Environment Agency

For homes and habitats

Project TARA – Testing Approaches to Regulating Agriculture

Poultry Manure Regulation: Exploring regulatory approaches to the use of poultry manure within the English stretches of the River Wye catchment.

To ensure a balanced assessment, the project targeted farms with more than 1,000 birds, including:

- Sites with capacity for over 40,000 birds which are regulated under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations (EPR) 2016
- Smaller, non-permitted farms, which are not routinely inspected

The inspections focussed on poultry production sites and their associated farmed land. Compliance checks relating to the export of poultry manure from the site of production were also carried out but inspection of farms receiving exported manure did not fall under the scope of this project.

- 63 sites with over 1000 poultry were inspected
- 94% compliant with NVZ regs
- 89% compliant with FRfW
- No difference in compliance between permitted and unpermitted farms
- The most common non-compliance with the Reduction and Prevention of Agricultural Diffuse Pollution Regulations (England) 2018 was associated with autumn **applications of poultry manure prior to winter cereal planting**
- Although this project's focus has been on the poultry sector, the findings from assessment of their nutrient plans and records have shown a notable environmental risk to be associated with the **growing of potatoes.** Regulatory non-compliances found on

potato crops were associated with both **organic manure and manufactured fertiliser applications** – i.e. were not solely due to excess nutrient applications from organic manures.

- Of the 63 poultry sites inspected, 30% had purpose-built covered manure stores, while **41% relied on temporary farmyard manure (FYM) heaps**. Many of the latter farms indicated a preference for covered storage but cited prohibitive costs - particularly the expense of concrete and galvanised steel - as a key barrier. The remaining 29% exported manure directly at clean-out, eliminating the need for on-site storage.
- Poultry farmers and their agronomists in **the River Wye catchment demonstrated strong awareness of local water quality issues.** Assessing historical records as well as current nutrient plans has enabled us to observe changes in practice over the last 4-5 years. There have been changes in practices observed in phosphate management over this time. Where soil phosphate levels have historically been elevated, management practices have been adapted to mitigate this.
- Many poultry farms in the River Wye catchment supply a major processor, who works with a **manure broker to facilitate the export of poultry litter from their supply farms**.
- We are seeing some very innovative and forward-thinking solutions implemented and proposed from poultry and AD site operators to address the management of phosphate. We have been working with several AD operators and poultry farms within the West Midlands to provide permitting advice on the treatment of manures and digestate. Several of these have trialled the use of **phosphate stripping equipment**, with two AD operators in the Wye catchment planning to install plants to remove phosphate into a marketable phosphate product that can be easily transported to other areas of the country. **This will reduce the application of phosphate containing digestates to land in the River Wye catchment**.
- **Agronomists** provided feedback that they found the in-depth nutrient management assessment very helpful, and some have **changed their practice** in response. They welcomed the opportunity to gain clarity on the Reduction and Prevention of

Agricultural Diffuse Pollution Regulations (England) 2018 and the associated Secretary of State's Guidance, which was issued in June 2022. They have found the opportunity for open discussion very constructive. Good working relationships with the industry have `formed as a result.

- There is a lack of detailed understanding within the agricultural industry about **the factors that affect phosphate cycling within the soil and subsequent crop assimilation**. A number of farms have reported high levels of (available/potentially available) phosphate in the soil, which have not reduced despite omitting phosphate applications for many years. This has been particularly evident in apple orchards which have not received phosphate applications for many years.

July 2026