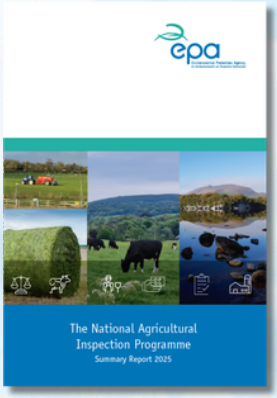
Non-Compliance With Good Agriculture Practice:
= Big Impacts on Water Quality



The latest National Agricultural Inspection Programme (NAIP) Summary Report highlighted that 43% of all farms inspected in 2025 were found to be non-compliant with the Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) Regulations.

Non-compliant farmyards can cause significant negative impacts on water quality.

The main areas of non-compliance include:-

Mixing of clean and soiled water, resulting in discharges to drains and ditches

Poor management of silage pits, silage effluent or farmyard manure resulting in discharges to water

Runoff from manure storage areas and inadequate slurry storage capacity

A leaking drain or pipe, silage effluent escaping from silage pit or soiled water runoff entering a stream can have a greater impact on water quality than nutrient losses from several hectares of land.

Identifying and addressing these point sources is often one of the quickest and most effective actions a farmer can take to protect water quality.

The good news is that most point sources are visible, identifiable and fixable.

Contact us:

teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

Better Farming for Water
8-Actions for Change

The source is important, but so is the pathway

One of the most important lessons from water quality work carried out across Ireland is that pollution rarely reaches water by accident and usually follows a pathway that can be identified. In most cases, once the source and pathway are identified, practical measures can be taken to reduce or eliminate the risk.

For a farmyard water quality issue to occur, three things must be present:

- **Source** - Slurry, FYM, Silage effluent, Soiled water, Dairy washings, Sediment
- **Pathway** - Drain, Ditch, Pipe, Open channel, Roadway
- **Receptor** - River, Stream, Lake, Estuary, Groundwater

Most farms contain at least some potential pollution sources. Understanding how water flows around the farm, and how it can transport a source of pollution via a pathway, can be just as important as managing the source itself. The difference between a potential source and an actual pollution incident often comes down to whether a viable or active pathway is present.

By identifying sources and intercepting pathways before they reach the receptor, many pollution risks can be prevented before they become a water quality problem.

Following water from the yard to its discharge point is often the quickest way to identify hidden point source risks on farms.

(Photo: Farmyard discharge entering watercourse)

Walk Your Farmyard During Rainfall – Water Quality Health Check

One of the simplest and most effective assessments any farmer can carry out costs nothing and takes around 15 minutes. Walk the farmyard during or immediately after heavy rainfall and follow the flow of the water through the farmyard.

Ask yourself:

- Where does every drain go, and where is the nearest stream?
- Is clean water mixing with soiled water?
- Are gutters and downpipes working correctly?
- Is farm roadway runoff entering drains?
- Could contaminated water reach a stream or open ditch?
- Are there any unknown outfalls leaving the farmyard?

Moving water from recent rain often reveals problems that remain hidden during dry weather.

Minimising and Managing Soiled Water

Two of the most effective ways to reduce soiled water are:
(1) Minimise the amount of soiled water produced and
(2) Minimise the area of the farmyard that gets soiled

Keeping clean and dirty water separated through well-maintained gutters and downpipes is one of the simplest ways to reduce storage requirements and minimise pollution risk.

Maintaining clean yard surfaces through regular scraping reduces the area of soiled surfaces and helps minimise the volume of contaminated water arising from livestock faeces, urine and/or silage effluent. This helps ensure that soiled water is minimised, collected and managed in accordance with the GAP Regulations.

Silage Effluent Remains a High-Risk Pollutant

Every year examples emerge where silage extends beyond collection channels or where collection systems become overwhelmed following wet weather.

Silage effluent remains one of the most polluting substances found on farms. Even small losses can have serious consequences for nearby aquatic ecosystems and water quality status.

When inspecting silage storage areas, particular attention should be paid to:
Slab capacity; collection channels; effluent tanks, overflow points; division chambers; cracks in concrete and nearby drains or other pathways. Regular inspections during the first few weeks after harvesting are particularly important, as this is when effluent production is at its highest.

NAIP Inspection Checklist

- Are gutters and downpipes operating correctly?
- Is clean water properly segregated from soiled water?
- Is soiled water entering drains or ditches?
- Is silage being stored within collection channels?
- Are silage bales located away from drains and watercourses?
- Is there any risk of silage effluent discharge?
- Is runoff from Farmyard Manure (FYM) storage controlled?
- Is Farmyard Manure (FYM) stored appropriately during the closed season?
- Is stored Farmyard Manure (FYM) located an adequate distance from any surface waters/exposed karst features?
- Is slurry storage capacity sufficient?
- Are slurry storage facilities properly maintained?
- Are supplementary forage or concentrate feeding areas creating runoff risks?
- Are roadways discharging directly to any surface or ground waters?
- Are fertilisers (chemical/organic) applied in accordance with GAP regulations?

Help and Support Are Available

Water quality improvements do not have to be tackled alone.

The Better Farming for Water (BFFW) Campaign, through its **8-Actions for Change**, is a national Teagasc-led initiative designed to help farmers improve water quality. The 8 actions focus on nutrient management planning, reducing nutrient losses from farmyards and roadways and minimising losses at the field scale level.

ASSAP advisors work with farmers to identify risks and develop practical, farm-specific solutions. An ASSAP visit is a free, confidential and voluntary service for farmers to identify issues before they become problems, prioritising actions that will deliver the greatest benefit. Financial assistance for actions may be available through TAMS and other water quality support initiatives. Speak to your ASSAP/Sustainability or enterprise advisor to identify options for you.

The Take-Home Message

Most point sources are not hidden. A drain, channel, roadway or outfall may only occupy a small area of the farm, but if it creates a direct pathway to water, the consequences can be significant. Many of the issues highlighted through NAIP inspections are visible, identifiable and fixable.

On the next rainy day, take a walk around the farmyard and follow the water. Identifying one small issue today will help prevent a major water quality or compliance problem tomorrow.