

Your environmental responsibilities under
Cross Compliance

A Guide for Farmers



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

www.dardni.gov.uk



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

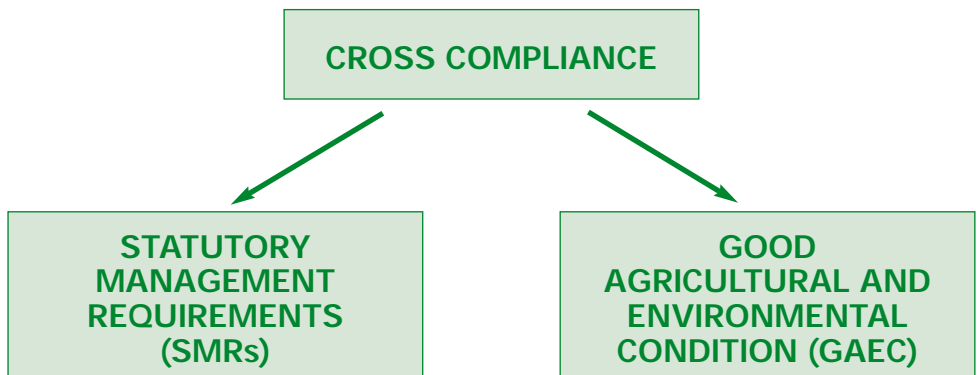
This winter Northern Ireland farmers will receive their first Single Farm Payment (SFP). Farmers are required to observe certain conditions in return for receipt of direct agricultural support. This is known as Cross Compliance.

CROSS COMPLIANCE

Cross Compliance involves complying with 19 existing European laws known as Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs). These cover four key areas:

- **environment;**
- **food safety;**
- **animal and plant health;**
- **animal welfare.**

Cross Compliance also involves maintaining land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC).



STATUTORY MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS (SMRs)

Statutory Management Requirements are being introduced in stages and will be complete by 2007.

| | | |
|------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1st January 2005 | Environmental Protection Public, Animal and Plant Health | (5 SMRs) (3 SMRs) |
| 1st January 2006 | Public, Animal and Plant Health Sheep and Goat Identification and Registration Notification of Diseases | (4 SMRs) (1 SMR) (3 SMRs) |
| 1st January 2007 | Animal Welfare | (3 SMRs) |

This booklet only deals with environmental issues connected to Cross Compliance. Further information on SMRs not covered in this booklet including Public, Animal and Plant Health, Animal Welfare and Disease Notification can be found within the CAP Reform Part 3 Cross Compliance Verifiable Standards booklet.

The Five Environmental Protection SMRs:

1. The Conservation of Wild Birds

Farmers must not:

- Kill, injure, capture or keep any wild bird without a licence in authorised circumstances;
- Destroy, damage, remove or keep their nests or eggs;
- Disturb birds while nesting unless they have a licence to do so.

2. The Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna

Farmers must not:

- Pick, cut, collect, destroy or dig up protected plants;
- Disturb, kill or injure protected animals, destroy or obstruct their breeding places or places of shelter;
- Introduce invasive non-native species into the wild.

3. The Protection of Groundwater against Pollution

- Pesticides and spent sheep dip are classified as dangerous substances;
- Authorisation for disposal is required;
- Sheep dip baths must be sited, maintained and operated properly;
- Records of disposal must be maintained.

4. The Protection of the Environment and in particular of the Soil, when Sewage Sludge is used in Agriculture SMR states that the use of sewage sludge should be monitored and controlled to preserve crop yields and minimise health risks. Factors to consider include:

- Suitability of soil;
- Crop requirement;
- Restrictions on land use;
- Methods of application;
- Record keeping.

5. The Protection of Waters against Pollution caused by Nitrates from Agricultural Sources SMR states that farmers must comply with the Nitrates Directive Action Programme Measures. Under this legislation, farmers in the seven existing Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) must continue to apply the mandatory measures under the Action Programme for Nitrate Vulnerable Zones Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999, until such times as a new Action Programme which will apply to all farmers in Northern Ireland is put in place. The current requirements for the seven existing NVZs include:

- Closed periods for application of organic manures and chemical fertiliser;
- A minimum storage capacity for organic manures;
- Application limits for organic nitrogen and chemical fertiliser;
- Spreading methods for organic manures;
- Application of organic manures and chemical fertilisers only during times of suitable soil and weather conditions;
- Application of chemical nitrogen fertilisers to crop requirement;
- Record keeping to show compliance.

These verifiable standards will be reviewed in accordance with the new Action Programme, when implemented.

Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition

In addition to compliance with SMRs farmers are required to ensure that they keep their land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). This includes all land that they farm, even land on which they do not claim direct payments.

The following GAEC measures are designed to ensure that land is farmed according to good agricultural practices that do not damage the environment.

There are six main GAEC measures:

- 1. Soil Management;**
- 2. Supplementary Feeding;**
- 3. Overgrazing;**
- 4. Undergrazing;**
- 5. Field Boundaries;**
- 6. Protection of Habitats (wildlife areas), Archaeological Sites and Permanent Pasture.**

1. Soil Management

Positive management of soil can ensure increased crop yields, better quality soils and improved river and water quality.

All claimants of direct agricultural support must:

- Protect soils from erosion and maintain soil structure by preventing land from being severely trampled or poached;
- Ensure that cultivated land has either crop, stubble or grass cover or is left ploughed or disced over the following winter;
- Not carry out cultivations if water is standing on the surface or if the soil is waterlogged.

What does severely tramped or poached mean?



2. Supplementary Feeding

Supplementary feeding sites are essential to many upland hill farms especially during the winter to provide feed to livestock. Good supplementary feeding site management will result in minimal damage to the underlying and surrounding plant cover and to the environment.

All claimants of direct agricultural support must ensure that:

- No supplementary feeding takes place on semi-natural habitats (woodland, scrub, moorland, wetlands, species rich grassland), archaeological sites or within 10 m from waterways or 50 m from a borehole or well or 250 m from a borehole used for public water supply;
- Feeding sites are rotated and managed to prevent excessive trampling, poaching or vehicle rutting to minimise soil erosion and to avoid run-off to waterways.



Sacrifice areas will only be permitted on improved grassland / arable land where the land is flat and must be located 10 m from waterways or 50 m from boreholes or wells (irrespective of current use), or 250 m from boreholes used for a public water supply. Sacrifice areas must not be situated on or adjacent to archaeological sites. The area must be ploughed and sown in the following spring. Natural regeneration (recovery of the sward) and surface seeding will be permitted providing there is at least 90% grass / crop coverage by the end of the spring.

3. Overgrazing

Overgrazing is grazing land with livestock in such numbers as to damage the growth, quality or species composition of the vegetation. There is little or no plant cover and there may be evidence of run-off or standing water. Overgrazing can result in soil erosion, increase the risk of flooding and cause damage to semi-natural habitats and archaeological features. Overgrazing is often associated with evidence of poor animal condition.

All claimants of direct agricultural support must:

Avoid overgrazing grassland, semi-natural habitats (woodland, scrub, moorland, wetlands, species rich grassland) or archaeological sites with livestock in such numbers which would damage the growth, quality or species composition of vegetation or destroy the archaeological feature.

Signs of overgrazing are: a combination of the following: very short sward, grasslands with a sward height of less than 3 cm, rough grassland / moorland with a sward height of less than 5cm, a high density of cattle / sheep dung, frequent areas of bare ground and / or evidence of run-off or standing water.

Overgrazing can be avoided by: grazing livestock in numbers appropriate to the ground and climate conditions. Keep stock numbers limited to the carrying capacity of the field. Regular shepherding on open hills may be required to prevent localised overgrazing. Move livestock once signs of overgrazing become apparent.



4. Undergrazing

Land abandonment is not allowed under Cross Compliance. Many of the wildlife areas, birds and other animals in Northern Ireland are dependant on grazing livestock. Therefore continue to graze and/or cut your grass to avoid land being infested by weeds, scrub etc. to such an extent that it can no longer be farmed.

All claimants of direct agricultural support must:

- Avoid infestation by species which degrade the agricultural and environmental value of land. These include Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and the noxious weeds, dock, thistle, ragwort and wild oat;
 - Weeds are best controlled by cutting before they set seed or alternatively by spraying with an appropriate approved chemical. If spraying is to be used then spot spraying is recommended;
 - Rhododendron and gorse should be controlled but not within the bird nesting season (1st March – 31st August). This is best done by cutting and treating the stumps with glyphosate;
- Ensure that land is capable of agricultural production at the start of the growing season. There is no minimum stocking rate unless you are in receipt of Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowance Payment (0.2 LU/ha of eligible stock).

Exceptions to the undergrazing measure include management of areas of land where grazing is either prohibited or restricted. Such areas include ASSIs, Natura 2000 Sites, Scheduled Archaeological Sites and certain land under agri-environment scheme agreement.

If you have any of these on your farm ensure that you know what management is required.

