



# The National Agricultural Inspection Programme

Summary Report 2024

# Highlights/Key Findings



**2,598** initial farm inspections (GAP) were carried out by local authorities, more than double the number carried out in 2023. The target for 2025 is **4,500** farms to be inspected.



The increase in inspections is welcomed, however, local authorities must take stronger enforcement actions and carry out more follow-up inspections to confirm compliance.



The rate of non-compliance for the initial GAP inspections was **42%**.



The top two reasons for non-compliance were the control of soiled water and management of farmyard manure.



Local authorities conducted **576** follow-up GAP inspections of which **46%** were non-compliant.



In addition, **1,666** other (non-GAP) farm inspections were carried out on foot of planning applications, incidents and complaints.



A total of **1,746** enforcement actions were taken by local authorities. However, the level of prosecutions and cross-reporting is too low.



**149** farms were cross reported to DAFM for non-compliance, leading to penalties in BISS (Basic Income Support for Sustainability) payments.



DAFM carried out **621** inspections on behalf of the local authorities, **116** farms received penalties in BISS payments.



# Introduction

## National Agricultural Inspection Programme

The Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) is a key component of Ireland's strategy to protect water quality from agricultural pressures. Under the Fifth NAP, an enhanced compliance and enforcement framework is required, expanding the EPA's oversight role in relation to local authority agricultural inspections. The EPA's strategic focus is to increase the level of compliance and strengthen enforcement activity to reduce agricultural pressures on water quality. This will be achieved by increasing the number of agricultural inspections by local authorities, addressing non-compliances in a consistent manner, and taking appropriate enforcement actions. A key part of this approach is the implementation of the National Agricultural Inspection Programme (NAIP), which aims to establish a consistent, risk-based inspection framework across all local authorities. For 2024 and 2025, the EPA has assigned inspection targets to each local authority, using a risk-based methodology, focusing efforts in areas where agriculture significantly impacts on water quality. The NAIP aims to increase the initial number of GAP inspections being undertaken by local authorities in order to achieve the inspection target of 4,500 farms per annum by 2025, as outlined in the Water Action Plan 2024. This will be supported by comprehensive training, guidance, and resources for local authority inspectors.

The EPA will continue to focus its oversight role of local authorities to meet the objectives of the NAIP.

## Inspection findings

In 2024, the local authorities carried out 2,598 initial inspections under the GAP Regulations which is more than double the number of inspections completed in 2023 (1,137 inspections carried out in 2023). The rate of non-compliance for initial GAP inspections was 42% in 2024. The number of follow-up GAP inspections remained relatively consistent, with 576 conducted in 2024 versus 556 in the previous year. Compliance rates for follow-up inspections remained relatively stable for both years as 54% of farms were found to be compliant. The three local authorities that carried out the highest number of initial GAP inspections were Cork County (495), Meath (256), and Kilkenny (240). A breakdown of inspection activity by local authority in 2024 is presented in Figure 1 below.



