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## **Experiences with integrated advice in the catchment area of Hinnerup Water Works**

*by Susanne Østerby, environmental consultant at Århus-Hadsten Farmers' Union and Karin Hvidberg, environmental officer at Favrskov Kommune*

### **Background**

The environmental problems in the area have been presented to the farmers on many occasions in recent years, either at meetings arranged by the former Århus County (action plan for the protection of drinking water) or in connection with the AGWAPLAN project. The information farmers have received has been of a general character and the meetings have been general. With the integrated advice method, the dialogue has been moved out to the individual farmer.

### **Method of advice**

At the Århus-Hadsten Farmers' Union we have, on the whole, followed and tested the concept of advice that has been jointly developed by the project group. All the advisory visits have been carried out.

Prior to the meetings, we developed a report template that we carried with us on a pc. The DIS maps were also printed out and taken along. During the meeting with the farmer, the information on cropping history, discussions on control measures, etc, could then be written directly into the report template.

The meetings lasted 3-4 hours and present at the meetings were the farmer and his family, an environmental consultant, an agricultural adviser and an environmental officer from the local council office.

The advisory meetings all had the following agenda:

1. Tour of the farm
2. Explanation of the AGWAPLAN project
3. The history, current operation and future prospects for the farm
4. The farm's environmental SWOT
5. Environmental targets and reduction targets / N calculations
6. Measures that can be adopted to improve agricultural practice
7. Conclusions and future course of action

As none of us knew the farms very well, the visits started with a guided tour of the farm, usually accompanied by the farmer's wife. The tour gave a good starting point for the ensuing discussions.

The tour was followed by the difficult exercise of analysing the strong and weak aspects of the farm. The farmer often finds it difficult to describe the strengths and weaknesses of his farm, but the analysis helps to clarify what the farmer and his family believe is the way ahead for the farm and to identify any alternative future options.

We used the mapping tool (DIS) to establish the environmental conditions for the farm and its surrounding area during the discussions.

We then used the manual on improved agricultural practice (GAP) in paper form during the visit to systematically go through the various options to reduce nitrate leaching. The method of discussing all possible options and the farmer maybe giving feedback of his interest in calculating possible effects for some of the scenarios worked really well.

### **Susanne Østerby and Karin Hvidberg report**

Consultants and council officers have supplemented each other well at the meetings. We have managed to get a good dialogue going with the families based on the farm tours and their accounts of the past and current practices on the farm.

We find that the farmers are very positive and interested in talking about environmental problems and possible solutions, and that it is far more relevant for them when seen from the perspective of their own farm. It is our impression that the farmers also gain new knowledge away with them from the meeting. They have expressed their interest in several of the solutions proposed and have already put some of them into practice. It will be exciting to see exactly how many of the measures they will adopt.

At all the meetings we have ended up with a number of measures that interested the family and that relatively easily could be included in the current production. If these measures are realised, they will contribute significantly to achieving the environmental targets set for the area.

We concluded the meetings by asking the farmers what their experience of the meeting had been. They replied that they thought all the items on the agenda had been relevant to them and that they did not think the meeting could have been any shorter.

We planned the course of farm visits in advance and stuck to the plan fairly well. Integrated advice is very time-consuming but apparently has a greater effect than what is achieved by more general meetings and more general information.

### **Contemplations by Karin Hvidberg**

Being present at the farm visits has certainly given me a greater insight into the basis and process behind the decisions that the farmers need to take. I believe that both the consultants and I have learned something about each other's way of thinking. I am convinced that the further development of the two-legged approach of arable farming and the environment in advisory work is a fruitful way of providing advice in areas where environmental targets necessitate changes in crop production.

### **Good experiences from Norsminde Fjord**

Consultants and environmental officers have also met a great deal of willingness from farmers in the catchment area of Norsminde Fjord in connection with the farm visits.

According to environmental consultant Helge Kjær Sørensen, the farmers have been positively brimming over with thoughts and ideas of how to keep the nitrogen in the root zone rather than letting it ooze into Norsminde Fjord. There have been many different approaches to the tackling of this matter, where what appears to be an obvious solution on one farm can be totally unrealistic on another.

The collaboration with the environmental authorities has also been a good experience with a positive dialogue helped by consultants and environmental officers being of like minds in connection with the integrated advice.

Crucial to the positive outcome of the meetings has been the detailed preparation, partly in form of workshops where the tools have been developed, and partly in form of consultants and environmental officers spending time preparing for the meetings.

Now we are waiting to see the results of the advisory work – what can we achieve at farm level in terms of reducing the nitrogen leaching to Norsminde Fjord?

### **At Ravn lake catchment area they focus on ensuring the correctness of the data**

At Ravn Lake there has also been activity, although only a small number of farm visits have so far been carried out. Consultant Kjartan Einarson is busy trying to establish the size of the nutrient input to the lake from different sources and has in that connection been in dialogue with Henrik Skovgaard from Miljøcenter Århus about the level of the natural content of phosphorus in water courses. These discussions are important in AGWAPLAN as it is very important to have data you can trust in connection with the fulfilment of the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, and Kjartan and his colleagues have therefore delayed the farm visits until they have full data clarification.

### **AGWAPLAN at the annual general meeting of the Odder-Skanderborg Farmers' Union**

The chairman of the Odder-Skanderborg Farmers' Union presented the new approach to the solution of environmental problems in his report to the annual general meeting on 14 March.

The press cutting from the annual general meeting reads:

“Our Life project, also going by the name of AGWAPLAN, is something completely different and visionary. It is now 18 months since the project started and I am certain that the sector will benefit from the project. We are at the moment busy advising all farmers at farm level in order to clarify whether there are obvious ways of reducing nitrogen losses. The farmers who have participated to date have been very involved in the project. The first results indicate that it is possible to optimise good agricultural practice with a better knowledge of soil quality at field level.”

About 160 farmers attended the annual general meeting.

### **Are catch crops the way ahead?**

The project enables a closer look at some of the initiatives that are tested in practice. If any farmers have something they would like tested, then please contact the relevant consultant in the project.

## Calendar

11 – 12 April	Excursion to Sweden to look at controlled drains and small wetland areas
April – June	Catchment area meetings in the three project areas
31 May	Project meeting at Tennegården in Grundfør
June – December	Brainstorming phase in relation to the Water Framework Directive and Natura 2000. Input from the three project areas.

## Webpage info

Remember to check the webpage [www.agwaplan.dk](http://www.agwaplan.dk). If you have forgotten your login or you cannot find your way around, please contact Lotte Buchtrup Hornbek on telephone 8740 5456, who will try to help.

## Latest news

- We have presented the project to the EU Parliament in Brussels.
- The project has been recorded on film and been sent to all the municipalities.
- The project was also referred to at the Crop Production Congress in January, where Hans Jakob Fenger presented the project from the farmer's viewpoint.
- There is close dialogue with the actors who will be constructing the framework for the completion of the brainstorming phase in relation to the Water Framework Directive. We are aiming for real, actual involvement by all parties right from the word go, i.e. a close dialogue between on the one hand the municipalities and agriculture and on the other the environmental offices, who after all are responsible for setting up the plans for how the targets should be achieved.