5. Field Boundaries

Field Boundaries include all types of hedges, dry stone walls, ditches and earthbanks. Hedges are defined as hedgerows, hedge banks, rows of trees and hedgerow trees. Ditches are sheughs / open channels, with or without water. Field boundaries provide valuable shelter for stock, nesting cover for birds and a variety of habitats and food for wildlife.

All claimants of direct agricultural support must ensure that:

- No removal of field boundaries takes place except by prior written permission from DARD. This includes infilling or laying drainage pipes in open sheughs. DARD will assess and consider derogations for field boundary removal after using DARD field boundary assessment criteria, which will include consideration of the area of the field and the quality of the field boundary. Such requests should be made in writing to Countryside Management Branch offices;



- No hedge cutting / coppicing or laying takes place during the bird nesting season – 1 March to 31 August – unless there is a health and safety or animal welfare reason. This prohibition on cutting hedges during the bird nesting season applies equally where the hedge needs to be cut before it is fenced.

Sheugh Maintenance

Sheugh maintenance is permitted. It is recommended that sheugh cleaning should be carried out during the autumn to late winter. Avoid deepening or widening the sheugh.

6. Protection of Habitats (wildlife areas), Archaeological Sites and Permanent Pasture.

Wildlife areas (semi-natural habitats) are areas supporting wildlife and include woodland, scrub, wetlands, flower rich (species rich) meadows and moorland. Semi-natural habitats contribute to both the landscape character and the wildlife value of the countryside.

All claimants of direct agricultural support must ensure they:

- Retain all semi-natural habitats (woodland/scrub, wetlands, species rich grasslands, moorland), ponds, shelterbelts, trees protected under a Tree Preservation Order, archaeological features and earth science sites;
- Comply with the DARD Environmental Impact Assessment Uncultivated/Semi-natural Areas Regulations 2001. Farmers must not undertake new drainage, ploughing, clearing, levelling, reseeding or cultivations on uncultivated land or semi-natural habitats without prior approval from DARD;
- Refrain from heather and gorse burning between 15 April and 31 August.



Anyone wishing to carry out an intensive agricultural activity / project on uncultivated land or a semi-natural area must apply to DARD Environmental Policy Branch for prior consent (Tel: 028 90 524130 for further information). Reseeding, drainage and other cultivations are all considered intensive agricultural projects.

Any farmer wishing to infill any of his land with soil / spoil, hard core or any waste material must apply to the Department of the Environment Special Studies Unit Planning Service (Tel: 028 90 416892 for further information) and obtain the necessary consents before commencing this activity.

A list of all archaeological sites is available from EHS Built Heritage (Tel: 028 90 543004; www.ehsni.gov.uk). Regularly check sites for signs of damage, particularly trampling damage by livestock.

Cross Compliance is designed to ensure that land is farmed according to good agricultural practices that do not damage the environment. For further information please contact your local Countryside Management Branch office or attend a training workshop.

Cross Compliance training workshops are run by the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise. Workshops are available to all farmers and are delivered locally at various locations throughout Northern Ireland. Each workshop lasts approximately two hours and is designed to give farmers practical help and guidance. For further information on environmental training please telephone 028 9442 6874 or e-mail enquiries@dardni.gov.uk .

COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT BRANCH POINTS OF CONTACT

Countryside Management Branch provides advice on all aspects of countryside management. Local Countryside Management Branch staff can be contacted at the following locations.

Kilpatrick House
38-54 High Street
BALLYMENA
Co Antrim
BT43 6DT
Tel: (028) 2566 2800

Inishkeen House
Killyhevin
ENNISKILLEN
Co Fermanagh
BT74 4EJ
Tel: (028) 6632 5004

2 Newry Road
ARMAGH
BT60 1EN
Tel: (028) 3751 5600

31 Station Road
MAGHERAFELT
BT45 5DN
Tel: (028) 7930 2112

Rathkeltair House
Market Street
DOWNPATRICK
Co Down
BT30 6LZ
Tel: (028) 4461 2211

Sperrin House
Sedan Avenue
OMAGH
Co Tyrone
BT79 7AQ
Tel: (028) 8225 1020

Annexe D
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST BT4 3SB
Tel: (028) 9052 0922

2B Portaferry Road
NEWTOWNARDS
BT 23 3NT
Tel: (028) 9181 3570



Department of

Agriculture and Rural Development

www.dardni.gov.uk

AN ROINN

Talmhaíochta agus
Forbartha Tuaithe

MÄNNYSTRIE O

Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin
