

Teagasc Notes for week ended Friday March 29th

New advisory service to work with farmers to help improve water quality

We are very fortunate in Ireland to have good water quality in comparison to our European neighbours. Water quality concerns our ground water, rivers, lakes and coastal waters. There has been much investment in farming infrastructure and Agri-Environment schemes designed to protect water and enhance water quality. Having good to high/pristine water quality is a minimum standard that we must maintain so the whole community can benefit from this.

However, despite a lot of good work over the last 20-30 years we are falling short in achieving the target of “good status” for all waters in Ireland and water quality has remained mainly static with no significant improvement being recorded.

As a result, the Government has decided to adopt a new strategy. This strategy involves a more collaborative approach to facilitate improvements in water quality. The EPA has identified 190 catchments or ‘areas for action’ across the country where the status of the water is at risk of regressing.

There are multiple pressures across the areas for action; industry, waste water treatment plants and septic tanks, forestry, agriculture and urban pressures. Within this new strategy, there are agencies that will deal with the pressure points from industry, urban pressures etc. While the agricultural pressure points will be dealt with under ASSAP (Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme).

The ASSAP is designed to work closely with the farming community in each catchment and is made up of scientists that will assess the streams and advisers who will work closely with farmers providing them with a free and confidential advisory service. There are 20 advisers from Teagasc and 10 advisers from the dairy industry on the programme. Farmers can avail of this service within the ‘areas for action’ on a voluntary basis.

A team of scientists; Catchment Assessment Teams, will assess the stream to identify the pressures on the stream. Where an agricultural pressure is identified the farmers in the area will receive the offer of a free farm visit from an ASSAP adviser. The purpose of the visit is to meet with the farmer and assess his farm for any potential issues that may be having an effect on the water quality in the local stream. In general an adviser will assess the rivers and streams on the farm, a farmer’s farmyard, nutrient management plan and nutrient management practices, use of pesticides and his/her general farm land management.

At the end of a visit the adviser and farmer will agree on where the farmer should focus improvements or actions, if any are required, on his farm. The practical advice will be designed to ‘break the pathway’ and prevent nutrients from entering water. There may be a requirement for more significant actions to be undertaken, for e.g. a TAMS application and the existing farmer’s adviser will be required to support this work. In many cases the advice will be based around changes in management rather than significant investments to “break the pathway”. A written summary of the advice and actions will be provided and a timeframe for completion agreed between them.

The programme is a collaborative one and this is seen as crucial to ensuring that the ASSAP can aid in the collective goal of achieving ‘good status’ for waters in Ireland. The funding and support received from the DAFM, DHPLG and Dairy Sustainability Ireland has allowed the formation of the

Catchment Assessment Teams and ASSAP advisers that will progress the programme on the ground.

Support from the farming organisations for the programme has been very strong and this is vital in communicating and informing farmers about the ASSAP programme and its key messages.

It is in every ones interest to work together to improve Irelands overall water quality. This will have many benefits across the local community and will help with achieving Ireland's obligations under the Water Framework Directive. It will also help to strengthen agriculture by reinforcing our green image as food producers and underpin the future development of sustainable Irish agriculture.

We have 2 ASSAP advisers in this region – Deirdre Glynn is based in Kilkenny & covering Kilkenny and Cathal Somers is based in Mullinavat & covering Waterford. Deirdre is currently working in the Duiske, Dinin and Nuenna catchments. Cathal is working in the Clodiagh (Rathgormack) and Tay (Killrossanty) catchments. If you are in one of these catchments and interested in getting involved in this programme, please contact your local Teagasc office. This service is available to all farmers, clients and non clients of Teagasc.

BETTER FARM BEEF WALK

Maurice Aherne and his family farming in Leperstown , Dunmore East will hold a BETTER Beef farm walk on the 4th April at 2pm. Maurice joined the Teagasc/*Irish Farmers Journal* BETTER farm beef challenge programme in 2017, and since then there has been plenty of ups and downs on the farm. The weather conditions experienced last year definitely created many difficulties but thankfully they have all since passed and they have weathered the storm.

The farm has also made numerous positive changes to improve efficiency. These changes were all simple steps but proving very beneficial in the performance of the farm. The completion of the farm plan gave Maurice a clear vision as to what way he was going to drive on the farm in future and what changes needed to be made in order to maximise its potential. Since joining the programme in 2017 the key areas he has targeted for improving are grassland management, soil fertility and herd health and Maurice starting to see the benefits of these improvements.

Come along on the 4th April to see the progress Maurice has made and to help identify areas for action on your farm.

