

Catchment management in practice

Factors to consider on your farm

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What are the factors to consider on your farm?

65% of our drinking water comes from rivers, while the rest comes from groundwater.

The use of pesticides and fertilisers on farms can affect the quality of this water. We treat water to make sure it is safe to drink, but it's a complicated process.

Preventing pollution is more sustainable than using expensive and energy-intensive treatment processes to clean water. That's why we're:

Raising awareness of the problems



Partnering with local organisations to deliver projects

Funding research into solutions

Working with farmers and agronomists in high-risk areas



Pesticides used on crops and nitrate from fertiliser can reach watercourses in many ways. You can help to reduce their impact by considering how this happens at a catchment, field and farmvard level.

Your catchment

Water quality depends on a range of factors from soil type and geology of the landscape to weather patterns and farming practices. These factors can vary greatly from catchment to catchment, and from farm to farm. Identifying the risks that apply to your land and implementing measures to minimise them can help improve water quality in your area.

Is your farm inside a Drinking Water Safeguard Zone or Nitrate Vulnerable Zone? In these designated areas, the use of certain pesticides, fertilisers and/or manure must be carefully managed to prevent pollution.

The next step

- Find out if your farm is in a designated area and what the local water quality issues are
- Ask your agronomist, Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer, the Environment Agency, or your local farm advisor for help
- Contact us to find out more: catchment.management@thameswater.co.uk

Your fields

Fields with heavy soil types, like clay, are susceptible to waterlogging and compaction. Both of these factors can result in rapid runoff of both water and pollutants to local watercourses.

Although underdrainage can help to remove excess water from your field, it also provides another pathway for pollutants to reach the river. If your field is on a slope, any runoff or drainflow will reach the watercourse even faster, and if livestock have access to the river, they can directly affect water quality.

The next step

- Establish and maintain appropriate buffer zones between your field and nearby watercourse
- Create tramlines across, rather than down, your field
- Avoid applying pesticides and fertilisers when heavy rain is forecast or when field drains are flowing
- Fence off riverbanks to stop livestock entering the watercourse

Your farmyard

Chemical storage and manure storage can both present a risk to water quality if not located and managed carefully.

Washings from rinsing chemical containers or sprayers, cleaning protective clothing or equipment, or drips and spills from filling areas are a risk to water quality, especially if they enter drains, which may be a fast route to local watercourses. All washings should be collected and disposed of safely, such as through a special filtration system like a biobed or biofilter.

The next step

- Set up a bunded chemical storage area in a secure location, away from public access and waterways, and keep a clear record of all the products inside
- Establish bunded filling areas to handle chemical spills or splashes, with contained drainage, biobeds or biofilters to collect any washings
- Follow the instructions on product labels to dispose of chemical waste and empty bags and containers safely (if you're unsure, contact the manufacturer or seek guidance from a licensed waste disposal contractor). Always keep a spill kit close to hand, and know whom to contact in an emergency
- Store manure at least 10m away from surface water and land drains, at least 50m from springs, wells and boreholes, and under cover between 1 October and 1 April each year

Catchment management - helping to keep your drinking water clean



Catchment management is all about collaboration. It relies on land managers and water managers working together to ensure their respective needs of crop production and the provision of drinking water can be met, without damaging the environment.

The Thames Water catchment



To find out more email:

catchment.management@thameswater.co.uk