



Nutrient Management Plans for soil and water management

Factsheet

The ENRD Contact Point Thematic Group (TG) on the ‘Sustainable Management of water and soils’ aims to promote better soil and water management through improved design and implementation of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). The TG ran between September 2017 and July 2018 and is based on stakeholder engagement, including managing authorities, paying agencies, farm advisors, NGOs and farmer groups. The TG members selected three approaches to be examined in the context of soil and water management: result-based payments schemes (RBPS), co-operative and multi-actor approaches (MAA) and nutrient management plans (NMP).

Nutrient management plans (NMPs) in agriculture set out the required nutrient management needs (and in some cases requirements under EU law) in an area and how those needs can be met through specific land management actions (for example through appropriate application rates, times, locations and practices). Plans are primarily delivered at the holding level, but can be applied to broader areas where nutrient management is critical to achieving soil and water objectives, such as within catchments or nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZ).

The main benefits of nutrient management plans are: raising awareness about resource efficiency; improve knowledge for farmers and land managers; enabling

farmers and advisors to identify the right land management actions; and as part of the process of monitoring and checking that the approaches adopted are in fact leading to the desired results.

Nutrient management plans have been in use in the CAP for a number of years, supported in basic agri-environment programmes in the two previous programming periods, as well as forming part of the Statutory Management Requirements (SMR) of Cross Compliance (Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013). A range of different approaches have been adopted across the EU in the current programming period. These are presented in the figure below.



Recommendations of the TG to improve soil and water management through NMPs

Ensuring that RDP support adds value to soil and water management

1. **Soil Management Plans (SMPs)** can provide a more complete picture of the actions needed on farms if the plans include a clear nutrient management component that set out priorities such as addressing erosion, compaction, soil health, water status, and nutrient use.
2. **SMPs or NMPs** should include as a minimum: the careful **analysis of land conditions**; an understanding of what are the best management techniques to address any issues identified; the **integrated planning** of land management decisions at the local level; and ensuring that the management plan and associated actions are implemented.
3. Ensuring the utility and effectiveness of a management plan requires a number of supporting conditions: **guidance** (e.g. templates) on how to prepare a consistent management plan and in which cases such a plan is needed; guidance on how long a management plan should remain valid and when a new plan should be prepared; the **certification** of soil testing laboratories to validate the initial assessment, and to support ongoing monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the plan.
4. Soil management planning should be a **pre-requisite** of support for soil and water management actions implemented through RDPs.
5. Careful consideration should be given to offering RDP support only where this can add value to existing National or Regional requirements.

Targeting and monitoring

6. **Targeting** to ensure that management plans to deliver action in the right areas should be **coupled with clear guidance** about which measures and interventions are appropriate, and for what duration a management plan should be prepared and implemented.

7. Setting out **clear priorities** (linked to RDP needs assessment) for a given area/holding and highlighting the environmental and production benefits to farmers.
8. **Ongoing monitoring** and review is necessary to ensure the actions implemented through the plans are delivering the intended results.
9. In developing the monitoring tools and indicators, a careful **assessment of the ability to measure impacts of management practices** should be undertaken.

Encouraging and supporting action on the ground

10. **Demonstration farms and pilots**, combined with dedicated extension services and advice through RDPs should be developed, as well as seeking opportunities to make use of LIFE and other funding streams.
11. RDPs to set out clearly which **measures or packages of measures** should be used in different contexts to implement SMP identified priorities.
12. **Ongoing training** for farmers and farm technicians is important in order to ensure that they suitably educated in the implementation of actions necessary to deliver SMPs.
13. It is important to consider **land tenure status** when planning how management plans should be put in place.

Using NMPs in a multi-actor approach - to improve working together to deliver results

14. Support for the implementation of soil management plans through **cooperatives or multi-actor approaches** should be explored through the use of RDP measures (e.g. M16 or M10);
15. RDP support through M16 could be used to encourage vertical integration between stakeholders and actors in the supply chain.

Additional information



Visit the ENRD thematic webpage on the [sustainable management of water and soils](#)