



Preparation is the key to success – Ground preparation and protection against expected rabbits is carried out before planting. Michael Norris, Kilballyquilty, Co Waterford, with niece Eilish.

AEOS fertilizer request approved

PAUL MOONEY
IRISH FARMERS JOURNAL

THE Department of Agriculture has advised planners and AEOS farmers that up to 30kg per hectare (24 units per acre) of nitrogen can be applied on ground claimed as species rich grassland.

The original specification

of AEOS stated that no artificial fertilizer, slurry, farmyard manure or other organic material could be applied on these areas.

A request to allow a small application was made to the EU Commission soon after the start-up of the scheme in 2010 and it has been approved.

The change will be welcomed by farmers as it will

allow them gain more use out of these areas for grazing or fodder. The change applies to participants in AEOS 1 and 2. The maximum rate of 30kg per hectare is equivalent to just over one 50kg bag of 10-10-20 per acre.

The scheme specification has now been changed to state that fertilizer may be applied up to an application rate of 30kg per hectare.

It states: "Fertilizer means any substance containing nitrogen or phosphorus or a nitrogen compound or phosphorus compound utilised on land to enhance growth of vegetation and may include livestock manure, the residues from fish farms and sewage sludge."

Notice of this change was made by way of AEOS Circular 7 of 2011.

Penalty start at 10% for skipping actions

THE Department has also announced that any applicant to AEOS 2 who neglects to carry out an action will be penalised. In a circular, it states that actions selected on the AEOS 2011 application were assessed and they determined the ranking score of each applicant and therefore his or her chances of approval into the scheme.

It adds: "Approval into the scheme is based on delivery of all the eligible actions

included in the application form."

Clearly the Department does not want applicants abandoning actions which they selected solely to increase their chances of getting into the scheme. Some farmers took on additional actions to increase their total ranking points. But the scheme was under subscribed and the ranking system not called into use.

• Non delivery of approved

actions will result in a penalty calculated at 10% of the beneficiaries' approved payment for a full calendar year.

• In the event that the action in question is one which represents the minimum entry requirement for participation in the scheme, the application will be deemed withdrawn and any money paid recouped. • This means that to remain in the scheme's category 1, applicants must retain a Natura and/or Non-Natura Commo-

nage action.

• Category 2 and Category 3 applicants must retain two minimum entry actions ie one mandatory action and one complementary action or an additional mandatory action.

However, no penalty will apply where in the resolving of outstanding approval queries actions are dropped at the request of the Department for the purposes of regularising the application.

Bad bunnies and wicked weeds – protect your new hedge

CATHERINE KEENA
TEAGASC

IN my experience there are two main reasons why hedgerows fail – rabbits and weeds!

With regard to rabbits, the issue is to gauge whether or not they will cause a problem on your farm. On some farms, there is no problem and there is no need for rabbit fencing.

However, where they do graze the young hedgerow, it is unlikely to survive without protection.

The difference between permanent rabbit fencing required for other crops is that hedgerows only require protection for a short period while getting established.

In my experience, most problems occur with early sown hedgerows during the hungry period for rabbits and hares in January while the hedgerow plants are not actively growing to get ahead of the grazing pressure.

Farmers in REPS4 must plant by the end of December, while farmers who joined

AEOS in 2011 can delay planting until spring. If delaying planting, make sure you have plants ordered now and make sure planting is done while the plants are still dormant.

So while the deadline for AEOS farmers is the end of March 2012, the optimum time will depend on weather conditions.

Permanent fencing against rabbits involves rabbit wire and burying it beneath the ground angled outwards to prevent rabbits burying a tunnel in beneath the wire.

A few rows of electric fence close to ground level is effective for short term protection. As vegetation grows, it will need to be cut to prevent the wire earthing, but hopefully the hedgerow will grow quickly passing the vulnerable stage.

Where a wide strip of plastic is used for weed control, I have seen the electric fence placed on the plastic.

I also find the hedgerow plants that are pruned to

create a dense base pass the vulnerable stage quicker with the production of multi-stems rather than one single stem.

There are numerous suggestions on substances that can be applied onto the plants that will discourage rabbits eating them, including stockholm tar and proprietary rabbit protection materials. They are useful in the armoury against rabbits, but require regular replacement.

The most important point is to keep an eye on your newly planted hedgerow and act if necessary.

In previous years, many reports of hedgerow destruction occurred where the hedgerow was not seen for weeks after planting.

WEEDS

Competition from weeds causes problems on all farms. Where weeds are not controlled, the hedgerow will at best struggle to within the vegetation, taking years to

establish and never have a dense base as it struggles up above the vegetation.

With the large lengths of hedgerow being planted under REPS and AEOS, I have never seen effective manual weeding.

In the presence of large volumes of vegetation, there is huge competition for water, nutrients and also physical space at the base.

In my experience, unfortunately, there is no weed killer that will control the vegetation and not harm the hedgerow plants.

Using weed killers such as glyphosate in and around hedgerows requires huge care to prevent any drift onto the hedgerow.

Over the years, many farmers have told me of how they killed their new hedgerow inadvertently while spraying.

Plastic is the answer to weed control and encourages hedgerow growth in many ways. I like to use four foot strips of old used silage plas-

tic. Ideally open up the silage plastic indoors for a time beforehand before handling to avoid it being very messy. The wider the strip the better to reduce the need for strimming of vegetation along the sides.

Rather than restrict moisture, which is the most commonly asked question, I find the ground beneath the plastic retains moisture.

Whitethorn plants are pruned with a long handled loppers to 100mm or 4 inches above ground level. Cut at an angle to facilitate the sharp stump be pushed through the plastic. Where farmers have seen the result of using plastic and pruning, no convincing is needed that it is the only way to grow good hedgerows which will be a valuable asset to the farm.


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