

New agri-environment scheme

Proposals for a new agri-environment scheme were submitted to the European Commission in July 2009 as part of a draft amendment to the CAP Rural Development Programme 2007–13. Financial support for the scheme will include the modulation funds secured by Ireland in the recent “Health Check” of the Common Agricultural Policy. EU Council Regulation 74/2009 requires that schemes supported by modulation funds address specific “challenges” which include climate change, renewable energies, water management and biodiversity.

The new scheme will consist of a range of actions from which almost every farmers should be able to find some that would suit his or her farm and farming system. It will be different from REPS in that it will not be a whole-farm undertaking. The only obligation applying to the whole farm will be the obligations attaching to the Single Payment Scheme, i.e. cross-compliance and the requirement to keep the land in good agricultural and environmental condition (GAEC).

Most of the actions in the proposals that went to the Commission will be familiar to farmers from REPS 3 and REPS 4 where they appear as biodiversity options or supplementary measures.

A list of the actions is attached.

7 August 2009

| | Action and how it contributes to the Commission's priorities (water quality, biodiversity, climate change) | Details |
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| 1 | Riparian Margins This action will contribute to the water quality objective but will also deliver biodiversity benefits. | This is for riverbanks on agricultural land. Riparian margins act as buffer strips to intercept the flow of nutrients over land. The development of streamside vegetation strengthens channel banks and creates an important habitat to a wide range of flora and fauna. |
| 2 | Retain wildlife habitats This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective. | This is for areas identified as, or created as habitat on expiring REPS contracts. The retention of these areas, which could otherwise be lost, makes a significant contribution to the Irish landscape and wild flora and fauna. Qualifying area must be declared as habitat on the SPS application. |
| 3 | Water trough installation This action contributes to water management objective | Installation of water trough and pipe |
| 4 | Traditional hay meadows This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective. | This is for grassland farms. It is designed to allow grasses and wild flowers to mature and seed where they grow. This will improve plant diversity at farm level and, due to reduced fertiliser inputs, will indirectly reduce the risk of water pollution. |
| 5 | Species rich grassland This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective. | This is for grassland farms. It is designed to provide greater biodiversity through a specific grazing plan, which maximises diversity rather than forage production. |
| 6 | Clover Swards This action will contribute to the water quality and climate change objectives | This is for grassland farms. It is intended to promote and encourage the practice of incorporating clover into suitable grassland, in order to reduce dependency on fertilisers. The incorporation of clover into suitable swards can significantly reduce the dependence on chemical nitrogen, which, in turn, will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from that source. |

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| 7 | Selected control of invasive species This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective. | This is for grassland farms. It is intended to enhance identified non-Natura 2000 habitats in the interest of biodiversity by managing high rush, bracken, gorse, hazel and blackthorn populations in grassland habitats using targeted chemical/manual means. |
| 8 | Use of trailing shoe technology This action will contribute to the climate change objective | This is for grassland farms. It will improve the recycling of organic nitrogen on livestock holdings and to contribute to reduced nitrous oxide, ammonia emissions and odours. |
| 9 | Stone wall maintenance This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective and preserve high nature value farming systems | This is for all farms with stone walls. It is designed to maintain traditional farming practices in high nature value areas. |
| 10 | Arable margins This action will contribute to the climate change objective | This is for tillage farms. It is designed to create different types of environmentally friendly crop margins, thus creating more space for the characteristic plants and animals associated with arable farms to survive |
| 11 | Conservation of Animal Genetic Resources This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective | This is for grassland farms. It is designed to preserve breeds in danger of being lost to farming. |
| 12 | LINNET¹ Habitats This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective | This is for all Farms. It is designed to encourage the small-scale production of cereal plots as a food source for farmland bird populations. |

¹ LINNET is an acronym for Land Invested in Nature, Natural Eco-Tillage

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| 13 | <p>Traditional Sustainable Grazing</p> <p>This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective.</p> | <p>This is for grassland Farms with marginal land.</p> <p>It encourages sustainable grazing practices in marginally farmed areas and contributes to the conservation of flora and fauna on specific habitats and the maintenance of farming on lands most vulnerable to abandonment.</p> |
| 14 | <p>Conservation of Wild Bird Habitat</p> <p>This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective.</p> | <p>This is for farms with corncrake habitat sites</p> <p>The objective of this supplementary measure is to enhance the habitat structure and availability of breeding sites for the corncrake.</p> |
| 15 | <p>Mixed Grazing</p> <p>This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective</p> | <p>This is mainly for sheep farmers.</p> <p>The measure is available to farmers who graze both cattle and sheep in a structured way that delivers a more diverse sward.</p> |
| 16 | <p>Lake Catchments</p> <p>This action will contribute to the biodiversity objective</p> | <p>This measure will be available on a limited basis and will initially be introduced in a selected catchment area. The purpose is to encourage farmers in the selected area take up one or a combination of a suite of actions designed to contribute to water quality objectives.</p> <p>Whole-farm reduction of Organic N: stock density to be maintained at identified levels for environmental sustainability</p> <p>Minimum reduction of 30kg organic N/ha across the holding from baseline of year preceding entry to commitment</p> <p>Traditional hay meadows in fields surrounding lakeshores.</p> <p>Reduced crop production</p> <p>Reduced feeding value</p> |

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|------------------------------|---|---|
| 16 (contd.) | | <p>Species-rich grassland management in adjoining fields.</p> <p>Reduced grass production/grazing potential</p> <p>Reduced grass quality</p> <p>Increase watercourse margins</p> <p>Grazing restriction along additional 1m strip by watercourse</p> <p>Installation of water troughs</p> <p>Provide alternative piped water source.</p> <p>Interception of overland flow of nutrients and silt by establishment of planted buffer zones.</p> |
| 17 | <p>Planting new hedgerows</p> <p>Coppicing of hedgerows</p> <p>Laying hedgerows</p> | <p>This will be suitable for all farms.</p> <p>Hedgerows are essential for sustainability of farmland flora and fauna.</p> |
| 18 | <p>Tree planting</p> <p>The actions under this measure are non-productive. The option is linked to the achievement of commitments under Agri-environment Measure 214 and is included as an integrated measure.</p> | <p>This will be suitable for all farms.</p> <p>Trees play an important role in addressing the climate change agenda. Farmers not disposed to afforestation can be encouraged to contribute to this Community objective by planting broadleaf trees at a rate not exceeding 10 trees per hectare.</p> |
| 19 | Natura 2000 | This is for farms with areas designated as SACs and SPAs — it is intended to compensate for complying with the mandatory requirements arising from designation. |
| 20 | <p>Rough moorland grazing</p> <p>This action will contribute to biodiversity and address land abandonment</p> | This will be available to farmers with commonages. Payment will be for the cost of complying with management requirements such as commonage framework plans. |