Teagasc
Advisory
Newsletter

ENVIRONMENT

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Low-input grassland

Edited by
Catherine Keena,
Countryside Management Specialist

Farmers with low-input grassland (LIG) in the Results-Based Environment-Agri Pilot Project (REAP) are being rewarded for the number and cover of flowering plants in their extensively managed grassland. The presence of flowers indicates a high level of biodiversity in a field with bees, butterflies and other invertebrates using the flowers. Old grassland of highest value contains species unchanged in centuries – never having been reseeded or fertilised. There is no need to fence field margins in these fields, as the centre of the field is similar to the margins. The biodiversity of extensively farmed grassy fields (with less than 30% ryegrass), which don't contain flowers can be improved by fencing off field margins, allowing the vegetation to flower and seed and develop a structure different to that in the centre of the field. Such rank vegetation provides a habitat for invertebrates, birds and small mammals, which themselves are prey in the food chain.

Types of LIG fields (all with less than 30% ryegrass):

- **flower-rich grasslands** – species-rich old grasslands are a treasure and rewarded with high payments in REAP;
- **grassy fields with traditional grasses and no flower indicators** – grassy margins may be fenced off to get to a field payment of €250/ha; and,
- **some flower indicators** – grassy margins may be fenced to get additional payments of up to €75/ha.

Payments for fields scored as LIG range from €0-€400/ha based on how they score. Wildflowers cannot be sown in REAP LIG. Contrary to common misconception, pollinators don't want you to plant wildflower seed – they want you to allow common wildflowers to grow naturally. Teagasc does not recommend sowing wildflowers on farmland. See LIG indicator flowers on pages 2 and 3.

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LIG indicator flowers

Bedstraw.

Bird's foot trefoil.

Cowslips.

Lady's smock or cuckooflower.

Large umbel.

Lousewort.

Orchid.

Oval sedge.

Oxeye daisy.

Selfheal.

Small umbel.

Sorrel.


Eyebright.


Forget me not.


Knapweed.


Lady's bedstraw.


Marsh marigold.


Marsh thistle.


Meadowsweet.


Mints.


Primroses.


Ragged robin.


Scabious.


Sedge.


Thyme.


Tormentil.


Yellow composites.


Yellow rattle.

MESSAGE FROM SIGNPOST

Why do farmers need to engage with climate action?

1. **Social responsibility**
   We are fortunate to live in a beautiful and diverse part of the world. Our children, and all future generations of farmers, local communities and wider society, deserve the same.
2. **Policy**
   We are bound by international agreements, EU and national policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These policies mean that regulations will need to be implemented in the coming months and years to achieve the targets set.
3. **Protect our markets**
   The consumer is demanding food produced in a more sustainable manner, and farmers have an opportunity to delight these consumers.

SIGNPOST
Farmers for Climate Action

4. **Climate change will impact how we farm**
   We will have wetter winters, drier summers, more extreme weather events, as well as increased risk of pests and disease. All of which will create challenges for farming in Ireland.
5. **Improved farm profitability**
   Many of the technologies farmers are being asked to implement to reduce emissions will also reduce costs and improve profitability. Farmers are part of the solution to emissions and this will create opportunities for income generation.

MESSAGE FROM ASSAP

Tillage cover/catch crops can help water quality

There is a high risk of nitrate leaching from free-draining tillage fields in autumn/winter due to the absence of growing crops and high rainfall levels. Farmers can help reduce nitrate losses and impacts on water quality by targeting the establishment of cover or catch crops.

1. Catch or cover crops can take up significant amounts of nitrogen (N) over the autumn period and thereby reduce the risk of nitrate leaching.
2. Sowing date is critical. To be most effective, crops need to be sown as early as possible post harvest to ensure good growth is achieved. Delays in sowing date can impact on growth and reduce their potential to trap soil nitrate.
3. There are many different crop types and mixtures to choose from, including natural regeneration. Care needs to be taken in choosing a catch crop mix for your system that will not impact on subsequent crop rotation. Speak with your advisor.

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