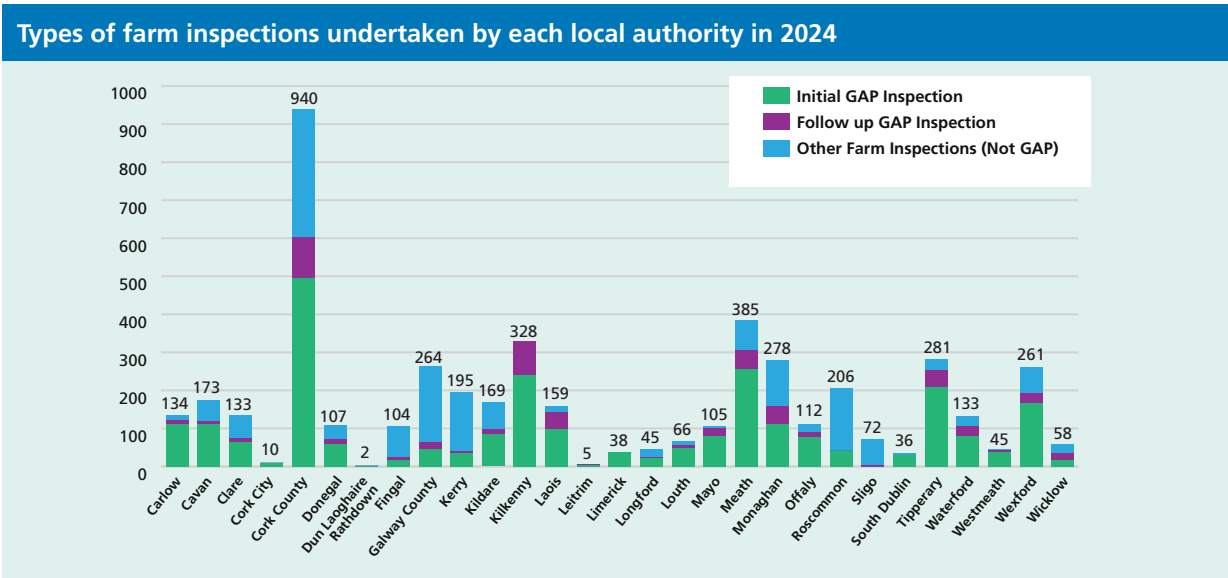


Figure 1: Number of farm inspections undertaken by each local authority in 2024.

The majority of local authorities increased their inspection activity in 2024 (Figure 2), largely attributable to the recruitment of dedicated personnel under the National Agricultural Inspection Programme (NAIP). In 2024, local authorities recruited 45 of the 57 additional staff members dedicated to the NAIP. Nine local authorities successfully met their interim inspection targets for 2024. While the majority of local authorities increased their number of inspections in 2024, twenty did not reach their interim inspection numbers allocated. It is noteworthy that an additional 1,666 other (non-GAP) agricultural inspections were conducted in response to planning applications, environmental incidents, and public complaints. All local authorities must make a significant effort to achieve the target number of inspections in 2025 as specified in the Water Action Plan 2024. A detailed breakdown of inspections carried out, along with the inspection targets for 2024 and 2025, is presented in Figure 2.

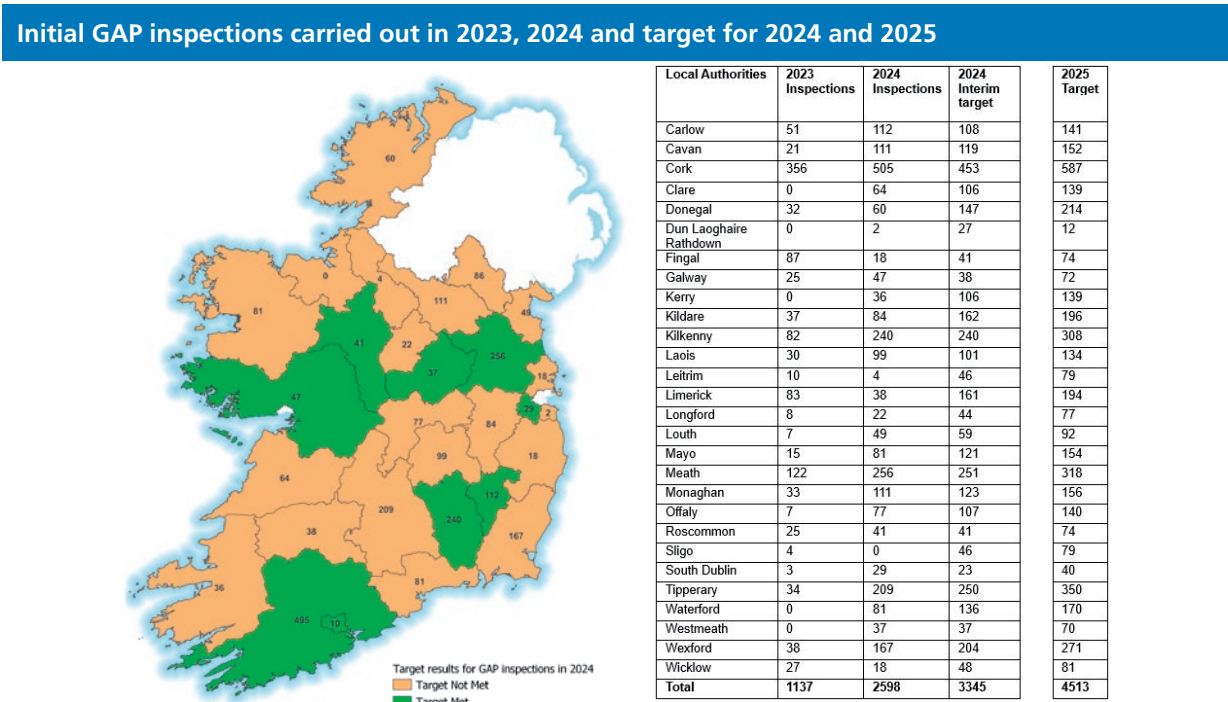
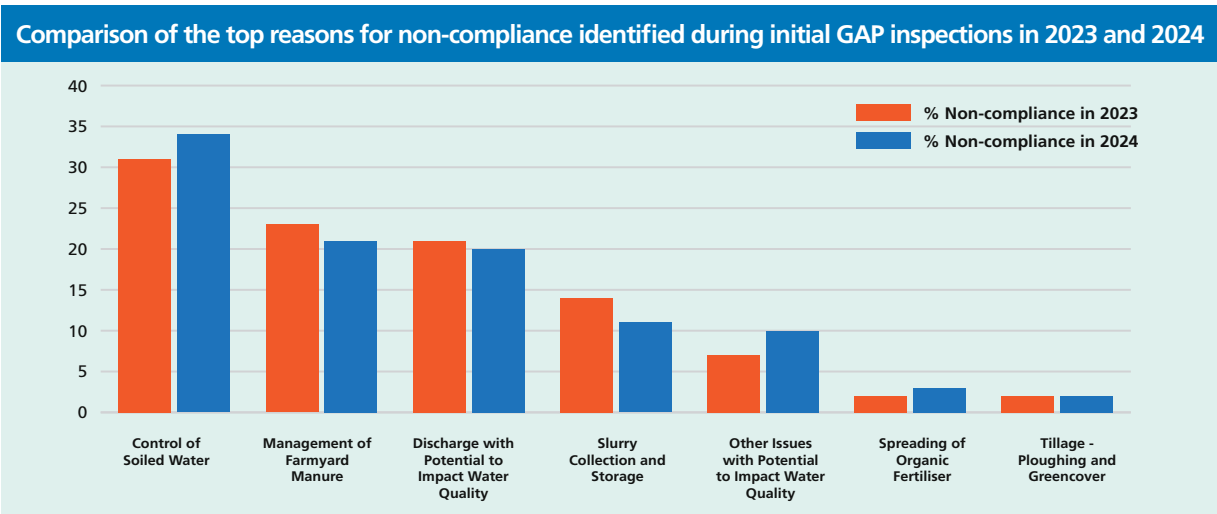


