● RESOURCE

Understanding and Influencing Behaviour Change by Farmers to Improve Water Quality

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Description / Abstract

Diffuse pollution from agriculture remains a significant challenge to many countries seeking to improve and protect their water environments. This paper reviews literature relating to the provision of information and advice as a mechanism to encourage farmers to mitigate diffuse pollution. The paper presents findings from a literature review on influencing farmer behaviour and synthesises three main areas of literature: psychological and institutional theories of behaviour; shifts in the approach to delivery of advice (from knowledge transfer to knowledge exchange); and the increased interest in heterogeneous farming cultures. These three areas interconnect in helping to understand how best to influence farmer behaviour in order to mitigate diffuse pollution. They are, however, literatures that are rarely cited in the water management arena. The paper highlights the contribution of the 'cultural turn' taken by rural social scientists in helping to understand collective and individual voluntary behaviour. The paper explores how these literatures can contribute to the existing understanding of water management in the agricultural context, particularly: when farmers question the scientific evidence; when there are increased calls for collaborative planning and management; and when there is increased value placed on information as a business commodity. The paper also highlights where there are still gaps in knowledge that need to be filled by future research — possibly in partnership with farmers themselves. Whilst information and advice has long been seen as an important part of diffuse pollution control, increasing climate variability that will require farmers to practice adaptive management is likely to make these mechanisms even more important.

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