

Upstream Thinking Newsletter

for the

Exe Catchment



Upstream Thinking in the Exe Catchment

Welcome to the latest update from the Upstream Thinking Project (UST) in the Exe catchment. This round runs until 2025. Since 2010 the rationale for this project is to improve water quality and biodiversity within the catchment. We will work with farmers in different ways to achieve this and you can find out what is available on the following pages.

Please check out the back page for our contact details.

What's On Offer

Confidential farm advice and farm plans — free visit from a farm advisor to offer advice on management of nutrients, soil, pesticides, yard infrastructure, watercourse management and habitats.

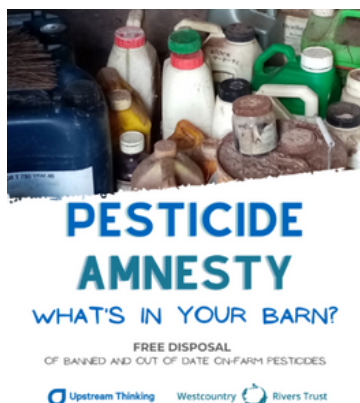


Soil Samples and Soil Health Pits

The Project can offer free and subsidised options for soil samples for 6 fields, this includes 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 your farm advisor. 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 resample your farm if we haven't done so for 2-3 years.

Free use of the Catchment Aerator and Soil Health Analysis

If you find you have compaction in the top layer of your soil (<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, improving crop yields. If you would like to use the catchment aerator please contact us.



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 Upstream Thinking catchments.

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

Visit wrt.org.uk/project/upstream-thinking-3/

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Faecal Egg Counting

A faecal egg count (FEC) counts the number of parasitic worm eggs in faeces (dung) and is used to monitor the worm burden in livestock. It is used as a tool to combat anthelmintic (worming products) resistance in livestock.

FWAG South West hold FEC events once a month at Cutcombe Market, Wheddon Cross as part of the Upstream Thinking Project. People can bring livestock dung samples and receive FEC training. Alternatively, we can do the count for you. These events run during the worm burden season from April to October. This season is weather dependant as parasitic worms typically prefer warm and moist conditions. Katie Bull from the University of Bristol Parasitology Lab is on hand at these events to offer her expertise. This year we've had a very successful season at Cutcombe with many keen attendees dropping in to get FEC training and some even ordering their own FEC kits from us to use on farm.

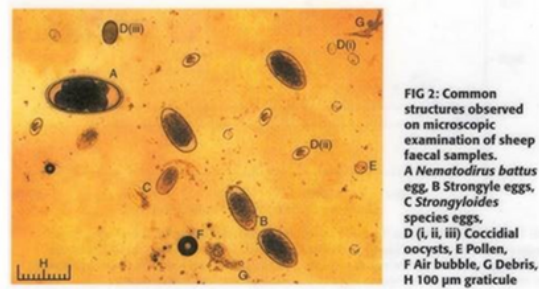


FIG 2: Common structures observed on microscopic examination of sheep faecal samples. A *Nematodirus battus* egg, B *Strongyle* egg, C *Strongyloides* species eggs, D (i, ii, iii) Coccidial oocysts, E Pollen, F Air bubble, G Debris, H 100 μ m graticule

The Veterinary Record, January 1, 2005

FECs use a representative dung sample from the flock/herd, preferably doing a separate sample for young stock and older stock. Older animals have developed immunity to the various parasitic worms and combining their dung with young stock dung will artificially raise the worm burden in the sample and give an inaccurate count.

Worm control in livestock is an important tool on farm, with obvious benefits to animal performance farm costs and soil health. Unfortunately, resistance to many anthelmintic products is increasing which raises concerns over their long-term effectiveness and means that increasing care is needed to promote their longevity. It is not too late to introduce FEC on farm and help safeguard the future of worm control.

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FECs can be used to identify if you need to treat, to assess for resistance, and to give information about the amount of contamination going onto pasture.

There are a variety of other management tools to help reduce parasitic worm burdens:

- Weaning young stock onto less heavily contaminated pasture helps to avoid the high levels of infection on pastures grazed with their mothers since turnout,
- Mixed grazing and reduced stocking numbers reduces the density of host species (sheep and cattle worms are different species),
- Ensuring livestock are maintained at a good body score as livestock under nutritional stress are less able to withstand challenges from internal parasites,
- Consider growing forage shown to reduce the negative effects of parasites such as birdsfoot trefoil.

For those with FEC training, there is microscope and FEC equipment that can be borrowed from the Upstream Thinking Project, please contact Áine Corrigan or Katherine Williams for more details. Microscopes and Mini-Flotac FEC equipment are also available for purchase, with subsidised rates available for those in the Headwaters of the Exe Project area. For more information, [please contact Áine by email aine.corrigan@fwagsw.org.uk](mailto:aine.corrigan@fwagsw.org.uk) or phone 07557 094029.

Upstream Thinking Grants

The application window is now open. Previous successful applications have funded for scrub removal, ditch and pond restoration, natural flood management measures, water course fencing, guttering and tanks, tracks, gateway resurfacing, mire and habitat restoration for example. Typically grants are up to £5000 but can be higher for larger infrastructure projects, (averaging £3000) at a 50% rate. Grants are available from DWT and WRT. Please get in touch with your ideas.



