Improving Water Margins for Biodiversity and Wider Benefits – Livestock Farms

Practical Guide

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Fencing watercourses is an effective means of protecting them from diffuse pollution associated with grazing livestock and can help to achieve regulatory compliance. If managed correctly, fenced buffer strips have the potential to provide additional benefits.

- **Livestock health:** Buffer strips prevent livestock accessing watercourses and their banks reducing the risk of **liver fluke** and **microbial infections** with positive benefits to **livestock health, biosecurity and productivity.**
- **Stabilising river and ditch banks:** By limiting livestock access to riverbanks, buffer strips **reduce bank erosion**. The roots of buffer strip vegetation provide **strength to riverbanks**. Novel green engineering techniques (e.g. willow spiling) can be effective at **rebuilding and stabilising banks**.
- **Enhance wildlife:** Buffer strips provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife and can provide **corridors** that help species move through intensively managed landscapes. They support diverse vegetation, which in turn supports insects including **beneficial species** such as **pollinators**.
- **Flood defence:** Fenced buffer strips typically have tall dense vegetation that **slows the flow of water** into watercourses. **Planting tree species** can further improve **flood management** in riparian zones, as they absorb water and introduce woody debris that can further slow the movement of water into flood-risk areas downstream.

Livestock health

Protects watercourses

Stabilising river and ditch banks

Enhance wildlife

Flood defence

Farming for a Better Climate

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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas

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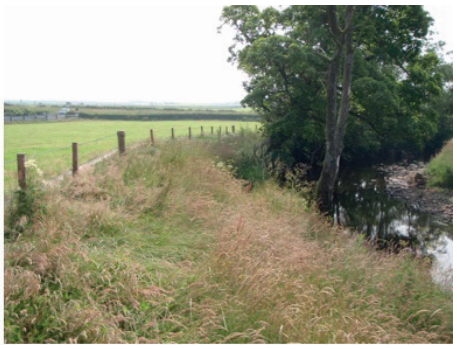
TOP TIPS: To optimise the benefits from buffer strips

- Buffer strips can help achieve cross compliance regulations (e.g. prevent significant poaching within 5m of a watercourse)
- Buffer strips over 6m wide are better at trapping pollutants and provide a more stable environment for wildlife
- Autumn grazing or cutting buffers prevents vegetation becoming overgrown and maintains a diverse habitat for wildlife
- Grazing in buffer strips should be conducted outside of the bathing season to reduce risk to human health
- For fields where access to mains water is an issue consider alternative watering systems (e.g. nose or solar panel pump)
- Green engineering techniques such as willow spiling can help to strengthen banks thus preventing erosion and loss of farmland
- Targeted tree planting can help reduce flood risks downstream and protect vulnerable banks whilst providing shelter and shade for livestock



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