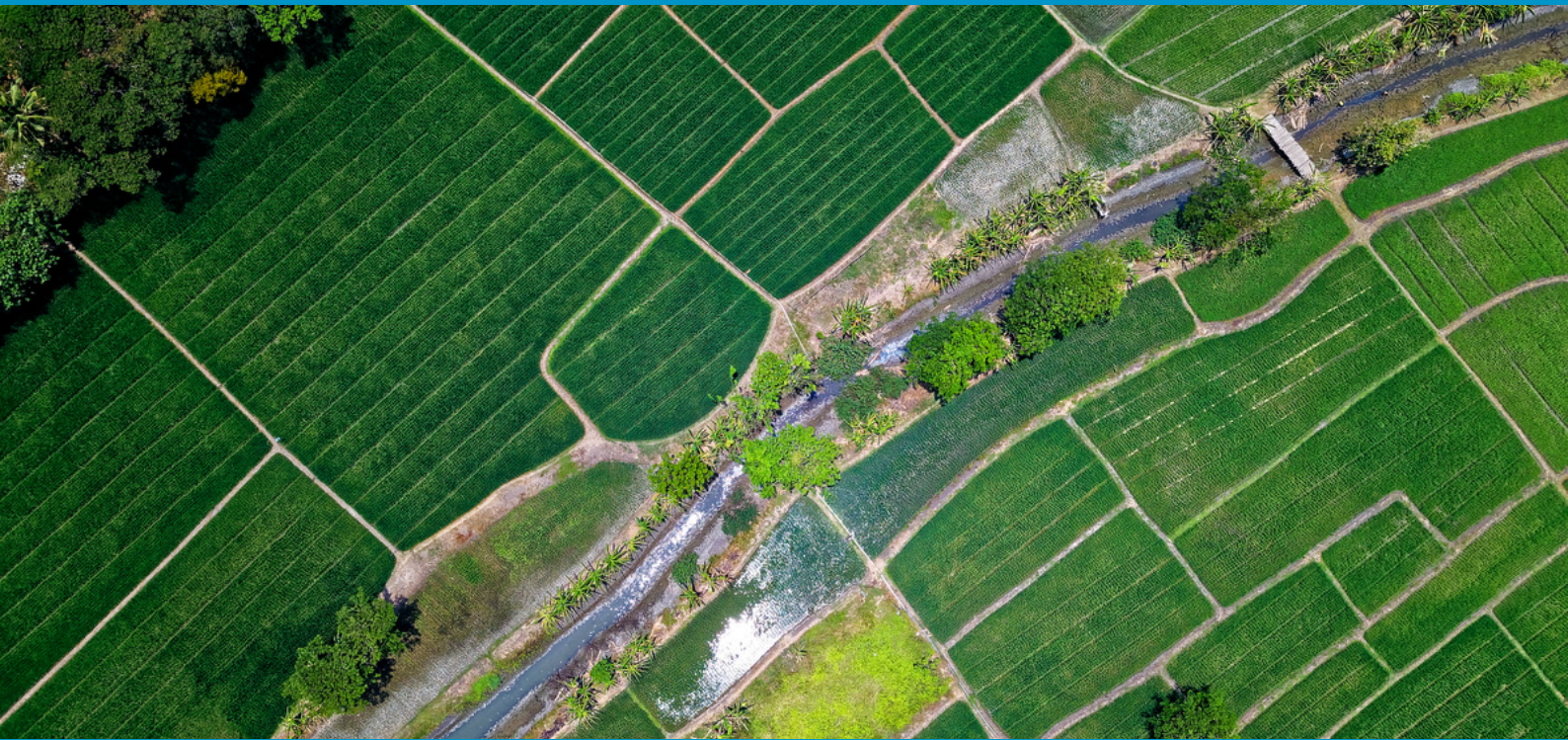


December 2024

Scoping Exercise for Content & Delivery of Water-Friendly Farming Course

in partnership with the Ulster Farmers Union



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Who We Are

The Rivers Trust (TRT) is the leading environmental charity dedicated to protecting and restoring river environments across Northern Ireland, Ireland and Britain.

Focusing on freshwater protection and improvement, TRT uses science-based approaches and community empowerment to enhance biodiversity, improve water quality, and engage multiple state and non-government organisations, as well as the public, in conservation efforts.

In Northern Ireland and Ireland, The Rivers Trust operates with a dedicated All-Ireland team that coordinates the efforts of several catchment-scale projects and schemes, including the Sustainable Catchment Programme, and supports the work of 21 local Trusts.

This regional specialisation enables TRT to address unique ecological and hydrological challenges across diverse catchments. The All-Ireland team enhances TRT's capacity to implement local projects while maintaining a cohesive strategy aligned with broader environmental objectives.

TRT's local expertise is critical for successfully delivering the Sustainable Catchment Programme (SCP). This initiative focuses on improving water quality and agricultural practices by directly engaging farmers and landowners to implement tailored water management solutions through non-regulatory farm advice and support.

By crafting bespoke Water and Environment Management Plans (WEMPs) for each participant, TRT ensures that conservation efforts are both effective and sustainable.

TRT's expertise in hydrology, ecology, catchment management and community engagement makes it uniquely positioned to lead the SCP. The organisation's long-standing relationships with local communities, governmental bodies, and environmental experts facilitate collaborative approaches to environmental challenges.

Moreover, TRT's ability to scale successful models from local pilots to broader applications underscores its capability to drive significant environmental improvements across Northern Ireland, the border counties and Ireland.

Through dedicated teams and strategic partnerships, The Rivers Trust continues to champion the health of rivers and catchments, fostering resilient ecosystems and communities to work together for freshwater health.

If you would like to find out more about the work of The Rivers Trust, go to www.theriverstrust.org

Water-friendly farming course

Introduction to Feedback from the UFU Data and Information Session

On 10 December 2024, The Rivers Trust hosted a data and information session in collaboration with the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) at The Royal Hotel in Cookstown. This session served as a platform to explore the opportunities and challenges of delivering a water-friendly farming course for farmers across Northern Ireland, with a target rollout date of March 2025. The discussion brought together representatives from both organisations to align on shared goals and aspirations for the future of farming and the freshwater environment.

The Rivers Trust and the UFU share a common vision: to empower farmers to reduce their impact on rivers and the freshwater environment, enhance habitats and biodiversity, and deliver tangible financial and social benefits to farm businesses. By integrating environmental stewardship into daily farming practices, we aim to promote sustainability while also driving economic resilience and public health improvements for Northern Ireland's society as a whole.

The Rivers Trust brings a wealth of experience, knowledge, and expertise to support the local farming community in achieving these goals. We are committed to working closely with the UFU and its members to co-develop and deliver practical, farmer-focused solutions to improve water quality, support biodiversity, and ensure long-term sustainability for farmers and their families. By fostering this partnership, we believe we can make meaningful progress that benefits farmers, local communities, and the environment alike.

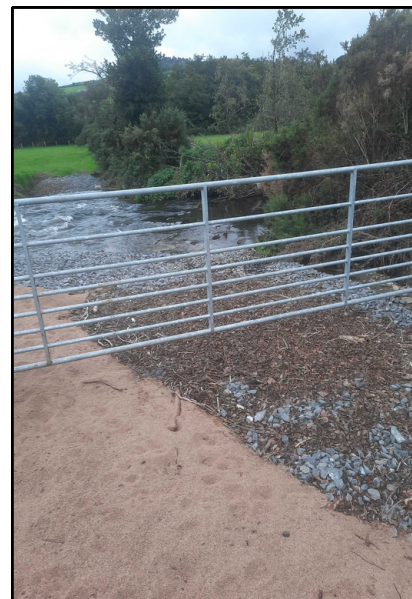
This feedback report summarises the insights and recommendations gathered during the session, highlighting both the opportunities and barriers identified by stakeholders. These findings will inform the development of a robust, accessible, and impactful training course tailored to meet the needs of Northern Ireland's farming community.



