

EXTENSION TO THE PERIOD FOR SPREADING OF SLURRY

10 October 2008

Mr Brendan Smith TD, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, today announced that, following consultation with Mr John Gormley TD, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and taking account of poor weather conditions in recent months, farmers will be allowed as an exceptional measure to spread slurry until the end of October, 2008.

Farmers have been concerned about their ability to meet the 15 October deadline for spreading slurry, as laid down in the Nitrates Regulations. Minister Smith said that the concession now being given is necessary, as the adverse weather conditions experienced in Ireland over the last few months have caused significant hardship for farmers and have made it extremely difficult to carry out regular farming activity. The exceptional rainfall has caused flooding of farmlands in many areas or has left land waterlogged, liable to severe damage by machinery and of course, unsuitable for the spreading of livestock manures for long periods of time.

"The high rainfall levels have meant that many farmers, mindful of the requirements on best practice in relation to spreading slurry, have struggled to complete their normal landspreading operations before the start of the prohibited period on 15 October.

"In these circumstances, this two-week extension is justified and necessary. It will allow farmers an opportunity, weather and ground conditions permitting, to complete landspreading activities that for reasons outside of their control, have been curtailed during the last few months due to the exceptional weather conditions that we have experienced."

The Minister stressed that his announcement represents an extension of time only. All landspreading activity is conditional on weather and ground conditions being suitable as set out in the Nitrates Regulations. Livestock manures or any fertilisers may not be landspread when, for example, land is waterlogged, flooded or likely to flood, frozen or if heavy rain is forecast within 48 hours. Buffer zones are specified for different kinds of water bodies and fertilisers may not be applied within those buffer zones. In addition, the absolute prohibition on landspreading during the months of November and December remains.

The European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2006 (SI No. 378 of 2006) were made by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2006. The Regulations came into effect on 1 August 2006 with later commencement dates for certain provisions.

The Regulations provide statutory support for good agricultural practice to protect waters from pollution from agricultural sources and include measures such as

- * Set periods when land application of fertilisers is prohibited
- * Limits on the land application of fertilisers
- * Requirements in relation to landspreading of fertilisers
- * Requirements in relation to the storage and management of livestock manures

Under the Regulations, for any farmer with storage capacity that meets the minimum requirements on his holding, the prohibited period for landspreading of livestock manures

such as slurry commences on 15 October. Farmers who do not yet have the required capacity may landspread up to 31 October under a transitional arrangement that will expire this year.

The extension announced by the Minister means delaying the start of the prohibited period for application of livestock manures from 15 October to 1 November for all farmers, not just those who do not yet have their storage capacity in place. This would allow farmers an additional two-weeks to complete their landspreading operations.

The requirements of the Regulations are set out in the Explanatory Handbook for Good Agricultural Practice Regulations issued to all farmers by the Department in 2006.

The Handbook and Regulations are available on the Department's website:

www.agriculture.gov.ie <<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie>>

Nitrates Directive

Background

The Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC) – Council Directive of 12 December 1991 concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources – was adopted in 1991 and has the objective of reducing water pollution caused or induced by nitrates from agricultural sources. The Directive has been implemented in Ireland since 1991 by way of extensive monitoring of nitrate levels in waters, the assessment of the trophic status of waters, the development and dissemination in 1996 of a Code of Good Agricultural Practice to Protect Waters from Pollution by Nitrates and a range of other measures which operate to protect water quality from pollution by agricultural sources.

Ireland's national Nitrates Action Programme was given statutory effect by the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2006 which were made on 19 July 2006. These Regulations provide strengthened statutory support for the protection of waters against pollution from agricultural sources e.g. by phosphorus or nitrogen. The Regulations require the avoidance of careless practices by farmers, which create a risk of causing pollution and provide for inspections by local authorities.

Implementation of the Action Programme is supported by an enhanced package of financial supports for farmers by Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (DAFF) and by the cross-compliance inspections carried out by that Department. There is cross reporting of breaches between local authorities and DAFF.

Derogation

The Nitrates Directive requires application of a general landspreading limit of 170kg per hectare for nitrogen from livestock manure [this is considered to be equivalent to the output from two dairy cows]. However Member States can apply for a derogation to allow higher amounts in appropriate cases i.e. where soil or climactic conditions are such that the higher amount will not cause water pollution. In keeping with a commitment in Sustaining Progress, an application for a derogation was made by Ireland for the benefit of some 6,000 dairy farmers operating at levels above 170 kg per hectare. Approval was sought for landspreading rates of up to 250kg N per hectare per annum.

The EU Commission granted Ireland a derogation on the 22 October 2007, which allowed landspreading rates of up to 250kg of Nitrogen per hectare per annum for specific circumstances. Revised Good Agricultural Practice Regulations will be made shortly, following a consultation process, to give statutory effect to the operation of the derogation. These Regulations will also provide for better farmyard management and strengthened

enforcement provisions in order to achieve compliance with a judgment of the European Court of Justice in relation to the Dangerous Substances Directive.

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EU Water Framework Directive Monitoring Programme - EPA

The Water Framework Directive (WFD), Directive 2000/60/EC, was adopted in 2000 as a single piece of legislation covering rivers, lakes, groundwater and transitional (estuarine) and coastal waters. Its objectives include the attainment of good status in water bodies that are of lesser status at present and retaining good status or better where such status exists at present.

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<http://www.epa.ie/downloads/pubs/water/other/wfd/>

links / reading material

Ammonium Thiosulphate as an Environmentally Friendly Tool for Reducing Inputs

<http://www.teagasc.ie/research/reports/environment/4270/eopr-4270.htm>

Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/legislation/SI2006/SI378-2006.pdf>

Implementation of Nitrates Directive

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-nitrates/index_en.html

Pathways for Nutrient Loss to Water; Slurry and Fertilizer Spreading

<http://www.teagasc.ie/research/reports/crops/4924/eopr4924.htm>

Water Quality in Ireland - Interactive Map

<http://www.epa.ie/rivermap/data/rivmaptop.html>

FAO : WATER

<http://www.fao.org/nr/water/>

The Environment & You - Water

<http://www.epa.ie/environment/water/>

Eugris: a portal for soil and water management in Europe

<http://www.eugris.info/>

Inshore Ireland

<http://www.inshore-ireland.com/>

The Fertiliser Association of Ireland

<http://www.fertilizer-assoc.ie/default.htm>

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland

<http://www.iwai.ie/>

Waterways Ireland

<http://www.waterwaysireland.org/>