

Assurance scheme will not cover grain produced using human sewage sludge

By [Caitriona Murphy](#)
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Grain produced using human sewage sludge will not be covered under the Irish Grain Assurance Scheme, it has emerged.

The technical committee of the Cereals Association of Ireland, which operates the grain assurance scheme, took the decision on Thursday morning.

Officials from the Food Safety Authority, Irish Grain and Feed Association, Department of Agriculture, Teagasc and the IFA are expected to formally ratify the decision this week.

There is concern over the serious lack of legislative control over the spreading of raw and treated sewage sludge on agricultural crops.

There is no definitive figure for how much land is spread with sewage sludge.

Meanwhile, with regards to forecasts for this year's harvest, Teagasc has warned that careful financial analysis is needed by farmers who are growing maize for sale.

Cost

Some 24,000ha of maize was grown in 2008 according to the latest figures from the Department of Agriculture. However, the cost of growing maize has increased by 18pc since last year, Teagasc warned. Very little progress has been made with sowing spring crops so far, but some winter wheat was sown in late February.

The Teagasc crop report advises farmers to give priority to sowing beans, spring wheat and malting barley. Growth in winter crops of wheat, oats and barley is backward and disease levels are variable, according to the report.

Winter barley has high levels of rhynchosporium in places while Septoria tritici is widespread at low levels in winter wheat but oat crops are generally clean.

Growers are being advised to wait for good soil conditions before sowing spring barley, oats, peas, oilseed rape, fodder beat and potatoes. Farmers are also warned to plan and estimate farm fertiliser requirements based on crop requirements and legislative allowances.

Fertilisers (N, P & K) prices have taken a large increase over the past two years. In the past 12 months, the cost of nitrogen fertilisers such as CAN and urea has increased by around 25pc.

The prices of P & K compounds (18-6-12 and 10-10-20) have increased in the region of 20pc.

Teagasc said even though fertiliser N had taken a significant increase in price, correct use of nitrogen was still a very profitable input.

- *Caitriona Murphy*