Meadow creation and restoration

We have lost 97% of our nations hay meadows which is having a huge impact on the numbers of pollinators and water quality. If you are interested in restoring or creating a wildflower meadow, however big or small, please get in touch with the UST team.

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Updates / things to think about:

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:
 - a. Applying fertiliser and reducing associated pollution, particularly on fields with high phosphate indices.
 - b. Using and storing manure
 - c. Preventing erosion – managing livestock and soil

ELMS – Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) Improved Grassland Soil Standard

The SFI (Sustainable Farming Incentive) scheme is now open to applications. SFI is the first of 3 new environmental schemes being introduced under the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). SFI aims to help farmers manage land in a way that improves food production and is more environmentally sustainable. In 2022, SFI aims to encourage actions that improve soil health, and for the new SFI Improved Grassland Standard payments will be made at either an Introductory level of £28 per hectare, or £58 per hectare for those joining the Intermediate level.



As part of the scheme you are expected to:

- Complete a soil assessment and produce a soil management plan
- Test soil for organic matter
- Minimise bare ground over winter
- Establish and maintain herbal leys (Intermediate level)

Upstream Thinking Catchment Advisors can help with:

- Assist with SFI applications
- Help with completing a soil assessment
- Help with producing a soil management plan
- Assist with soil organic matter testing
- Advise on herbal ley establishment and management
- Calculate the % of BPS reductions that can be made up by joining the current SFI standard

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Countryside Stewardship: Your last chance for this guaranteed income and capital investment opportunity

The River Exe catchment is a Priority area for Water Quality, so applicants are well placed to maximise the Scheme. Last year saw a reported 40% increase in applications with many attracted by the generally higher, payment rates. 2023 is the last year for Capital, Mid and Higher tier applications

Eligible existing high risk priority farms seeking Capital items and annual options needing approval by their local Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers can now come from Mid and High Priority areas for the first time in the Exe catchment.

The Grant Scheme has a number of options:

- Mid-Tier: A five-year scheme with capital and annual payments.
- Wildlife offer: A streamlined version of the Scheme.
- Higher Tier: A 5, 10 or in some cases 20 year Scheme. It covers the more environmentally significant sites, commons and woodlands. Preparation for applications need to commence now.
- Capital Grants: The maximum grant available for any application is now £60,000. However, there is a limit of £20,000 for certain items within this. New rolling application window.

Scheme details can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management>

A few top tips:

- Get in touch – free on farm advice and support with applications to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, Capital, Mid and Higher Tiers.
- February opening for the application window for Mid Tier and Higher Tier
- Commence planning early. Many of the options, such as orchards, and items, for example concreting, will need RPA recognition prior to the application window opening
- Make sure all your fields, yards and hedges are correctly registered and mapped with the RPA to be eligible for funding as soon as possible
- Expiring HLS agreements, Mid tier, and Higher tier are typically given the option to extend on a yearly basis
- Any agreements that have not expired before 2025 will be given the option to enter into the new E.L.M.S (Environmental Land Management Scheme) without penalty
- Farm Wildlife Package. These specific combinations will bring you ‘bonus’ points and are well worth considering in your application as each application is scored.

Slurry Infrastructure Grant

DEFRA have recently announced that they will be accepting applications to the **Slurry Investment Scheme this Autumn (2022) as part of the Farming Investment Fund**. This is for farmers interested in providing six months of slurry storage to improve the use of manures on agricultural land and to reduce the risk to watercourses from dilapidated storage facilities or being applied when conditions are poor such as when fields are saturated, or before heavy rain. Improved storage should reduce the use of artificial fertilisers.

Current Silage Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil regulations (SSAFO) require all stores to have a minimum of 4 months storage. There are exemptions to those store built before 1991 and so the Slurry Investment Fund is for an increase in storage capacity. **Grants will be available at 50% of costs for projects between £25,000 and £250,000**. The grant can be for new stores, extensions i.e. extra rings on a tank, lagoons and can be combined with on-site SAAFO compliant stores to ensure 6 months storage. Non-compliant or exempt stores must be decommissioned. All grant funded stores must also be fitted with an impermeable cover. This to prevent rainfall entering stores increasing storage capacity and to reduce air pollution.

Farmers can apply through a 2-stage process, starting with an online eligibility checker (opening in the autumn) followed by a full application (over the winter), but **demand is likely to be very high, so early planning is paramount**.

It is recommended that you:

- Start planning your storage capacity need.
- Thinking about what sort of store you might build.
- Choosing where on the farm to put your store.
- Checking if you need to apply for planning permission.
- And essentially to get early support from the Environment Agency.



Recent catchment inspections by the EA have shown an infrastructure failure rate of up to 95% in some catchments in the SW and combined with pressure from Red Tractor will mean some farmers will need to upgrade their slurry storage. Consider this scheme and other means of support from Countryside Stewardship (CS) and Upstream Thinking (UST).

There is free advice under the Upstream Thinking Project offering guidance on slurry storage including full infrastructure audits, calculating on farm slurry storage requirements, help with the Slurry Investment Scheme, CS Capital Grants and signposting to advice funding opportunities.

We look forward to working with you over the coming years, and please feel free to 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.



Exe

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