

# Upstream Thinking Newsletter

for the

## Dart Catchment



### Is your soil ready for winter?

After a phenomenally dry 12 months, the soil will have cracked and opened up in ways not seen for years. Some of these cracks will have reached field drains and should help with future drainage when the soil does fully wet up again. There is likely to be nitrogen sitting un-used in the topsoil, as grass and crop growth has not been able to reach planned yields. If we do now see a prolonged spell of wet weather the results will be interesting – so long as temperatures stay up, grass growth should hopefully mop up the available nitrate and the risks of leaching should be minimised.

At higher risk will be fields being drilled with winter cereals where crop-growth is unlikely to be enough to take up the available nitrate. In some cases, a safer option may be to leave a weedy stubble and opt for a spring cereal instead.

### Free Trees

Upstream Thinking Catchment Advisors are offering **FREE** native tree species to those in the catchment. If you are interested in receiving some free trees, please contact your advisor. These can be for new areas of woodland, or 'gapping' up hedges.

Here are some other thoughts on soil management to minimise nutrient and topsoil losses this autumn and winter:

- Maize — if harvest is late or wet, fields may be best left roughly ploughed across the slope, rather than rushing to establish grass or a cereal crop. Ploughed strips across a slope are better than nothing as they slow the flow of surface water.
- Late grass re-seeds are very vulnerable to soil wash so may be best left until the spring.
- Cereal stubbles usually survive the winter very well but if the field has compaction at plough depth, sub-soiling may be advantageous in a dry spell. Best to check with a spade, or ask for a visit from UST to assess soil structure.
- Fields that are at risk, such as grass re-seeds, maize stubbles, or autumn cereals can lose a lot of soil as surface wash (as opposed to erosion that shows up as gullies in the field). Soil wash shows itself as muddy water running out of the gateway. As an emergency measure, using straw bales across a gateway or on a track can trap a significant amount of sediment and prevent it from getting onto the road.
- Take a closer look—having a look at fields with a spade will help with decision-making. Regularly silaged fields are worth checking as they carry so much traffic, as well as fields in the arable rotation.
- Have a look after and during heavy rain—not a popular pastime but having a look at gateways, field edges, and watercourses during and after heavy rainfall events is the quickest way to see if you are losing any soil from your fields. It also shows up the pathways that transport soil onto roads and then usually into watercourses.

To discuss soil issues on your farm, contact Annabel on [annabel@wrt.org.uk](mailto:annabel@wrt.org.uk), 07805 773932.

## Machinery Ring

The Soil Aerator is available for loan free of charge in the Dart catchment. It is brilliant at reducing the impacts of soil compaction, increasing drainage potential and water filtration through to plant roots, ultimately improving plant growth. We also have a small seed drill which can be used to help establish herbal leys, a shake-aerator and other machinery which can be used in the catchment.

Please get in touch with Alex - [aworsley@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:aworsley@devonwildlifetrust.org)

## Free use of the Catchment Aerator and Soil Health Analysis

If you find you have compaction in the top layer of your soil (down to 15cm/6 inches), aerating and then resting the field can significantly improve soil health. The action of aerating damaged soils can improve infiltration, access to nutrients, water and oxygen, and in turn, improves crop yields. If you would like to use the catchment aerator, [please contact Alex Worsley at aworsley@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:aworsley@devonwildlifetrust.org)



Before requesting the aerator - it is important to first identify the depth at which there is a compaction problem – this can be done by digging out cubes of soil and determining any limiting layers. WRT offer free soil health analysis, if you are interested, [please contact Annabel or Wendy at annabel@wrt.org.uk or wendy@wrt.org.uk](mailto:annabel@wrt.org.uk)

## Catchment Sensitive Farming returns to the Dart!

We are very pleased to inform you that Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF), has returned to the Dart catchment for the first time since 2015. Certain Countryside Stewardship options will be open to farmers within the catchment but will require sign-off by a CSF officer. These include things like roofing (option RP28 £62/m<sup>2</sup>), concrete (option RP15 £27.14m<sup>2</sup>) and tracks (option RP4 £33/m), as well as some in field revenue payments such as arable reversion (option SW7). The application process can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution> and applications should be sent to: [csf.devoncornwall@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:csf.devoncornwall@naturalengland.org.uk)

Additionally, the new Slurry Infrastructure grants should be available this autumn for new stores, covers, and equipment such as pumps. Annabel is able to help with advice on yard infrastructure and can help with an application to CSF or the Slurry Infrastructure grant scheme – [annabel@wrt.org.uk](mailto:annabel@wrt.org.uk)

## Pesticide Amnesties

Find out if you are eligible for our free and confidential farm Pesticide Amnesty scheme in the Dart, Exe, Fowey, Otter, Roadford, Tamar & Tavy UpstreamThinking catchments.

