Nitsch, FAL Braunschweig 2003

Influenced by its wet and mild climate, Irish agriculture has traditionally been characterised by extensive, grass-based farming systems and relies heavily on livestock farming. Grass and grass crops cover around 90 % of all agricultural land, while just 6.6% is used for cereals (D'Alton 2003). The average Irish farm is smaller than in many other European countries and subsidies are more and more making an important contribution to farm income. Environmental problems, many of them caused by nutrient-excesses, have been aggravated by intensification in the agricultural sector (D'Alton 2003).

Ireland has a considerable volume of legislation on air, soil, water and biodiversity, and environmental protection has become an important element of national agricultural policy with a number of new legislation, voluntary guidelines, training, financial incentives and agri-environmental programmes. The CAP Rural Development Plan allocates •2 billion (from a •4.9 billion budget for the whole programme) to agri-environment measures.

As a national strategy, the then Department of Environment has 1997 launched a policy for integration of sustainable development into all economic and social policies, including measures for agriculture such as the control of artificial fertiliser, organic manure, pesticides and sheep dip (D'Alton 2003).

The *Code of Good Agricultural Practice to Protect Waters from Pollution by Nitrates* was developed by the then Department of Agriculture (now Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development), Food and Forestry and the Department of the Environment in reaction to the Nitrates Directive. It serves as a voluntary guideline and includes recommendations on storage of organic wastes and chemical fertilisers, timing and application rates for organic and chemical fertilisers, buffer strips and nutrient management (D'Alton 2003).

Although Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) have been identified, they haven't been implemented yet, and Ireland is planning towards a system where the whole-territory is defined as a NVZ (D'Alton 2003).

In response to the Reg. (EC) 1257/1999 and Reg. (EC) 1259/1999, Ireland has defined the requirements for Good Farming Practice in its Rural Development Plan 2000-2006. Farmers receiving CAP subsidies under the EAGGF in agri-environment or LFA measures have to comply with Good Farming Practice. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (DAFRD) also prepared and distributed a booklet for

information of farmers, in which GFP is described in more detail, including good nutrient management, collection and storage of waste, avoidance of manure spreading during November and December, careful handling of pesticides and chemicals, observing buffer zones and legislation concerning water quality; advice for disposal of sheep dip is not included (D'Alton 2003). Although Good Farming Practice mentions the importance of nutrient management, there is no general obligation to undertake nutrient management planning. But it is increasingly integrated in schemes and services. Nutrient management planning is mandatory for farmers receiving tax allowances for the provision of farm pollution control facilities and financial assistance under the Scheme of Investment Aid for Farm Waste Management, and has been incorporated into water quality and waste legislation (D'Alton 2003).

As a new development, legislation, commonly known as the Regulations for Good Farming Practice, will be introduced before the end of 2003, and is expected to regulate some issues of the EC Water Framework Directive and lay down many principles of waste management of now voluntary Codes of Practice, such as timing and rate of fertiliser application, organic wastes types which may be used as fertiliser and farmyard management (D'Alton 2003).

Environmental policy is still developing and several parts of European legislation are still to be implemented. But there has been already very positive development in the last years such as rising consciousness of farmers towards the environment, continually increasing participation in agri-environment measures, declining sales of artificial fertilisers (N, P), a revision of official fertiliser advice on the basis of ongoing research, and even water quality trends seem to have changed to the better (D'Alton 2003):

GFP Requirements with control measures (according to RDP 2000-2006)

Control:

- Direct scheme controls (random checks on 5% of participants) carried out by DAFRD
- Internal cross reporting from/to other sections of the DAFRD
- External cross reporting from/to relevant responsible implementing bodies, who have the responsibility and competence to implement environmental legislation

The minimum level of compliance checks of participants (5%) is complied with by the checks carried out by scheme staff of DAFRD. Internal and external cross reporting is carried out independently. If there is non-compliance with any principle of GFP, a penalty is imposed as a percentage of the total annual payment to which the farmer is entitled

under the scheme in which he is participating and is additional to any scheme penalty, although, in the first year after the introduction of GFP, no penalties have been imposed (D'Alton 2003).

