

Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP)

Pat Murphy¹ and Noel Meehan²

¹Head of Environment KT, Teagasc, Johnstown Castle, Wexford, Co. Wexford; ²ASSAP Manager, Teagasc, Deerpark, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway

Summary

- Ireland has been set a target by the E.U. Water Framework Directive of achieving 'Good Status' for all waters.
- The River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018–2021 sets out Ireland's plan to achieve good status.
- The Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) service is available to farmers in 190 Priority Areas for Action (PAA's) and is a key part of helping achieve good status.
- The Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP) is a free and confidential advisory service available to all farmers.

Introduction

In Ireland, all water policy and management is led by the Water Framework Directive. Under this directive, Ireland has been set a target of achieving 'good status' for all waters. However, despite a lot of good work over the last 20–30 years, we are falling short in achieving this target and water quality has declined in recent years.

Ireland's response to challenges around water quality is set out under the national river basin management plan. As part of this plan, 190 priority areas for action (PAA) have been identified across the country where water quality improvements need to be made. There are multiple pressures across each of these PAA's including industry, waste water treatment plants and septic tanks, forestry, agriculture and urban pressures.

Implementation of the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP)

The local authorities have deployed a catchment assessment team of 60 scientists across the country to assess the PAA's in detail and identify the significant pressures in each PAA. This group communicates the detailed information about the PAA to all of the stakeholders across the local community including agricultural and non-agricultural land owners and businesses.

Where an agricultural pressure is identified the farmers in the area will receive the offer of a free farm visit from an advisor under the ASSAP programme.

The ASSAP programme is made up of a group of 30 advisors (20 working under Teagasc jointly funded by DHPLG and DAFM and 10 from the dairy industry). These advisors are available to provide farmers with a free and confidential advisory service that farmers in a PAA can avail of on a voluntary basis.

The advisors will meet the farmer to assess the farm for any potential issues that are having an effect on the water quality in the local stream. In general an advisor will assess the farmyard, nutrient management practices and general farm land management practices including the use of pesticides etc.

At the end of a visit the advisor and farmer will agree on where the farmer should focus improvements or actions, if any are required, on his/her farm. The practical advice will be designed to 'break the pathway' and prevent nutrients from entering water. A written summary of the advice and actions will be provided and a timeframe for completion agreed between them.



Figure 1. Heavy rainfall leads to overland flow of water, Phosphorus able and soil particles

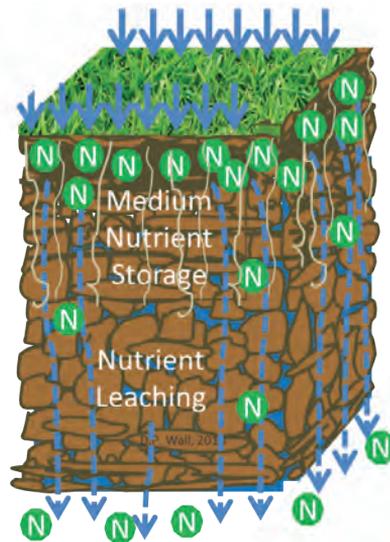


Figure 2. Nitrogen that is not used up by the grass/plant growth is available to be leached to groundwater/streams during heavy rainfall.

Conclusions

The ASSAP programme is collaborative and the funding and support received from DAFM, DHPLG and the dairy industry has been critical to allow a new approach to enabling local landowners to engage positively in seeking solutions to local problems with the support of a confidential advisory service. 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.