Agenda

Training needs of farmers

- What is already available for farmers in this area?
- What is the scope of a new training course – diffuse / point source, pollution pathways, sector specific.....
- What a new course should look like – what works well etc?
- Who is this aimed at?
- Funding
- Roll out
- Longevity / flexibility to adapt to new requirements / changing circumstances



Training Needs of Farmers



What specific challenges do farmers in Northern Ireland face in managing water quality on their farms?

- Lack of understanding of pollution pathways, particularly soluble reactive phosphorus (SRP).
- Difficulty connecting measures to practical benefits.
- Diverse farm-specific conditions require tailored approaches.
- Farmers struggle with practical implementation despite awareness of problems.
- Understanding compliance for water quality versus active improvement.
- Understanding and using soil testing results

Are there particular knowledge gaps or misconceptions among farmers about diffuse and point-source pollution?

- Farmers can identify pollution pathways but often do not understand how certain measures mitigate these.
- Lack of awareness about the practical steps to "slow flow" over land.
- Cross-compliance checks are poorly understood.

Existing Resources and Gaps

What training or resources are already available to farmers in this area, and how effective have they been?

- Programs like Farming with Nature, Teagasc, and Source to Tap provide useful materials, including videos on pesticide handling.
- Hands-on "water animal" identification workshops have proven effective.
- Limited short, engaging video content is available.
- DAERA and CAFRE offer some resources, but gaps exist, particularly in farm-building-related topics.

Are there any existing partnerships or initiatives that could complement this new training course?

- Collaboration with organizations like UFU, Rivers Trust networks, and CAFRE.
- Potential to use existing databases and communication channels such as UFU text systems.



Scope and Content

Should the training focus on particular farming sectors (e.g., dairy, beef, arable), or should it be broad to accommodate all?

- Initial training should provide a broad foundation for all sectors.
- Sector-specific content can follow as a secondary phase.

What practical, on-farm solutions or technologies should be prioritized in the course content?

- Nutrient management planning to reduce pollution sources.
- Practical measures like riparian buffers, hedges, and tree planting.
- Collecting and separating clean and dirty water.
- Farm self-assessment tools and plans for environmental compliance.

Delivery and Audience

Who should the primary audience for this course be—farm owners, farm managers, or farm workers—and what format would best suit their needs?

- Audience: Farmers, workers, suppliers, and farm families.
- Format: Hybrid approach with face-to-face sessions, smaller group interactions, and supplementary online videos.
- Lifestyle and educational content for children to engage farm families effectively.

Funding and Rollout

What funding mechanisms are available, and how can we ensure the course is cost-effective and accessible for farmers?

- Match funding or sponsorship opportunities.
- Pay farmers to host visits, potentially using community halls for cost-effective delivery.

What partnerships or support from local councils, government bodies, or industry stakeholders could help roll out the course?

What funding mechanisms are available, and how can we ensure the course is cost-effective and accessible for farmers?

- Match funding or sponsorship opportunities.
- Pay farmers to host visits, potentially using community halls for cost-effective delivery.

Longevity and Flexibility

How can we design the course to remain adaptable to future environmental regulations and evolving farming practices?

- Modular approach using short videos for ease of updates.
- Self-assessment tools adaptable to new farming practices.
- Aligning content with evolving compliance and inspection standards.
- Continued collaboration with stakeholders to refresh materials.

Action points

1. Develop Core Content and Modular Resources

- Focus on practical solutions such as nutrient management, pollution pathway reduction, and riparian buffers.
- Include foundational training for all farming sectors with sector-specific modules to follow.
- Design simple, clear materials tailored to farm-specific needs.

2. Incorporate Multiple Delivery Methods

- In-person, classroom-based training in community halls or on farms.
- An app for mobile access to resources and interactive tools.
- Online modules with notifications via email or text.
- Short instructional videos.
- Printed leaflets or a booklet summarizing key points.
- Podcasts or audio content for easy on-the-go learning.
- Partner with farming publications to print course-related information.