Contact [melanie@wrt.org.uk](mailto:melanie@wrt.org.uk) (or your WRT farm advisor if known)

## Free Fertiliser Spreader Calibration – February 2023



WRT are planning to run a free fertiliser spreader calibration event under the Upstream Thinking Project. The event is planned for February 2023 – final date and venue yet to be confirmed. You will need to bring your machinery to the specified location where there will be a calibration contractor carrying out the service. Once we know attendance numbers, we will send out an email with dates and the location.

Please get in touch with [annabel@wrt.org.uk](mailto:annabel@wrt.org.uk) to let us know if you would like to participate in the event.

## Farming Rules for Water – Update

In order to prevent manures, fertilisers and soil getting into water courses, please follow the Farming Rules for Water, which have been in place since 2018. Many of you will be aware the restrictions that were in place for autumn/winter 2021 have been amended. The details of which can be found at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rules-for-farmers-and-land-managers-to-prevent-water-pollution#environmental-benefits> and
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-the-farming-rules-for-water/applying-the-farming-rules-for-water>

Please be aware most dirty water and parlour washings are now considered as slurry. All farm waste applications will require a crop need justification.

In summary, the rules are based on the following:

1. You must take steps to prevent manure, fertiliser and soil getting into watercourses
2. Assess pollution risk (ground cover, slope angle, soil type and condition, land drains and distance from watercourses/coastal waters/springs, wells, boreholes)
3. Soil test every 5 years
4. Adhere to rules about:
  - Applying fertiliser and reducing associated pollution, particularly on fields with high phosphate indices.
  - Using and storing manure
  - Preventing erosion – managing livestock and soil

## Sustainable Farming Incentive – Improved Grassland Soils standard may be worth a try

WRT have conducted some analysis of the potential costs and savings of implementing the Improved Grassland Soil standard of the SFI. The results show that a 60-hectare farm could potentially earn a net income of £1520 per year for entering the introductory level and a possible £4260 a year from entering the intermediate level. The requirements of each level are shown below:

The introductory level actions are:

1. complete a soil assessment and produce a soil management plan
2. test soil organic matter
3. minimise bare ground by having no more than 5% of the total area of land entered into the standard left bare over winter

The intermediate level actions are:

1. complete a soil assessment and produce a soil management plan
2. test soil organic matter
3. minimise bare ground by having no more than 5% of the total area of land entered into the standard left bare over winter
4. establish and maintain herbal leys on at least 15% of land in this level of the standard

If you are interested in considering the SFI, which can usually be implemented alongside existing schemes then [please ask for help from Annabel](mailto:annabel@wrt.org.uk)  
[annabel@wrt.org.uk](mailto:annabel@wrt.org.uk)

## Soil Samples and Soil Health Pits

As in previous years, WRT are offering free soil samples for 6 fields, this includes P, K, Mg, pH and Soil Organic Matter. We can also offer some soil health pit analysis, if you would like to ascertain if you have any compaction issues on the farm. Please contact [annabel@wrt.org.uk](mailto:annabel@wrt.org.uk) or [wendy@wrt.org.uk](mailto:wendy@wrt.org.uk) if you would like to book in for this, we carry out this work during the autumn and spring. We are keen to see new faces for soil sampling but may be able to return and re-sample your farm if we haven't done so for 2-3 years.

## Species-rich Permanent Grassland Payments - GS6

If you have species-rich grassland, including wet grasslands such as rhos pasture, that isn't currently registered on Natural England's 'MAGIC' maps as Priority Habitat, you will likely be ineligible for the higher payments that can be accessed currently through the option GS6: Management of species-rich grassland. In the current Countryside Stewardship (both Mid-tier and Higher-tier) payments for GS6 are £182 per hectare and with supplements (for example GS15 - Haymaking supplement or SP6 - Cattle grazing supplement) these payments can be increased further. Comparatively, the other options for permanent agricultural grassland are GS2: Permanent grassland with very low inputs (outside SDAs) pay £132 per hectare, whereas if you are with the Severely Disadvantaged (SDA) area (most of Dartmoor) the option would be GS5: Permanent grassland with very low inputs in SDAs, a payment of £71 per hectare.

To have your land mapped as Priority Habitat a survey is needed of the sward and vegetation present. The data and extent of the area will then be mapped for use in informing Rural Payments Service decisions on awarding options such as GS6 in next year's applications. It is considered highly likely that the same process will be required when the new Environmental Land management Schemes are fully rolled out. As such if you wish to access the potential for higher payments on species-rich grassland it is recommended that you have any species-rich parcels mapped as Priority Habitat as soon as possible, as the process can take some time before the Rural Payments Agency are able to access it.

If you have potentially species-rich grassland and would like it surveyed for accessing higher payments in current and future agri-environment schemes [please contact Alex at aworsley@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:aworsley@devonwildlifetrust.org)

## Get in touch

Upstream Thinking 3 is delivered by Westcountry Rivers Trust and Devon Wildlife Trust in your area. The project will run until 2025. Its purpose is to improve water quality across the catchment and the team work with farmers in different ways to achieve this.



### **Dart**

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Visit [wrt.org.uk/project/upstream-thinking-3/](https://wrt.org.uk/project/upstream-thinking-3/)