

# Up-to-date records are key for NVZ compliance

In the first of two articles, land agent and surveyor expert Hugh Townsend provides guidance on how to comply with Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) regulations



**A**S we all cope with the impact of COVID-19, along with all the usual spring tasks on the land, there are also some very important farming deadlines to meet that cannot be overlooked.

These include Basic Payment and Stewardship claims, but also NVZ records need to be completed by April 30.

In the first of two articles, we set out our shortened 'pocket guide' on what NVZs are and what you need to do if you have land in an NVZ (the full version can be seen on our website). This should only be used together with accompanying professional advice.

A Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) is an area at risk of pollution from nitrates due to agricultural activity. The areas are designated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and include approximately 55% of land in England. If your holding is in such a zone then the use of nitrogen fertilisers and storage of organic manure must comply with the NVZ regulations in order to meet cross compliance rules, which you need to do in order to qualify for payments from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Rural Development Programmes (RDPE), Countryside Stewardship and Countryside Productivity. This is checked in the form of cross compliance inspections by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and if an inspector decides the regulations are not being complied with then payments may be reduced.

## How to find out if your holding is in an NVZ

The Environment Agency (EA) provides an online map (<https://environment.data.gov.uk/farmers/>) which can be searched by postcode or name of holding and then highlights areas in an NVZ. When clicking on the area of your holding it will show the reason for the designation, e.g. surface water issues, and a link stating what you need to do to comply.

Defra reviews the NVZ designations every four years as the concentration of nitrates in an area can fluctuate over time.

When the area is redrawn, Defra will notify all farmers and landowners within the area by letter. After the initial designation you have 28 days to appeal your holdings inclusion before the area is finalised. The current area was established for 2017-2020.

## Use of nitrogen fertilisers

This involves the spreading of any fertiliser containing nitrogen, including both manufactured and organic, on agricultural land within an NVZ. To control this process there are limits on the average amount that you can apply to your fields, the 'N-max limit', i.e. the amount of nitrogen (N) which can be applied in tonnes per hectare per year. This varies depending on the crop and the time of year it is sown, as well as the soil nitrogen content and type of fertiliser.

## Planning your nitrogen use and keeping records

Applications of nitrogen to each type of crop (including grassland) must be planned, recorded and kept for five years as part of your farm records, and made available for inspection upon request. These records will include a fertilisation plan, field records, an NVZ risk map and your livestock records as part of an over-arching NVZ plan.

Your NVZ plan will show that you have taken into account the amount of nitrogen already in the soil and available to the crop throughout the growing season, the amount that should be applied to a specific crop for optimum yield, the amount present in any planned applications of manure applied throughout the growing season, and/or the amount of manufactured nitrogen to be used. The risk of run-off when spreading or stored (i.e. muck heaps) must also be assessed.

## Fertilisation plan and field records

The first stage occurs before fertiliser is applied and involves creating a plan of your whole holding, and then creating the fertilisation plan where you record any planned applications of fertiliser on each field on your holding plan, including grass-



> Spreading slurry plays a vital role in fertilising the land ready for making hay or silage later on in the year  
Jim McEwan

land. You must also ensure you keep your field records updated every month, i.e. for manufactured fertiliser you should note the date of spreading and the amount of nitrogen used on that field, as well as the crops planted.

If applying manure to permanent grassland, the calculations should be based on a farming year starting on January 1, then preparing a plan for any fertiliser / manure used after that date.

Your fertilisation plan must show you've taken the following steps before you apply nitrogen for the first time in a field where you're going to plant a crop or have planted a crop:

1. Calculate the amount of nitrogen in the soil that's likely to be available for the crop to use during the growing season. You can use the SNS (soil nitrogen supply) method found in the AHDB Nutrient Management Guide RB209;
2. Calculate the optimum amount of nitrogen that should be applied to each crop, taking into account the amount of nitrogen already available in the soil, e.g. wheat and barley crops can receive an additional 20kg N/ha for every tonne that the expected yield exceeds the standard yield;

3. Calculate the amount of nitrogen from any planned applications of organic manure that's likely to be available to the crop in the growing season in which you spread it. The 'field limit' (excluding manure deposited by grazing animals) for organic manure applied in any one field is 250kg N/ha over the year. If the only organic manure used is certified green/food compost you can apply 500kg of nitrogen every two years as mulch, worked into the ground, or 1,000kg every four years;
4. Calculate the amount of manufactured nitrogen fertiliser you need or each specific crop.

## Derogation applications

Farmers with at least 80% grassland can apply for derogation for the following year by contacting the EA, usually between October 1 and December 31. If you had a derogation for 2019 then you must submit information to the EA for that year in the form of a 'fertilisation account' by April 30, 2020. A derogation effectively increases the 'loading limit' for manure from 170 N/ha per year to 250 N/ha/ per year. You need to re-apply each year.

## Records of livestock / manure

Between January 1 and April 30 each year you must create detailed

livestock records on your holding for the entirety of the previous calendar year including number and type of animals, amount of nitrogen produced, and start / end dates and locations of any field heaps used to store solid manure on a risk map.

To ensure these figures are accurate ensure your movement books for livestock are up to date and kept with the other records in your NVZ plan. They will provide the data for your manure calculations in conjunction with the area in your field records and will be checked during an inspection. If bringing manure onto or off your holding you must record the amount and date as well as its N content. Also record the name and address of the recipient or supplier and a contingency plan (such as storage) if the manure isn't accepted by a recipient.

In addition there are separate requirements for organic manure records set out in the NVZ handbook.

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