

Waters of



Pilot Agri-Environmental Programme

Information Booklet

October 2024



Co-funded by
the European Union

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1. Introduction

This booklet is an introduction to our project's pilot agri-environmental programme. The Waters of LIFE Programme is designed to reward farmers for protecting and improving water quality.

There are four ways in which farmers can receive payment through the Waters of LIFE Programme:

- 1. Results based payments**
- 2. General actions**
- 3. Supporting actions (also known as non-productive investments or landscape actions).**
- 4. Training and knowledge exchange**

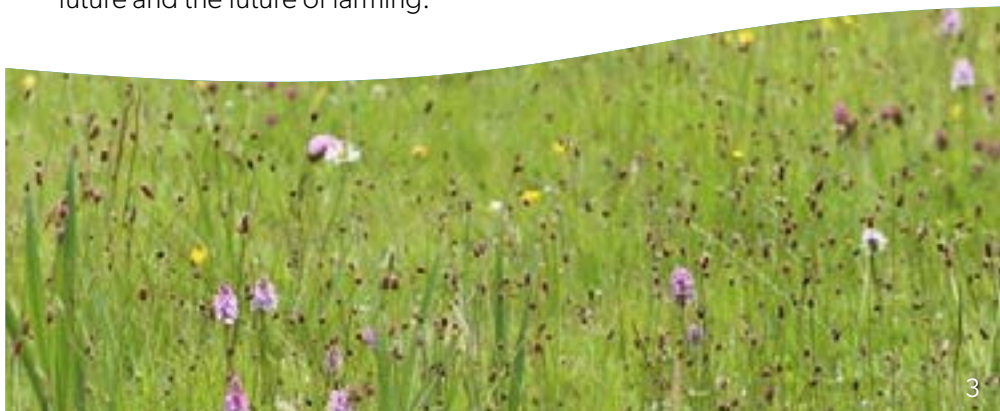
Achieving greater outcomes for water quality is important for our future and the future of farming.

Results-based payments are a key part of the programme. Payments are linked to quality of habitats on farms including:

- **Riverside areas**
- **Species-rich grasslands**
- **Peatlands**
- **Woodlands and scrub**

The more you can improve the quality and/or quantity of these habitats on your farm, the more payment you will receive.

Many farmers will be familiar with results-based schemes and the use of scorecards for habitats. Waters of LIFE have introduced a new riverside habitat scorecard for farmers with river frontage in our demonstration sub-catchments.



Our riverside habitat scorecard pays out €2000/ha on a 10/10 score for a fenced or uncultivated strip along the river in areas of improved grassland and tillage, up to a maximum width of 20m.

Farmers who do not have river frontage can still apply for the programme. They can receive payments for habitats not immediately adjacent to rivers and also through a number of actions. Some general actions are not linked to results. These include:

- **Runoff risk assessment**
- **Nutrient management planning**

- **Nutrient surplus recording**
- **Precision nutrient application and record keeping**
- **Catch crops**
- **Minimum tillage/no tillage**
- **Mob grazing**

Farmers can also be paid for agreed supporting actions including:

- **Fencing**
- **Livestock drinking facilities**
- **Riverside tree planting**
- **Spatially targeted buffers**
- **Drain blocking**

2. Is this programme for me?

Who can apply?

Farmers with a herd or tillage number. All privately owned farmland within our five active project demonstration sub-catchments can be considered for payment. Exceptions are buildings (and their curtilage), extensive water, farmyards, quarries, and commercial forest. Commonage is not eligible because it is already covered under the ACRES programme.

Lands should be declared on your current Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) application to be considered for the Programme.

How do I apply?

Complete and submit the Expression of Interest form to the project team. The form is available from www.watersoflife.ie/eoi You can also pick one up from your farm advisor or any Waters of LIFE Project team member.

All information is fully confidential. Submitting your expression of interest does not commit you to participating in the programme. It also does not guarantee entry.

What is the selection criteria?

