

Decreasing nutrient leaching at country and county level in Sweden

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Abstract Focus on Nutrients is a national advisory and information project in Sweden, driven as a joint venture between the Swedish Board of Agriculture, the County Administration Boards, the Federation of Swedish Farmers and a number of advisory organisations. It aims to provide farmers with the knowledge and tools to cost-effectively reduce nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) losses from agricultural land, through a combination of free advisory services at farm level, courses, seminars, field activities and information. Advice is given on fertilisation and nutrient balances, tillage practices, animal nutrition, livestock housing, manure storage, buffer strips along streams and wetlands. Focus on Nutrients was introduced in southern Sweden in 2001, and extended further north during 2005. In southern counties the project includes between 36-65% of arable land, whereas in more northerly counties it covers only 6-19%. In the period 1995-2005, a total decrease in N (24%) and P (14%) load to the seas was estimated to have occurred. The majority of the N reduction was from agricultural land and was attributed to farmers growing considerably more catch crops, delaying soil tillage until spring, and using N more efficiently. These findings agree well with data from farms within Focus on Nutrients. The project is expected to contribute a substantial proportion of the further N reduction needed to achieve the target agreed within the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

In the county of Östergötland, Focus on Nutrients started in 2005. It now covers 19% of arable land and 238 farmers have received 658 individual farm visits. A reduction in surplus nutrients cannot yet be demonstrated at county level, as it takes some years to implement and measure the effect of individual advisory sessions and actions at farm level.