3. Create Engaging and Accessible Digital Content

- Short, engaging videos (e.g., 5-minute clips) hosted on platforms like YouTube and TikTok.
- Use QR codes on printed materials to link to videos or resources.
- Design content for easy access within three clicks, ensuring relevance and immediacy.

4. Target Audience Diversification

- Include farmers, workers, suppliers, and farm families as target audiences.
- Leverage children's influence through school events and youth agri-clubs.
- Tailor material for younger, tech-savvy farmers as well as older generations.

5. Leverage Existing Partnerships and Resources

- Collaborate with organisations like DAERA, NIEA, CAFRE, UFU, and Rivers Trust networks.
- Reuse and adapt materials from initiatives like Farming with Nature, Source to Tap, and Teagasc.
- Build on the success of existing hands-on workshops, such as "water animal" identification.

Action points

6. Adopt Incentive Models to Drive Engagement

- Explore "carrot-and-stick" approaches, such as reduced penalties or inspection exemptions for course participants.
- Highlight financial benefits through cost-benefit analysis and compliance assurance.

7. Ensure Course Longevity and Adaptability

- Use modular, short-form videos for easy updates as regulations and practices evolve.
- Include self-assessment tools to help farmers gauge their progress and compliance.
- Build flexibility into the course to address future changes in farming and environmental policies.

8. Promote the Course Effectively

- Use social media influencers and farming networks to reach a broad audience.
- Employ text messaging systems aligned with UFU group catchments for targeted communication.
- Schedule messages to align with relevant farming seasons or issues.

9. Establish a Clear Project Timeline

- By Christmas: Finalise draft course specification and materials.
- Early 2025: Put the project out for tender and select delivery partners.
- Mid-2025: Pilot the course in selected catchments and refine based on feedback.

10. Secure Funding and Plan Rollout

- Seek match funding or sponsorship from stakeholders.
- Engage community groups to host sessions, reducing costs associated with venues.
- Develop a phased rollout plan starting with high-priority areas and expanding geographically.

Potential structure of course:

We suggest that the UFU conduct a short members' survey to gather feedback from farmers on the specific areas they would like the course to cover, ensuring the content is tailored to their needs and priorities. This survey would also provide an excellent opportunity to promote the upcoming course, gauge interest in sign-up, and gain valuable insights into the preferred delivery methods, helping to maximise engagement and effectiveness.

1. Why care about water on the farm?

Example topics:

- An introduction to healthy versus unhealthy rivers.
- How rivers connect the land and the “Catchment Based Approach”.
- The importance of rivers to drinking water/wildlife/community.
- The significance of agriculture for river health.

2. The journey of water on a farm

- How does water move through a farm?
- What are some common problem areas?

3. Simple things you can do to protect water and the farm business

Example topics:

- Manage nutrients
- Keep animals out of water
- Break pathways
- Separate clean and dirty water

4. Contact a farm advisor – what we do on a visit.



Course name ideas

- The Water-Friendly Farming: Balancing Productivity and Sustainability
- Growing with Care: Water Management Strategies for Sustainable Farming
- Farm Smarter, Not Harder: Water-Conscious Agricultural Practices
- Smart Water Farming
- From Field to Stream: Sustainable Farming for Healthy Waterways
- STREAM - Sustainable Techniques for Resilient Environmental Agriculture Models



Useful tools and resources:

The following links are a collection of tools for nutrient management on farms or contain materials that may be used to inform the development of the course:

- <https://adas.co.uk/services/farmscoper>
- <https://adas.co.uk/projects/planet-and-manner-npk/>
- <https://planet4farmers.co.uk/Content.aspx?name=PLANET>
- <https://ahdb.org.uk/slurry-wizard>
- <https://farming.earthwatch.org.uk/pages/programme-packages>
- <https://www.teagasc.ie/environment/water-quality/farming-for-water-quality-assap/assap-in-detail>
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution>
- <https://theriverstrust.org/our-work/our-projects/pinpoint>
- [Basis-reg.co.uk](https://basis-reg.co.uk)
- <https://aghub.catchmentbasedapproach.org/>

Water-friendly farming

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