For each catchment, applicants are ranked by the project team according to the criteria outlined below:

- **Length of river frontage:** The ratio length of mapped watercourses to land area.
- **Nutrient sensitive areas:** If nitrogen is an issue in the sub-catchment, farms in areas with a pollution impact potential (PIP) for nitrogen rank 1,2 or 3.
- **High runoff risk potential:** If in areas with a PIP rank of 1, 2 or 3 and with significant numbers of high risk flow paths and delivery points.
- **Ecological features:** Notable presence of positive ecological features such as good riverside woodlands, peatlands or species-rich grassland.
- **All other areas**

The project will use information from the farm's BISS application to make the assessment. The highest ranked applicants will

be shortlisted for acceptance first. Unsuccessful applicants automatically roll over to be considered again in the next round of recruitment.

The earlier you apply, the better your chances of being accepted. The application process is simple and all farmers who are interested should apply.

How will I know if I've been successful?

Farmers who are accepted into the programme will be notified. They will have one month to accept.

Unsuccessful applicants will also be notified.

Full criteria details will be outlined in the Terms & Conditions documents.

I'm already in ACRES (or another scheme). Can I still apply?

Yes. However, to avoid the risk of double payments, the programme will not pay out on plots already scored elsewhere, with the exception of the riverside bonus payment. The riverside bonus payment acts like a top-up for water quality.

Approval of general measures and supporting actions, such as fencing, will also depend on the avoidance of double payment.

Will my BISS be affected?

No. Payments from the programme are in addition to other supports like BISS or ANC.

Do I need a farm advisor to take part in the programme?

Yes. You nominate an advisor as part of your application. The advisor will also have to be trained and approved by the Waters of LIFE Project to be eligible.

Can I use my existing farm advisor?

Yes, if they have been trained and approved by the Waters of LIFE Project.

Who pays the advisor?

The Waters of LIFE project will look after all costs for advisors.

Do I have to have river frontage?

No. Farmers with any lands within our project's demonstration sub-catchments are eligible to apply.

Will all my lands be included in the programme?

No. Only land parcels within the demonstration sub-catchment are eligible.

Can I apply if I have a commonage shareholding in the sub-catchment?

Yes, but commonage is not eligible because it is already covered under the ACRES programme. Only privately owned land within the sub-catchment will be considered.

I do not have a herd number or tillage number. Can I apply?

This programme is only open to farmers with a herd number or tillage number.

Do Waters of LIFE enforce water quality measures?

Waters of LIFE have no enforcement role. Participation in the programme is completely voluntary. It is ultimately up to the farmer as to how they manage their farm.

How long will the programme run for?

The programme will run for three years - 2025, 2026 and 2027.

Where can I get further information on the Waters of LIFE Programme?

Talk to your advisor or contact the Waters of LIFE project team through www.watersoflife.ie/contact

3. How does the programme work?

Year 1 Timeline	
From October 2024	Expressions of interest submitted to the team
January 2025	Contract offer and farm plan
Spring 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Farmer training• First farm visit for runoff risk assessment and identification of supporting actions to intercept pathways• Submission of assessment
From Spring 2025	Approval of supporting actions and supporting actions payments
Summer 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Second farm visit for habitat scoring and identification of supporting actions to improve habitat scores• Submission of scores and proposed supporting actions
December 2025	Verification of scores, general actions and related payments
January 2026	First results-based payments issued. (Other payments are issued quarterly)

Programme Participation:

1. Waters of LIFE Farm Plan:

Once a farmer has been accepted into the programme, the Waters of LIFE project team will prepare a farm plan for your farm. This will identify the habitats to be scored and what general actions could apply to your farm.

2. Training and knowledge exchange:

Knowledge exchange events also take place. Participation is voluntary.

3. Farm visits:

During the first visit to the farm in springtime the advisor, working with the farmer, will:

- Carry out a runoff risk assessment.
- Make recommendations about supporting actions to address any risks identified.

During the second farm visit in summer time, the assessor will:

- Score all habitats on the farm and make recommendations about supporting actions to help improve plot scores.

4. Payments:

The results of the advisors' assessments will be submitted to the project team for review and payment.

All payments are made directly to the farmer's nominated bank account. Farmers and advisors receive a summary of payment calculations.

Four payment streams are available to participating farmers. In addition to payment for training and knowledge exchange farmers can also access:

Results-based payments: based on the results of habitat quality assessment.

General actions payments: farmers will be paid for implementing general actions, as agreed, either on a yearly or one-off basis.

Supporting actions: The advisor and farmer will identify and agree a number of supporting actions to either reduce runoff risk or increase habitat scores. The proposed actions will be submitted through the Waters of LIFE mapping system.

Once approved by the team, these actions may be implemented immediately. Payment for actions will be made on receipt of evidence that they have been

completed to the required standard. These actions are voluntary and funded by the programme up to 100%.

4. Results-based payments for habitat quality

Results-based payments schemes link payments to the environmental quality of a farm. Higher nature quality results in higher levels of payment.

All participating land is divided into plots. Each plot receives a habitat score between 0 and 10, based on environmental quality. This is done

annually. Payment are made on scores between 4 and 10. A score of 10 delivers the highest quality habitat for the programme.

Habitat quality

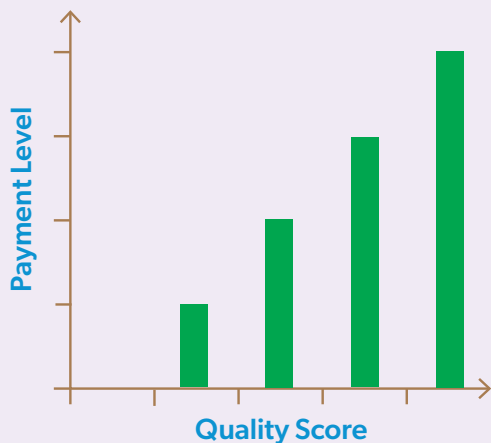
The management of farmland has a direct influence on the freshwater environment.

Results-based Approach

Payments are linked to nature quality of your farm.

Higher Nature Quality = Higher Payment Level

Each plot is scored out of 10 using a scorecard that records habitat quality. Habitat quality reflects land management past and present.



Higher habitat quality near a river leads to higher water quality. That's why we use four main habitats as results indicators for the programme:

- **Riverside areas**
- **Species-rich grasslands**
- **Peatlands**
- **Woodlands and scrub**

Some farms might already have high ecological quality. The programme will support farmers in protecting them.

Some farmers might want to improve the environmental quality of their lands. The programme supports farmer in making those improvements.

Assessment of habitat quality

Habitat quality is assessed at the plot level using a scorecard. There is a different scorecard for each habitat.

The scorecard uses indicators to give marks. Indicators include:

- **Biodiversity (plant species)**
- **Vegetation structure**
- **Water management**
- **Damaging activities**
- **Bare soil**

Payment Rates:

The payment rate for riverside habitats will vary depending on:

- **The width provided**
- **The quality of the area**
- **Legal requirements under the Nitrates Action Programme and good agricultural and environmental condition (GAEC).**

A maximum payment rate of €2,000/ha/year will be available for a 10/10 riverside habitat. This payment rate is available on a riverside zone of up to 20m in width. **However, a farmer is not obliged to provide the full 20m and will be paid on whatever width of riverside habitat they choose to create or retain.**

A payment rate of €400/ha is available for species-rich grassland, woodland and peatland. This is the same as the payment per hectare in ACRES Cooperation Project

The riverside bonus payable on species-rich grassland, woodland and scrub and peatland will be up to €3.20/m for a 10/10 plot. This is in addition to the payment per hectare. It is intended to bring the payment in line with the rate for riverside habitats on improved grassland and tillage.

Payment rates for species-rich grassland, woodland & scrub and peatland

Score	<4	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Payment/ha	€0	€120	€140	€160	€240	€280	€360	€400
Riverside bonus/m	€0	€0.96	€1.12	€1.28	€1.92	€2.24	€2.88	€3.20

Payment rates for riverside habitats on improved grassland and tillage

Score	<4	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Payment/ha	€0	€1000	€1100	€1200	€1400	€1600	€1800	€2000

Riverside on improved grassland and tillage



Everything that happens within a sub-catchment can impact water quality, but the area beside a river has the greatest influence.

Limiting certain activities and having a more natural strip of land beside a river can have huge benefits for water quality, even on intensively managed and highly productive farms.

Research tells us that the optimum width of such a strip is about 20m.

Waters of LIFE has introduced a new riverside habitat scorecard for farmers with river frontage in areas of improved grassland and tillage areas.

A payment of up to €2000/ha is available for a fenced riverside habitat up to a maximum width of 20m. This payment reflects the highly productive nature of these lands and the cost to the landowner of taking them out of production.

Farmers are not obliged to provide the full 20m. They are paid on whatever width of riverside habitat they choose to keep or create. The 20m does not include the width of any mandatory buffers that are already required.

Riversides on semi natural grasslands, woodland, scrub and peatland

The riverside habitat scorecard and the rate of €2000/ha to a 10/10 score of a 20m strip does not apply to river frontage along extensively managed semi-natural grasslands, woodland/scrub or peatlands.

These plots have their own scorecards, so a different bonus will apply per meter of river frontage. The bonus payment will be dependent on the overall plot score up to a maximum of €3.20/m



5. Payments for general actions

Not all water quality measures can be results-based. The programme also offers payment for general actions aimed at reducing losses of nutrient and sediment to rivers.

Some of these actions are well established through other schemes. Others are being trialled

by the project for the first time. Full specifications for general actions are available as a separate document.

General actions funded through the project will be paid at the following rates:

Action	Payment
Runoff risk assessment	€250
Nutrient management planning	€400
Nutrient surplus recording using AgNav	€250/yr
Precision nutrient application (including grass measuring and record keeping)	Up to €1,452.50/yr
Catch crop (winter cropping system)	€173/ha/yr
Catch crop (other cropping system)	€225/ha/yr
Minimum tillage	€40/ha/yr
Mob grazing (will be offered on a trial basis on suitable plots)	€750/ha

Runoff risk assessment:

Your advisor will do a desk study and a farm visit to identify areas at risk of overland flow into watercourses. The advisor will recommend suitable measures

for reducing this risk. These measures will be funded by the project. The farmer is paid for his time in assisting the advisor. This assessment will be done in years one and three of the programme.

Nutrient management (mandatory in sub-catchments where nutrients are a significant issue, optional elsewhere):

If no plan is currently in place on a farm and not required under the Good Agricultural Practice regulations, the project will offer a standardised nutrient management plan.

The farmer and their advisor develop a nutrient budget based on soil samples and crop requirements. Budgets can be assessed and adjusted annually.

Nutrient surplus recording using AgNav (mandatory in sub-catchments where nutrients are a significant issue, not available elsewhere)

Farmers will be supported to calculate their nutrient surplus through the Teagasc AgNav system. This is an automated system that draws information from the Irish Cattle Breeders Society, the Bord Bia sustainability survey, the milk co-ops and the fertiliser database.

The farmer signs up to AgNav for free through their advisor and is paid to attend training on managing nutrient surplus.

Farmers will be incentivised to have high quality records on their farm activities. AgNav is a collaborative programme hosted by Teagasc.

Precision nutrient application and high quality record keeping (available for selected farmers in certain nitrogen sensitive areas. Not available elsewhere):

This action is aimed at supporting farmers to use decision support tools such as PastureBase Ireland (PBI) or equivalent. By managing grass growth efficiently and taking account of grass growth predictions, dairy farmers can optimise their fertiliser use.

PBI also calculates an N surplus value for the farm but requires very accurate fertiliser records. Dairy farmers in certain nitrogen sensitive areas who sign up for PBI, will be offered payment for grass measuring and access to localised grass growth predictions. Farmers will be required to submit their PBI scorecards and nitrogen surplus value. They will be paid on the quality of these records.

Farmers are also paid for training on nutrient surplus reduction measures, provide by the Waters of LIFE project.

Catch/cover crops (available for tillage farmers):

Farmers receive an area based payment for catch crops. Catch crops help reduce nutrient losses to groundwater and overland flow to surface water during the fallow period between two sowing seasons.

A limited list of catch crop species will be available, reflecting those that are most effective in absorbing nitrogen.

