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Biobeds – the future for managing farmyard pesticide run-off?

The use of an on-farm biobed to remove up to 90% of pesticide residue in run-off from sprayer filling and washdown areas, is an investment many farmers are making across England. First used in Sweden in the 1990's, biobeds contain a mixture of soil, compost and straw, which work together to absorb and degrade dilute pesticides over time.



Photo illustrations of an offset (above) and direct (below) biobed.



Biobeds can be designed to be either: a) offset – where a separate bunded concrete area is used for sprayer filling and any liquid is drip-fed onto an adjacent biobed: or b) direct – whereby a mesh grid covers the biobed, which can be driven over and any liquid then falls directly onto the biobed below.

With many farmers and land managers having the necessary materials to fill the bed initially, the beds themselves will cost very little to maintain once established.

The Partnership has funding to install a demonstration biobed within the Chelmer and Blackwater catchment. Events will be held throughout the process and water quality sampling of the influent and effluent will take place so that lessons can be learnt about its design, installation, functioning and efficiency, which can then inform decisions across the catchment. Keep an eye out for regular updates in our newsletters and event flyers.

In this issue:

Biobeds
Catchment Water Quality
New Catchment Advisor
Grandfather Rights
Plan for March 2011–13
Future Events

What has been found in the rivers of the catchment this spring?

- **Propyzamide (eg. Kerb):** During January and February, this herbicide has been found at high levels in all rivers across the catchment. Propyzamide is the active ingredient in Kerb.
- **Metoldehyde:** Levels of metoldehyde have been at low levels across the catchment for the majority of the spring, with the only exceptions being Sandon Brook at Little Baddow Ford and River Can at Chignal St James.
- **Clopyralid (eg. Shield):** The only high incidence of clopyralid was at the River Chelmer at North End in February.
- **Carbetamide (eg. Crawler):** High levels of carbetamide were found at three places over the last three months, including: Chelmer at North End, Pant at Bocking and the River Ter at Hatfield Peverel.
- **Bentazone (eg. Basagran):** Detected most frequently in the River Can at Chignal St James with a couple of peaks.

Your New Catchment Advisor

Teresa Meadows has now taken over as the new Chelmer and Blackwater Catchment Advisor. As a farmer's daughter with a background in agri-environment schemes and agricultural practices, she is looking forward to meeting and working with you in the catchment.



Don't forget...Grandfather Rights for pesticide application will be ending soon!

We are holding a FREE PA4S training session on 9th June and will be running more in the autumn – if you would like to book your place or register interest, please reply using the enclosed response postcard.

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Have you got an idea for an event that we could run? Would you like to receive free training on a particular subject? Fill in the response postcard to let us know, so that we can arrange it!

Chelmer & Blackwater Strategic Partnership renewed

Commitment has been made by Essex & Suffolk Water, the Environment Agency and Natural England to continue the Catchment Sensitive Farming Strategic Partnership until March 2013. The original agreement between the three partners came to an end on 31st March 2011, following a very successful two years. Across the catchment, farmers from over 150 holdings have attended workshops, benefited from free on-farm, one-to-one advice visits and taken part events such as a tour of Hanningfield Water Treatment Works and fertiliser spreader and pellet calibration days.

With increased awareness of the issues with pesticides, nitrates and phosphates in the Chelmer and Blackwater catchment, supported by evidence gained from water quality sampling across the catchment and at our on-farm demonstration plot, plus input from the Steering Group, a plan has been put together for the next two years. The programme until 2013 will continue to provide free visits, workshops and events, as well as funding a demonstration biobed and providing access to a targeted capital grants scheme...look out for more information in the next newsletter!

Upcoming Events

- 9th June – Free PA4S training session – Book now by contacting Teresa on 07792 169545.
- 21st & 28th June – Open Days at Throws Farm, Dunmow, Essex
- Latest events will be published on our website: www.chelmerandblackwater.org.uk or phone Teresa on 07792 169545.

Look out for the next catchment newsletter: Summer 2011