

## **Critical evaluation of the first 15 years of the Nitrate Directive: results, failures and urgent tasks**

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It is now 18 years since the European Union passed the Nitrates Directive, aimed at protecting surface and subsurface waters in EU countries. It is therefore worth reviewing the progress made in recent years in achieving the aims of this major agricultural and environmental regulation. A comparison of changes in the nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) balances of the EU15 and NEU10 countries and in the P supplies of the soils over the last 15 years will be used for this purpose.

The negative NP balances and worsening NP status in CEE countries, including those which have recently joined the EU (NEU12), may result in increasingly low yields and in economic and agronomic problems. These trends are in sharp contrast to the practices in some of the EU15 countries, where strongly positive NP balances and oversupplies with NP may lead to environmental and ecological threats, though, there is evidence that the level of oversupply in many of these countries is on the decline.

Co-operation within the European Union should help to solve both the environmental threat facing the Western part of the community, and the agronomic and economic problems in the Central and Eastern part.