Minimum tillage/no tillage (Available for tillage farmers)

Farmers receive an area based payment for minimum tillage or no tillage practices for soil management.

Significant nutrient losses to watercourses can be prevented by avoiding deep cultivation through ploughing.

Mob grazing (limited option):

Farmers will be selected on a limited basis to receive an area based payment for mob grazing.

This practice can increase soil organic matter and moisture retention capacity.

The project will assess water quality benefits of short duration, high density grazing with a longer than usual grass recovery period.



6. Supporting actions (funded)

Supporting actions are voluntary measures to improve habitat quality or address a specific risk to water quality. Risks are identified through the runoff risk assessment. Where a farmer wishes to carry out supporting actions, additional funding is available.

The Waters of LIFE project will fund supporting actions, for example:

- **Fencing**
- **Tree planting in riverside areas**
- **Livestock drinking facilities**

- **Spatially targeted buffer zones**
- **Drain blocking**

The full list of supporting actions is available in a separate document.

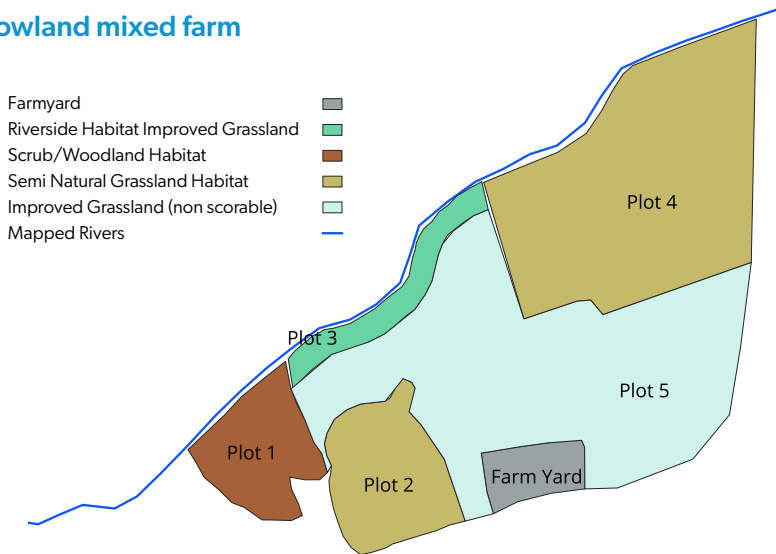
Farmers are also encouraged to propose their own solutions for water quality, which they believe may work on their own farm.

All works on supporting actions must be approved by the Waters of LIFE project before commencement. Supporting actions are subject to terms & conditions.



7. Sample payment calculations

Lowland mixed farm



Plot No.	Scorecard	Plot score	Habitat payment	River frontage (m)	Riverside bonus	Total plot payment
Plot 1	1 ha scrub/woodland habitat	8	€280	116	€260	€540
Plot 2	2 ha semi-natural grassland	8	€560	-	€0	€560
Plot 3	0.5 ha riverside habitat* improved grassland	8	€778	243	€0	€778
Plot 4	10 ha semi natural grassland	8	€2,800	292	€654	€3,454
Plot 5	16 ha improved grassland	0	€0	-	€0	€0
Total farm size	29.5 ha				Score total	€5,332

