

Written evidence submitted by Mr James Whatty (FR0084)

Farming Rules for water regulation – call for evidence

I am writing to provide a submission as an Agronomist who works for H L Hutchinson Ltd. I am based in Mid Cornwall and advise farmers from Penzance to Bude covering a range of crops from Cauliflower to Grassland. A large proportion (90% +) of farms which I deal with have livestock on the holding and rotations are diverse often with 4/ 5 crops in the rotation. I am writing to submit evidence as for the past four years I have worked on a large arable farming business, so I would like to think that I have a reasonable understanding of the difficulties faced by both farmers and advisors whilst trying to navigate rules and regulations.

The implementation of farming rules for water regulation is going to create some huge logistical and environmental problems in my opinion. In Cornwall there is a high proportion of small mixed farms which spread muck in small quantities throughout the year as machinery is small and they travel when the conditions are suitable. Often this is because soil conditions allow, also logistically many farming operations are small in Cornwall so labour is spread very thinly at key times of the year. This is similar for larger dairy businesses which are becoming more common across the county. Slurry is produced throughout the year and often spreading on a field-by-field basis is done when the conditions allow. I fear that the implementation of the farming rules for water will squeeze businesses to spread in a narrow and unrealistic time window. Rainfall as we all know is becoming more sporadic and heavier at times of the year and I certainly feel that if similar to NVZ there are spreading restrictions put in, there is a far higher chance of overapplication. (Look at the Irish with rain guns over hedges just because a date says they can spread as an example). Being honest I think that the implementation is very narrow minded and naive. As per the new sustainable farming incentive, we are being encouraged to move away from reliance on bagged fertilisers with more of a focus on soil health. Speaking to growers across the county another key factor is logistics and the realities of travelling at certain times of the year. In Buckinghamshire we actually spread organic materials into growing crops with a muck spreader which was only possible due to large flat fields, dry weather and a brand new sophisticated spreader which could spread compost to 24m. I feel that spreading will become date based rather than condition based which could very easily lead to damaged soils though compaction, along with far higher levels of runoff.

Regarding changes I think any restriction on autumn spreading should be completely removed. I would suggest a small change to the rules to prevent the most damaging pollution events. Ultimately many thousands of tons of bio solids are spread each summer/ autumn onto arable ground so it doesn't sit well that water companies can avoid the restrictions and other businesses will suffer.

Looking to the future, I would think that the best methods of preventing diffuse pollution in the future would be based around grants which make machinery/ new methods of application more achievable without a large financial outlay which can put many businesses off. Likewise, I think that meetings with businesses in parts of the county which are compulsory would not be a bad thing. Education of certain practises would not be a bad thing as there is a huge variation in how up to date people are. Rather than what I would consider an extreme regulation such as this, I feel that visiting farms individually and helping to advice/ give the resources to improve infrastructure to prevent diffuse pollution would be a good start. Travelling around the county has been eye opening and I feel that it is the bad practises of a handful which are jeopardising future regulation/ restrictions for the majority.

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