Figure 2: Initial GAP inspections carried out in 2023, 2024 and target for 2024 and 2025

### Non-compliances detected

The main reasons for non-compliance determined from local authority GAP inspections has not changed significantly between 2023 and 2024 (see Figure 3). The top four reasons were the control of soiled water, management of farmyard manure, discharges with potential to impact water quality, and slurry collection and storage. Non-compliances for the control of soiled water and for other issues with potential to impact water quality increased by 3% in 2024 when compared to 2023. Many of the non-compliances identified during the initial inspections are management issues that can be resolved without significant expenditure, as evidenced by the fact that over 54% of non-compliant farms achieved compliance by the time of the follow-up inspection.



**Figure 3:** Comparison of the top reasons for non-compliance in 2023 and 2024.

### Corrective actions requested by local authorities

Figure 4 illustrates the types of corrective actions requested by local authorities in 2024, along with the frequency of each action. It highlights the areas where local authorities have focused their efforts to restore compliance with the GAP Regulations. The most frequently requested corrective actions were as follows: provide control measures for farmyard manure (FYM) runoff, repair or replace gutters/downpipes, control silage effluent or divert to suitable storage, divert soiled water to suitable storage, and move FYM storage to suitable location. A total of 1,621 corrective actions were requested by local authorities in 2024. In addition, submission of further information was requested by local authorities on 305 occasions, typically in relation to slurry collection and storage, control of soiled water, management of FYM and for discharges that could adversely impact water quality. The EPA is requiring that local authorities must ensure that corrective actions have been completed either through follow-up inspections or compliance verification. Where actions are not completed within a reasonable timeframe, enforcement should be escalated accordingly.