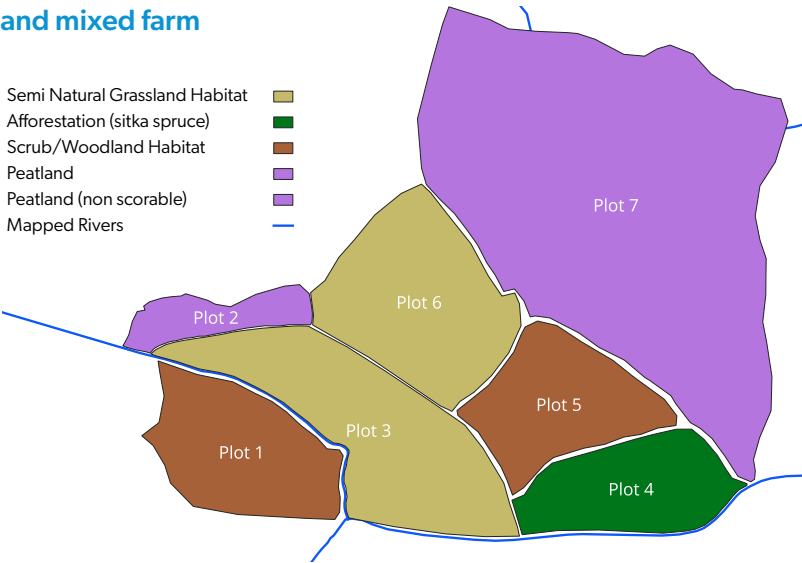
* This example of a riverside habitat payment is based on a 20m fenced width. A farmer is not obliged to provide the full 20m. They are paid on the width they provide.

Additional payments

Training (based on 3 days)	€468
Runoff risk assessment	€250
	€718

Total farm payment= €5,332 + €718 = €6,050

Upland mixed farm



Plot No.	Scorecard	Plot score	Habitat payment	River frontage (m)	Riverside bonus	Total plot payment
Plot 1	6 ha scrub/woodland habitat	8	€1,680	400	€896	€2,576
Plot 2	2 ha peatland habitat	8	€560	40	€90	€650
Plot 3	11 ha semi natural grassland	8	€3,080	683	€1,530	€4,610
Plot 4	5 ha afforestation		€0	350	€0	€0
Plot 5	5 ha scrub/woodland habitat	8	€1,400	0	€0	€1,400
Plot 6	7 ha semi natural grassland	8	€1,960	0	€0	€1,960
Plot 7	22 ha peatland commonage (not scorable)	0	€0	10	€0	€0
Total farm size	58 ha				Score total	€11,196

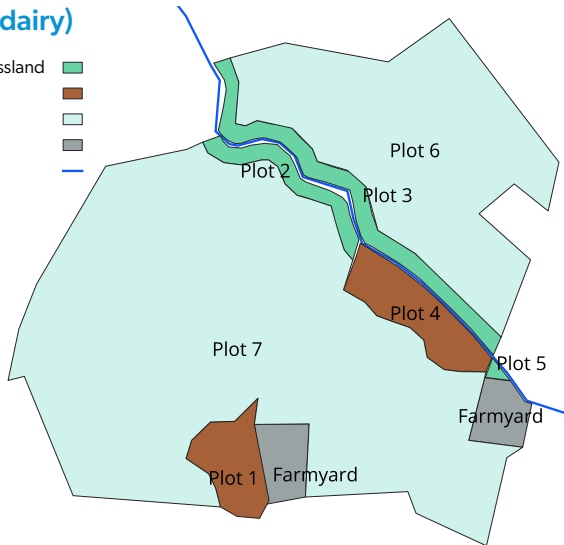
Additional payments

Training (based on 3 days)	€468
Runoff risk assessment	€250
	€718

Total farm payment= €11,196 + €718 = €11,914

Improved Grassland (dairy)

- Riverside Habitat Improved Grassland ■
- Scrub/Woodland Habitat ■
- Improved Grassland ■
- Farmyard ■
- Mapped Rivers —



Plot No.	Scorecard	Plot score	Habitat payment	River frontage (m)	Riverside bonus	Total plot payment
Plot 1	1 ha scrub/woodland habitat	8	€280	0	€0	€280
Plot 2	0.5 ha riverside habitat* improved grassland	8	€854	267	€0	€854
Plot 3	1.2 ha riverside habitat* improved grassland	8	€1,866	583	€0	€1,866
Plot 4	1.5 ha scrub/woodland habitat	8	€420	230	€515	€935
Plot 5	0.1 ha riverside habitat* improved grassland	8	€128	40	€0	€128
Plot 6	15 ha improved grassland habitat	0	€0	0	€0	€0
Plot 7	30 ha improved grassland habitat	0	€0	10	€0	€0
Total farm size	49.3 ha				Score total	€4,063