Use (storage) of fertilisers, slurry and manure:

Nitrate (+general rules of fertilisation):

- Conform to official recommendations (*Teagasc Soil analysis & Fertiliser, Lime, Animal manure & Trace Element Recommendations 1994 and subsequent updates*) on the use of organic manures, chemical fertilisers (N, P and K) and lime.
- Conform to recommendations for the management, provision and adequate storage and spreading of organic manures and effluents as set out in the *Nitrate Code*.
- Comply with recommended buffer zones as specified in the *Nitrate Code*, for the protection of water sources and watercourses when spreading chemical fertilisers or organic waste.

Check:

- Discharge of waste into water sources, watercourses, and drains (DAFRD & external cross reporting)
- Wastes (Slurry, manure, soiled water, sheep dip etc.) collected or stored in a manner liable to cause pollution (DAFRD & internal & external cross reporting)
- Non-compliance with Action Plans applicable to NVZs (external cross reporting)
- Non compliance with *local Bye-Laws* on the regulation of agricultural practice in river catchment areas (external cross reporting)
- Chemical fertiliser being spread within 1.5m of a watercourse (DAFRD & external cross-reporting)
- Organic fertiliser being spread within 50m of a domestic well or public water supply source of 10m of a watercourse (DAFRD & external cross reporting)
- Organic or chemical fertiliser being spread on wet, waterlogged, frozen or on land sloping steeply towards a watercourse (DAFRD & external cross reporting)

Potassium and Phosphate:

See general rules of fertilising

Pesticide Use:

- Safe storage of pesticides and chemicals (Check: external cross reporting).
- Use in accordance with product label instructions and *Statutory Code of Good Plant Protection Practice*. Comply with statutory maximum pesticide residue limits. (Check. internal cross reporting)

Water use (Irrigation): -

Soil conservation:

- Comply with applicable elements of GFP (?)

Animal housing/husbandry:

- External boundaries or roadside fences of fields (excluding Commonage Land) occupied by livestock should be stockproof. (Check: DAFRD & internal cross reporting)
- Housing of livestock should provide adequate space to meet the animal's requirements.
- Compliance with the European Communities (Welfare of Pigs 1995, Welfare of Calves 1998, Protection of animals kept for farming purposes 2000) Regulations and Care and Welfare of Poultry (Laying Hens) Regulations 1990. (Check: internal cross reporting)
- Ensure that animal are adequately nourished and are not exposed to unnecessary suffering (Check: DAFRD & internal cross reporting)

Landscape/Biodiversity:

- Comply with the requirements applicable to National Heritage Areas, NATURA 2000 sites, Commonage Land and *The Wildlife Acts 1976-2000* (Check: internal & external cross reporting)

Farm Management:

- Visual appearance of farm and farmyard: Comply with the *Litter Pollution Act 1997* (Check: external cross reporting)

Other:

- The management of animal outdoors shall not result in severe poaching or severe over grazing with possible pollution risk. Particular attention will be paid where the stocking rate is above 2 LU/ha (Check: DAFRD)
- Burning of vegetation shall be in compliance with *The Wildlife Act, 1976* (Check: Burning of growing vegetation on non-cultivated land between April 15th and August 31st: DAFRD & external cross reporting)
- Comply with *National Monuments Act 1994*. Do not damage or remove archaeological monuments and sites listed on the Record of Monuments and Places. (Check: external cross reporting)
- Become familiar with GFP
- Maintain the following records: Herd Register, Flock Register and Animal Remedies Record as required by DAFRD. Record of date, type and quantity of chemical fertilisers, organic waste and pesticides brought onto or leaving the farm. (Check: DAFRD & internal cross reporting)

- Comply with the requirements of the European Communities (Hygienic Production and Placing on the Market of Raw Milk, Heat-Treated Milk and Milk-Based Products) Regulations 1996 (Check: internal cross reporting)

References:

Department of Agriculture and Food (2000): CAP Rural Development Plan 2000-2006 for Ireland

D'Alton, M. K. (2003): Study on behalf of Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) " Controls on handling and disposal of agricultural wastes in Ireland"