Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

ENVIRONMENT

February 2022

Dates for your diary

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February 22:

- closing date for 2022 Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) traditional farm building grant scheme.

March 1:

- start of the bird nesting season;
- no more hedge cutting;
- no prescribed burning in the uplands;
- no more cutting of Results-based Environment Agri-pilot Programme (REAP) field margins; and,
- no more cutting of GLAS arable margins.

March 15:

- no topping of GLAS Low-Input Grassland until July 1;
- no topping of GLAS Traditional Hay Meadow until after mowing (after July 1); and,
- animals can access GLAS Wild Bird Cover crops (unless second year of a two-year mix) to aid decomposition.

New farm hedge competition

If you have planted a new hedge on your farm this winter, take a photo to enter the competition. The winning photo will receive a roll of compostable film for weed control in newly planted hedges – sponsored by Maizetech. Pushing pruned whitethorn plants through compostable film allows them to multiply and grow freely at ground level, resulting in a hedge with a dense base. Enter at: www.teagasc.ie/newfarmhedgecomp.

March 31:

- no more planting of REAP hedges and trees.

Last few weeks to:

- cut GLAS arable margins, which must be mulched, mown or grazed between August 15 and March 1 – offtakes can be removed;
- cut GLAS Environmental Management of Fallow

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Land, which must be mulched or mown between September 1 and March 1 – offtakes are not allowed;

- cut REAP field margins, which must be managed by either mowing/flailing or mulching at least once per year – this management can only take place between September 1 and February 28 (it is recommended to remove cuttings) – fertiliser/lime must not be spread on the margin and pesticides are not permitted, other than for the spot treatment of noxious/invasive weeds;
- carry out prescribed burning – follow best practice; and,
- cut hedges – follow best practice hedge cutting for each of the two hedge types (**Figure 1**) – have a conversation with your hedge-cutting contractor.

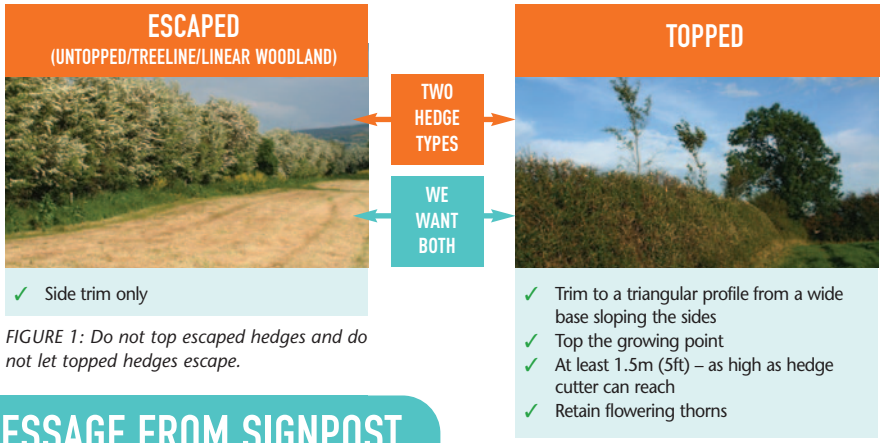

FIGURE 1: Do not top escaped hedges and do not let topped hedges escape.

MESSAGE FROM SIGNPOST

Fertiliser part of the climate solution

Climate change is perhaps the greatest challenge facing the world right now. Farmers can be a part of the solution! What are you doing on your farm to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions? Ask yourself:

- Is all my fertiliser nitrogen (N) spread as protected urea?
- Are all my soils at optimum pH levels (>6.2 for mineral soils, peat soils 5.5-5.8)?
- Are all my soils at optimum phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) levels?
- Do all my grazing swards have clover incorporated?
- Do I follow a fertiliser plan/nutrient management plan (NMP) for all my fertiliser decisions?
- Have I reduced my fertiliser N application rates in the last three years?

MESSAGE FROM ASSAP

Plan slurry application carefully

Do not apply slurry where heavy rainfall is forecast within 48 hours.

Plan how best to apply nutrients from slurry in the coming weeks and months from an economic, productivity and environmental viewpoint. With higher chemical fertiliser prices, the value of organic fertilisers has also increased, with 1,000 gallons of slurry nearly doubling in value and now worth €54. Here are some tips:

- apply slurry in spring where ground conditions are suitable and soil temperature is consistently greater than 6ºC;
- match application rates to grass growth rates to maximise nutrient uptake;
- do not apply slurry where heavy rainfall is forecast within 48 hours;
- keep 5m away from drains and watercourses when spreading organic fertilisers;
- ensure the tractor driver is aware of the location of drains, watercourses, wells, karst features, etc., when spreading organic fertilisers and observes the relevant buffer zones;

Apply slurry where ground conditions are suitable.

- prepare and implement an NMP to ensure the nutrients in slurry are targeted to where they are most needed (consult your advisor); and,
- ensure that the capacity of organic manure stores, at a minimum, is sufficient to meet the storage requirements for your county.

EIP UPDATE

Lessons from SUAS: people working together

SUAS farmers from Carrigeenduff commonage with ecologist Faith Wilson.

The Sustainable Uplands Agri-Environment Scheme (SUAS) in the Wicklow/Dublin uplands has important lessons for both agri-environment schemes and also for new European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) in the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Every upland site is different, with varied proportions of blanket bog, wet heath, dry heath and upland grassland. Each habitat is in varying condition, with very different stocking requirements. Sheep numbers, timing of grazing, type of sheep and the areas they actually graze are all important factors in determining appropriate grazing management for upland areas. Management plans must consider habitat condition as well as habitat type. Grazing management and the delivery of management actions can only be delivered by farmers, who are key to the future management of the uplands. Management change requires changes in farmers' attitudes, knowledge and practice. This entails people working together, on the ground, with ecologists, farmers, advisors and other stakeholders. While it will take time to effect changes in habitat condition, a change in management practices by farmers is an achievable result in the short term that will deliver long-term habitat improvement.

Commonage groups can deliver the management structure necessary to effect change on commonages. These groups require time, outside assistance and a formal approach to succeed – again people working together.

Effective use of the operational group members is considered key to the professional operation of an EIP and the delivery of its objectives.

Other lessons are that payment for actions alone provided no incentive for farmers to be involved. When given a menu of options to choose from, farmers take on actions that favour production rather than habitat improvement.

Future challenges identified include uncontrolled burning, bracken control (in the absence of asulam), gorse control and erosion. Finally, there is a need to agree objectives for areas impractical to restore to former condition.

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