



Policy and economics

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Farming policies at a glance

Over the next few weeks, the cross-cutting strand of policies and economics will be covered. This article covers CAP and some of the policies relevant to crop production

There are many policies, directives, laws and pieces of legislation which govern and guide the work, actions and procedures carried out by farmers. Many of these originate in the EU and are equally relevant for all farmers across the EU as they are for farmers in Ireland.

CAP

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was set up in 1962 to support agricultural income by guaranteeing prices and so incomes for European farmers. This led to the production of high-quality food for consumers. However, it also resulted in over-production in certain foods.

In 1992, the first major CAP reform led to a greater emphasis on less intensive farming and looking after the environment and also reduced prices for certain products, eg beef and cereals. Farmers got direct payments based on previous production to compensate for loss in income.

The second CAP reform, in 2000, placed an even greater emphasis on environmental protection and also on food safety. It set up Pillar II of CAP. This aimed to improve infrastructure, environment and development support in rural Ireland through schemes such as GLAS, TAMS and BDGP.

Today, CAP ensures that, EU farmers are sustainably producing high-quality, traceable and safe food for consumers.

Goals of CAP

- ➔ To ensure a fair standard of living for farmers.
- ➔ To stabilise markets.
- ➔ To ensure reasonable prices for consumers.
- ➔ To ensure availability of supplies.
- ➔ To protect the environment.
- ➔ To increase agricultural productivity through the promotion of technical progress.

They are doing this, while at the same time, protecting the rural environment and landscape. These goals are achieved through a system of subsidies paid to EU farmers, to ensure a fair standard of living for those dependent on agriculture.

Sustainable Use Directive (SUD)

The Sustainable Use Directive (SUD) is an EU directive governing all aspects of pesticide use. It is implemented in Ireland by DAFM, to include all herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, seed dressings, etc.

The SUD applies to all professional users (farmer or contractor) of pesticides, advisers (eg Teagasc), merchants/suppliers of pesticides and inspectors.

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To qualify as a professional user, farmers or contractors must first complete a pesticide application course and then register with the DAFM. They are then issued with a Professional User (PU) number.

The AIMS of SUD are:

➔ To reduce the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment.

➔ Promote the use of integrated pest management (IPM) and of the use of alternatives to pesticides.

Common IPM practices include crop rotation (pest and disease control), balancing seed rate and sowing dates, stale seed-beds and min-till, using resistant varieties and certified seed, appropriate and balanced fertilisation, irrigation and drainage, equipment cleaning to help prevent the spread of some diseases and the protection of important beneficial organisms such as earthworms.