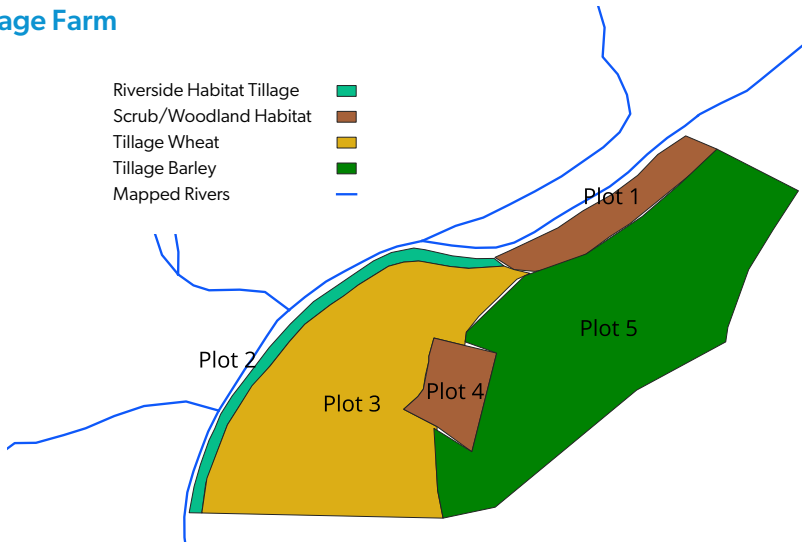
* This example of a riverside habitat payment is based on a 20m fenced width. A farmer is not obliged to provide the full 20m. They are paid on the width they provide.

Additional payments

Training (based on 3 days)	€468.00
Runoff risk assessment	€250.00
Precision nutrient application	€1,452.50
	€2,170.50

Total farm payment= €4,063.00 + €2,170.50 = €6,233.50

Tillage Farm



Plot No.	Scorecard	Plot score	Habitat payment	River frontage (m)	Riverside bonus	Total plot payment
Plot 1	2 ha scrub/woodland habitat	8	€560	394	€883	€1,433
Plot 2	1.6 ha riverside habitat* tillage	8	€2,496	780	€0	€2,496
Plot 3	15 ha tillage wheat		€0	0	€0	€0
Plot 4	2 ha scrub/woodland habitat	8	€560	0	€0	€560
Plot 5	7 ha tillage barley		€0	0	€0	€0
Total farm size	31.5					€4,489

* This example of a riverside habitat payment is based on a 20m fenced width. A farmer is not obliged to provide the full 20m. They are paid on the width they provide.

Additional payments

Training (based on 3 days)	€468
Runoff risk assessment	€250
Catch crop (winter cropping) on Plot 3	€2,595
Minimum tillage on Plot 3	€600
Catch crop (other) on Plot 5	€2,250
Minimum tillage on Plot 5	€400
	€6,563

Total farm payment= €4,489.00 + €6,563 = €11,052

8. Why is water quality important?

Humans and animals need clean water to survive. Ireland's nature is unique, and it needs healthy rivers to survive. Improving water quality is a challenge, but the solutions are there if we work together. That is our project's purpose.

All water bodies with moderate water quality or worse have to be restored under our Water Framework Directive legal requirements.

The EPA assigns each water body an ecological status for water quality and an objective to have good or high status by 2027.

A risk assessment works out how likely it is for a water body to meet its objective.

Some sections of our demonstration sub-catchments are at risk of not meeting their objectives for water quality.

Waters of LIFE Project Demonstration Sub-Catchments



The EPA has created a map to help understand the role of agriculture in protecting and restoring water quality. You can view it at gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/agriculture



9. What is the LIFE Programme?

The LIFE programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action since its inception in 1992.

The European Union recognises that a transition to a sustainable economy requires major shifts in investments towards new infrastructures, new technologies, new business models, and new modes of production and consumption of all types of goods and services, including food and natural resources.

Through its targeted support for policy and market uptake actions, the LIFE programme aims to preserve, protect and improve the quality of the environment, protect human health and pursue the prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources. To date, LIFE has co-financed approximately 4,000 projects across the EU, contributing more than €3 billion to the protection of the environment.







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