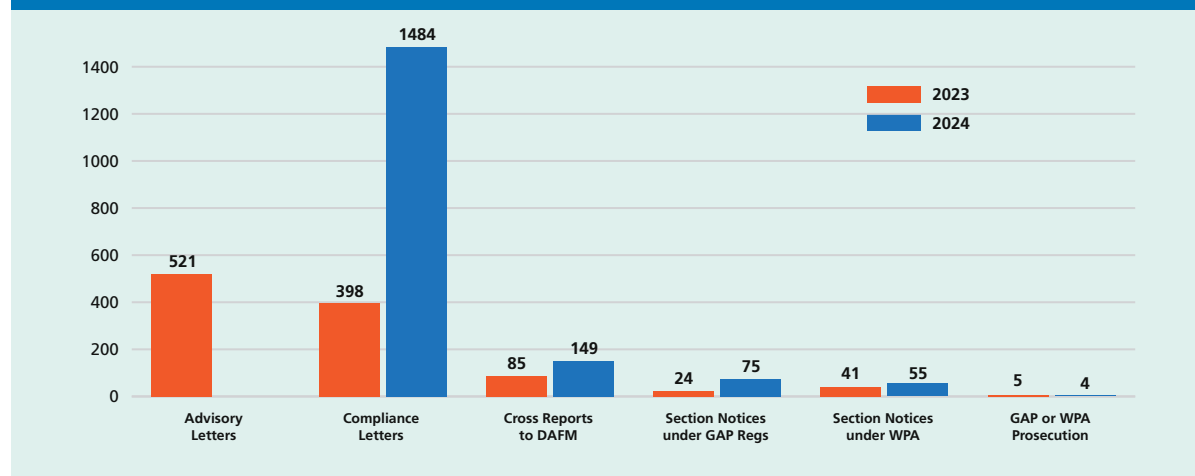


**Figure 4:** Types of corrective actions requested by local authorities to address non-compliances in 2024.

## Enforcement Actions

A total of 1,746 enforcement actions were taken by local authorities following farm inspections in 2024 (including GAP inspections and other farm inspections undertaken in response to planning applications, incidents, and complaints). Figure 5 provides a comparison of the number and types of enforcement actions taken by local authorities in 2023 and 2024. Advisory letters were most frequently issued to farm operators and landowners in 2023 (521). However, these have been replaced with compliance letters in 2024 which are issued after a farm has been found to be non-compliant and include timeframes for taking corrective actions to restore compliance. As can be seen from Figure 5, the number of compliance letters issued to farm operators and landowners rose sharply from 398 in 2023 to 1,484 in 2024. Similarly, the number of cross reports submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) increased from 85 in 2023 to 149 in 2024. The number of section notices issued under the GAP Regulations (75) and under the Water Pollution Act (55) also increased in 2024. Three prosecutions were initiated and a further one was concluded by local authorities in 2024 similar to 2023 when five prosecutions were reported. Local authorities must continue use their full suite of enforcement powers where non-compliances are detected and ensure corrective actions are taken to restore compliance. In addition, local authorities as well as advisory services and industry must increase compliance promotion and awareness-raising activities to support farmers in their efforts to comply with the GAP Regulations.

### Types of enforcement actions taken by local authorities in 2023 and 2024



**Figure 5:** Types of the enforcement actions taken by local authorities in 2023 and 2024.

## Summary of DAFM farm inspections carried out on behalf of the local authorities

The Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) also undertakes various types of farm inspections, including those carried out on behalf of the local authorities under the GAP Regulations. In 2024, DAFM carried out 621 farm inspections on behalf of the local authorities, detecting regulatory breaches in 157 farms. These breaches led to penalties ranging from 1% to 25% of BISS payments for 116 farms. Two farms that refused inspection received a 100% penalty on their BISS payments. The non-compliance rate in 2024 was 25%, down from 30% in 2023.

## Priorities for 2025

- While most local authorities have increased their farm inspection activity in 2024, many will have to significantly increase the number of farms inspected during 2025 to reach the target of 4,500 and annually thereafter, as set out in the NAIP and the Water Action Plan 2024.
- Local authorities must take a stronger enforcement approach to the implementation of the GAP Regulations. This includes taking appropriate enforcement actions and follow-up inspections to restore compliance. The EPA will continue to monitor how local authorities utilise their full range of enforcement powers.
- The rate of non-compliance increased in 2024 and remains unacceptably high. In response to the high level of non-compliance, local authorities as well as advisory services and industry must increase compliance promotion and awareness-raising activities to support farmers in their efforts to comply with the GAP Regulations.





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