



Title of presentation: Sustainable nitrogen management in agriculture in the Walloon region

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Name: Nelly MERCIER, senior auditor

Summary of the presentation

1. Introduction

In order to contain the increase of agricultural nitrogen in groundwater and in surface waters, the Walloon Region government launched its first programme on sustainable nitrogen management in agriculture in 2002 (PDGA I) and its second programme in 2007 (PDGA II). The programmes transpose the provisions of Council Directive 91/676/EEC of December 12, 1991 concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources. The measures that have been approved within the PGDA II-framework are also part of the conditionality requirements each farmer must comply with in order to obtain aid from Europe.

The efficiency evaluation of the impact of the approved measures can only be performed in the long run. Nevertheless, published results on water pollution remain alarming, as they show that nitrogen contamination of groundwater in the Walloon area is spreading.

2. Audit objectives and methodology

Three main objectives:

- to assess the implementation of different measures,
- to analyze the transposition of the provisions of Council Directive 91/676/EEC,
- to verify the subsidization mechanism of the bringing into compliance of storage facilities for livestock manure.

3. Methodology

The methodology mainly consists in:

- analysing the legal framework,
- analysing the implementation of the measure controls,
- analysing the evaluation reports related to water pollution in the Walloon region,
- exploiting management databases.

4. Measures taken within the PGDA II-framework

The regulatory requirements is a set of measures that must prevent an excessive presence of nitrogen in water.

4.1. Observance of maximal manure spreading standards

In order to qualify for some agricultural support schemes related to manure spreading, farmers have to ensure that the quantity of spreadable organic nitrogen on their farm does not exceed their farm's spreading capacity. Each farmer have to dispose of sufficiently large areas of land for spreading organic fertilizers without environmental risks. This commitment is checked on the basis of the principle of "the soil binding rate".

Administrative checks of this rate are performed in all farms. However, only half of the farms that do not comply with the regulations are being sanctioned by a reduction in aid. Moreover, farmers who do not claim aid currently escape censure. Although administrative sanctions can be imposed under the

provisions of the Environmental Code, these farms enjoy a complete immunity from punishment despite the enormous quantities of nitrogen they produce.

4.2. Compliance with the spreading scheme

In order to reduce the soil binding rate to an adequate value, the farmer can conclude “spreading agreements” with other farmers. The quantities of manure contractually exchanged are essential to determine the soil binding rate for each farm. In 2008, the quantity of nitrogen subject to spreading agreements represented 12% of the total quantity of nitrogen produced in Wallonia. However, there is no control of the actual existence of those agreements.

Furthermore, in vulnerable areas, the “potentially leachable nitrogen” allows to follow-up the quantity of nitrogen present in the soil in the form of nitrate. But in 2009, only 3% of the concerned farms were controlled.

4.3. Sufficient storage capacity for livestock manure

Having a sufficient storage capacity for livestock manure is a basic condition for complying with the spreading scheme. It was impossible to determine how many farms are still equipped with non-complying facilities.

No inventory was drawn up before starting to subsidize the work aimed at bringing those facilities into compliance. Mid-August 2010, only 28 % of the farms producing nitrogen in Wallonia possessed an attestation of compliance for their storage facilities for livestock manure.

5. Conclusion

The PGDA-concept is an ambitious tool and its content complies with European requirements. Nevertheless, the Walloon administration hasn't done everything in its power to change farmers' behaviour in nitrogen management matters. For some measures, the possibilities for performing controls are not used in an efficient way; for other measures the controls carried out lack true effectiveness because sanctions are not imposed in all infringement cases.

Key regulations :

- Council Directive 91/676/EEC of 12 December 1991 concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources;
- European Regulation 1698/2005 that defines a single framework for rural development aid by the EAFRD Regulation, article 26, § 1;
- Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programs on the environment;
- Community guidelines for State aid in the agriculture and forestry sector 2007 to 2013;
- Water Code of the Walloon region.

Reference of publication :

Website <http://www.ccrek.be/EN/Publications.htm>

An e-copy of the original report in French is available at:
<http://www.ccrek.be/EN/PublicationsWalloonRegion.htm>

An e-copy of the abstract in English is available at:
http://www.ccrek.be/docs/Reports/2011/2011_40_SustainableNitrogenManagement_Abstract.pdf

An e-copy of the abstract in Dutch is available at:
http://www.ccrek.be/docs/Reports/2011/2011_40_DuurzaamStikstofbeheer_AbstractNL.pdf