



Managing healthy grasslands on farms

Worksheet to assist ACRES advisors/farmers

There are many **different types of grasslands** that can be found on farmland in Ireland – ‘improved’ grasslands (ryegrass- dominated), permanent pastures, meadows, semi-natural grasslands, multi-species swards, wet grasslands...

This worksheet (and the associated video) provides an overview of general grassland management in relation to the ACRES actions: (a) low-input grassland and (b) extensively grazed pasture.

Workshop ideas for ACRES Advisors

1. Start by watching the short video on grassland management developed by Farming For Nature ([link here](#))
2. Ask farmers to think about (or write down) the different types of grassland they have on their farm – is it old pasture or has it been reseeded recently? Do some fields have more grasses and flowers than others? Does it vary from field to field, or is the grassland similar throughout the farm?
3. Ask farmers to think about what values beyond the obvious ones (for grazing and fodder production) these pastures might offer (a) for nature, (b) for the farm and (c) for themselves/their family/community (*some suggestions given below*)
4. Ask farmers to describe how they currently manage their grasslands – grazing regimes, stocking rates, cutting hay/silage, weed control etc...
5. Ask farmers to identify and describe any problems they are encountering with their grasslands – e.g. how are they at times of drought or flood, are there issues with ‘weeds’, etc.
6. Discuss the ACRES specifications and their purpose. Do they make sense to you, can you see them improving your grasslands?
7. Discuss any additional ways in which farmers can go ‘beyond ACRES’ to support more nature in their grasslands – e.g. fence off corners/field margins for wildlife, incorporate multi-species swards to reduce the need for artificial fertiliser, reduce stocking rate to minimise soil disturbance/compaction, change a grazing regime to facilitate healthier grass growth.
8. Ask farmers to think about (describe) one additional thing they might consider doing to help improve the condition of their grasslands.

Video Notes for ACRES Advisors: The benefits of healthy grassland on farms include:

1. For nature

Healthy, diverse grasslands can:

- Provide healthy habitats for wildlife (insects, ground-nesting birds)
- Improve soil structure and minimise soil erosion
- Improve soil health and biology
- Increase carbon capture
- Filter pollutants thus improving water quality down-stream

2. For the farm, the farming system & farmer's pocket

Healthy, diverse grasslands can:

- Improve soil stability and structure
- Reduce loss of nutrients from the farm and the need for costly external inputs
- Aid drought resistance and alleviate flood-risk
- Provide an additional income from result-based agri-environmental schemes like ACRES

3. For the farmer, their family & wider community

Healthy, diverse grasslands can:

- Provide personal joy in seeing nature and wildlife thrive
- Provide potential for farm visits, school tours, research – contributing towards the collective nature-friendly farming movement
- Minimise flood risk and improve water quality further downstream
- Help address our national climate and biodiversity crises
- Improve the nutritional value of the food that you consume and sell

For more information and resources on what you can do
to enhance your farm for nature go to

www.farmingfornature.ie