Farming Rules for Water

Complying with the new Farming Rules for Water (FRfW)

Introduction

The Farming Rules for Water (2018) were introduced to fulfil obligations on diffuse pollution and reduce phosphorus losses to water from agriculture under the Water Framework Directive.

Reasonable precautions must be taken to prevent diffuse pollution following the application of organic manures and manufactured fertilisers. Farmers must demonstrate that they have planned to apply nutrient treatments in quantities that are sufficient to meet, not exceed, crop and soil requirements. This can be fulfilled by referring to RB209 guidance.

The rules require farmers to:

1. Keep soil on the land;
2. Match nutrients to crop and soil needs;
3. And keep fertilisers and livestock manures out of the water.

Click here for a full list of the FRfW.

What the EA expects from farmers

Guidance for crop nutrient requirement is given by RB209, which states that autumn sown cereals have no requirement for nitrogen. The EA expects FACTS qualified advisers and farmers to base their nutrient management plans on RB209. So, any type of manure should not be applied ahead of drilling unless you are prepared to prove a legitimate crop and soil need.

Farmers must engage and work with the EA to improve management practices. If autumn applications are essential, then applications can be made to fields of low risk. The EA must then be notified by a regulatory position statement (RPS 252).

The EA wants to see a plan that demonstrates a change in how manures are handled and utilised. It must be proven that manures are being unavoidably produced, cannot be stored at the farm or in appropriate field heaps, cannot be exported and stored elsewhere, and that the land is at low risk of leaching or surface run-off.

For those who cannot comply with the regulations to Reduce and Prevent Agricultural Diffuse Pollution Regulations (2018) and rule 1a, RPS 252 should instead be referred to.

When applying organic manures, ensure that the rate applied does not result in over 5kg N/ha of leaching. This can be determined using the MANNER decision support tool.

To comply, farmers should work with their local EA officers and:

1. Test their soils every 4 to 5 years for pH, P, K and Mg;
2. Assess soil nitrogen through the Soil Nitrogen Supply Index in RB209 and/or test a proportion of fields each year before planning manure and fertiliser applications;
3. Annually plan and apply fertiliser and/or manure to meet the needs of the crop and improve or maintain soil nutrient levels;
4. Ensure minimum storage and spreading distances from water bodies;
5. Assess weather and soil conditions to reduce the risk of runoff and soil erosion before any applications are made;
6. Manage livestock and protect land within 5 metres of water;
7. Incorporate organic fertilisers into the soil within 12 hours of spreading to significantly reduce ammonia pollution.

RPS 252 is planned to be withdrawn by the EA on 1st March 2022 unless it is extended. If not, then from autumn 2022 the regulatory requirements for spreading organic manure to land must be complied with.

Checklist: land characterised as low risk of leaching

- ✓ The soil type is not sandy or shallow (as per definition in nitrate regulations).
- ✓ The land is not left bare over winter.
- ✓ The land has a slope of less than 8 degrees, has good structure, no compaction or surface capping, and land drainage is not impeded.
- ✓ The soil does not link directly to a land drainage system (other than sealed impermeable pipes) while at field capacity and does not contain shallow groundwater.
- ✓ The land has not been pipe-drained, mole-drained, or sub-soiled within the last 12 months.
- ✓ The land is 10m from surface water or from conduits leading to surface water.
- ✓ The land is at least 50m from springs, wells, or boreholes.

The EA must be notified of RPS 252 usage by contacting enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk, along with details of where it is being used, the contact details of the person/business responsible, and the material intended to spread.

Analysis

NRM offers the analysis services needed for farmers to comply with the FRfW. Nutrient management plans must be based on the most recent soil analysis and spring soil mineral nitrogen sampling. Analytical data helps farmers calculate and justify fertiliser and manure applications.

Services include:

- Basic soil analysis (pH, P, K and Mg)
- Soil mineral nitrogen and organic matter content
- Livestock manure or organic material (i.e. biosolids or digestate) nutrient analysis

How to take a sample and submit for analysis

See our technical advice sheet on how to take a soil sample here. Information includes:

- The importance of getting a representative sample;
- How to take a sample;
- The correct sampling depth;
- When samples should be taken;
- How much of the sample should be sent to NRM;
- The essential tools for sampling;
- The information required for paperwork.

Complete the relevant analysis request forms with the sample references and the client code, selecting the package required. Ensure the samples are in clearly labelled, well-sealed bags, and are carefully packaged. Don't forget to enclose the completed analysis forms.

Visit our website to make courier bookings and arrange delivery of sample bags and packaging.

Customer services: Email: enquiries@nrm.uk.com | Tel: 01344 886338