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## Livestock farmers to take full force of NVZ changes

Livestock farmers will feel the most pain in regard to defra's new Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ) proposals, warns Nick Steed, environmental consultant with Brown & Co.

First introduced in England in 1996, NVZs sought to reduce the nitrate level in water originating from agriculture with the aim of achieving a target level suggested by the World Health Organisation.

Defra's recently announced new NVZ rules are expected to be laid before Parliament in September. While the extent of the zones has been further increased, this time from 55% to 70% of England, the proposals are set to hit the livestock sector in three ways; by reducing the total organic nitrogen loading on the farm, significantly increasing 'closed periods' when spreading cannot take place, and extending the mandatory storage requirements for slurry.

"Dairy farmers are likely to encounter problems meeting the proposed maximum limit of 170kg Nitrogen per ha for organic manures applied over their whole farm," warns Nick Steed, who is based at Brown & Co's Norwich office. "They are expected to export the surplus off the farm or reduce cow numbers – however profit margins may not allow it. Smaller farms, majoring on livestock, may have too few hectares to carry it. There is talk of Defra applying to Brussels for a derogation to allow a higher limit for grassland."

Expansion of the 'closed period' means poultry and pig producers will not be able to spread manures on arable land between October 1 and mid-January. With all soil types now included, this is a huge increase in the land area affected necessitating farms to increase their storage capacity.

While most traditional straw based farmyard manure from dairy, beef and pig units will escape the net, Nick Steed warns producers with slurry systems and, to a certain extent poultry manures, will incur considerable expense providing mandatory on-farm storage for 22 weeks (dairy) or 26 weeks (pigs and poultry) of annual production. The NFU calculates it could cost £50,000 per farm.

Arable farmers, not producing or using animal manures, have little to fear from the new nitrogen fertiliser proposals. A revised RB209 Fertiliser Recommendations Handbook is due to be launched later this year. However, with huge price increases in all fertilisers, triple superphosphate and muriate of potash at close to £600 per tonne, Nick Steed believes growers will not want to waste as much as a kilo and will welcome a more precise approach.

"The industry awaits with interest, and some trepidation, the final form of the new NVZ action plans," he says. "As always, the devil will be in the detail. We must hope farmers are not inhibited from doing what they do best – continuing to produce top quality food for a rapidly increasing world population."

## **ENDS**

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### ***Notes to editors***

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