

# Farmland Biodiversity Management: Linear Habitats

## Linear Habitats

Hedgerows, watercourses, and field margins are important linear features that define the Irish farming landscape and provide food, shelter, and movement corridors for our native wildlife.

These features are vital for biodiversity, and also provide important benefits to farms such as shade and shelter for livestock, pollination, flood prevention, water quality protection and carbon storage.



### Hedgerow Management

**Steven Fitzgerald, AGLISH, Co. Waterford**

- ⇒ All internal hedges are at least 1.5m (5ft) tall
- ⇒ Hedges are cut from a wide base up to a point to encourage density
- ⇒ Thorn trees (whitethorn & blackthorn) are left uncut along hedges to allow for flowering. These are easy to identify as old feed bags have been reused and tied to the trees to guide the contractor during the hedge cutting season (1st Sept—28th Feb)
- ⇒ New hedges have also been planted with native species over the last number of years increasing the networks for nature and reducing average field size

Steven's practices provide cover above and below for nesting birds and a plentiful food supply for bees and birds throughout the year.



### Watercourses Management

**Cathal Moran, Skeoghvasteen, Co. Kilkenny**

- ⇒ All watercourses are fenced
- ⇒ No livestock drinking access points
- ⇒ Margins are also a focus on this farm, in addition to the existing 1.5m wide watercourse margins, Cathal plans to gradually increase the width of fenced margins along biodiverse boundaries to facilitate easier management and increase space for nature

Watercourse margins, banks, and beds are home to a range of plants, insects, and amphibians. The management actions in place on Cathal's farm ensure watercourses are great habitats for wildlife.



## Managing Linear Biodiversity Features

Farmers can take simple and practical actions to ensure that the linear biodiversity habitats on their farms provide for nature and their farms. Here are some examples of the actions that Teagasc-Glanbia Future Farm Signpost farmers in Waterford and Kilkenny are taking to ensure that the hedges, watercourses and field margins on their farms are fit for biodiversity.



### Average Field Size

**Francis Nolan, Muckalee, Co. Kilkenny**

- ⇒ Average field size of 2.8ha (7ac)

The extensive network of hedges and watercourses on Francis's farm are managed with nature in mind and act as corridors for the movement of wildlife throughout the farming landscape.

The target for average field size is less than 5ha (12ac).



### Field Margin Management

**Shane Fitzgerald, Portlaw, Co. Waterford**

- ⇒ Avoids the application of sprays, slurry and fertiliser within the margins
- ⇒ Retains a minimum margin width of 1.5m wide when cultivating.
- ⇒ Recently incorporated a 4m wide field fenced margin around a multi-specie sward where the wire is high enough for cows to graze underneath and it will be cut in autumn.

Shane's field margin practices ensure that natural, native vegetation has a chance to flower in summer while also maintaining the grassy margin habitat.



## Linear Habitats Management Practices Self Assessment

If you are unsure of where the best place to start is when it comes to the management of Linear Biodiversity Habitats on your farm follow the link below and complete the Biodiversity Management Practices Self Assessment for Linear Features: <https://www.teagasc.ie/environment/biodiversity--countryside/farmland-habitats/#linear>