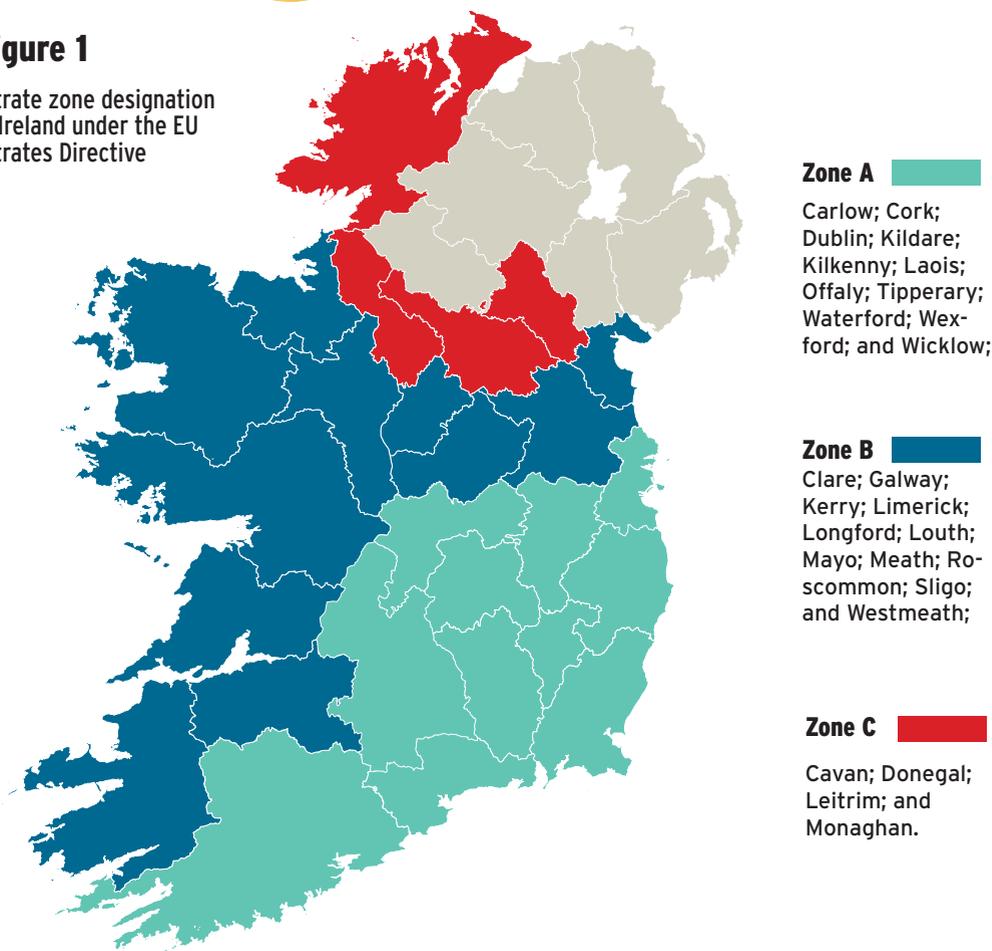
Where satisfactory cultural, indirect, biological, physical or other non-chemical methods are available, they should be used in preference to chemical methods providing they provide satisfactory control.

Under SUD:

- ➔ Only registered professional users can apply pesticides.
- ➔ All pesticides must be stored and labelled correctly.

Figure 1

Nitrate zone designation in Ireland under the EU Nitrates Directive



Periods when the application of fertilisers to land is prohibited

	Chemical/bag fertiliser	Organic fertiliser (other than FYM)	Farmyard manure (FYM)
Zone A	15 Sept-12 Jan	15 Oct-12 Jan	1 Nov-12 Jan
Zone B	15 Sept to 15 Jan	15 Oct-15 Jan	1 Nov-15 Jan
Zone C	15 Sept-31 Jan	15 Oct-31 Jan	1 Nov-31 Jan

*Key terms

- ➔ GLAS: Green, Low Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme.
- ➔ TAMS: Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme.
- ➔ BDGP: Beef Data Genomics Programme.

➔ Records must be kept of all sprays bought and used.

➔ Personal protective equipment (PPE) must be worn.

➔ Boom sprayers need to be inspected every five years and every three years from 2020 onwards.

The SUD legislation pays particular attention to water and measures to help prevent access of chemicals into sources of drinking water. It includes measures such as buffer zones along surface water bodies (rivers, lakes, drains, etc) and hedgerows. Buffer zones can be from 5m up to 70m in some cases.

EU Nitrates Directive

The Nitrates Directive, which is part of the wider Water Framework Directive (WFD), came into law in 1991. It aims to protect water quality across Europe by preventing nitrates from agricultural

sources polluting ground and surface waters and by promoting the use of good farming practices.

Nitrates can be leached down through the soil and end up polluting ground water. This is especially true during the winter, when plant uptake ceases due to a lack of growth.

Under the Nitrates Directive, farmers are limited to 170kg of nitrogen per hectare per year from livestock manure.

There are closed periods when slurry cannot be spread. These range from 12 to 16 weeks.

Farmers must have slurry storage capacity for 16 to 22 weeks, depending on the zone a farm is located in. The spreading of organic or inorganic Nitrogen is banned at certain times of the year. Land cannot be ploughed and left idle over the winter. Farmers should not allow animals to poach land, which can result in run-off.