

Eight in 10 farmers benefit from working with government pollution advice service

Eight in 10 farmers receiving advice from the government's Catchment Sensitive Farming service have seen improvements in water quality on their land or benefited financially, a new report published today (14 October) shows.

Nearly 20,000 farms – equivalent to 34 per cent of England's total farmland – have received advice from CSF officers since the partnership between Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England began in 2006 in a drive to tackle water pollution from agriculture.

The [report published today](#) evaluates the first 12 years of the advice service, showing that participating areas have seen reductions in a number of agricultural pollutants – with nitrogen levels down by 4%, phosphorus levels down by 8%, and a 12.3% reduction in sediment.

Alongside improving water quality, farmers also reported seeing other benefits on their farm, such as an improved reputation after taking steps to become more environmentally friendly, or making savings on fertiliser costs by only applying the nutrients their soil actually needs.

For more than a decade the network of trained CSF advisers have helped farmers across the country implement more than 75,000 actions to reduce water pollution on their land – from changing the way they apply pesticides to building new infrastructure to preventing pollutants from reaching waterways.

Visiting South Acre Farm in York today, Environment Agency chair Emma Howard Boyd and Natural England chair Tony Juniper will see first-hand the measures being taken by dairy farmers Rachael and Paul Tompkins, who have worked with CSF advisers since 2017 and taken action to reduce the amount of slurry reaching the water on their land – including the construction of a new concrete yard and roofing for their farm's slurry separation system.

Environment Agency chair Emma Howard Boyd said:

The public are rightly appalled by water pollution incidents. Protecting our rivers, lakes and streams is a top priority for the Environment Agency.

It does not come as a surprise that farmers working to enhance and restore river catchments have also reported financial and reputational benefits.

Natural England chair Tony Juniper said:

If we are to conserve and improve the many beautiful rivers that are so iconic of England's wonderful landscapes, then farmers must play essential roles in making it happen.

Agriculture remains one of the main sources of poor water quality and that's why it is so important that we see positive change toward better farming practices.

The progress being made through the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme reveals how tangible improvements to the quality of our waterways can be achieved, bringing wider benefits to farmers, local communities and the wider public.

[Farmers and land managers can check out the available guidance to find out if their land is in a high priority area or get in touch with a local CSF officer](#) to access free training and advice on how to improve water quality.