Farm Name: Lower Link Operator: Vitacress Salads

Permit Number: P.5767 & 5768

Introduction

This Improvement Plan has been written in conjunction with the Environmental Management System (EMS) for Lower Link farm as required under the new combined Environmental Permit. This Improvement Plan lists the actions to be taken (the detail of farm and vegetable washing operations are in the EMS) to improve phosphorous outputs at the farm and reduce trace pesticides in the factory wash water to ensure compliance with the new permit.

Vitacress have been industry leading in their management of watercress farms over a sustained period of years. Vitacress use a combination of best practice controls, bespoke nutrient regimes, and environmental management systems across all sites to ensure compliance with permits and to drive forward our own sustainability goals. Vitacress employs its own rigorous sampling and monitoring systems including monthly micro and non-micro sampling, spring and autumn aquatic biological sampling, real time PH monitoring and quarterly biological and groundwater sampling. This information is used to inform our decision making and techniques on the farm.

Lower Link is a key farm for commercial watercress supply. This Improvement Plan and the EMS will set out how we aim to comply with the new combined environmental permit for watercress growing and vegetable washing in the factory.

Lower Link Farm is located on the Bourne Rivulet to the East of Andover. As outlined in the EMS, the farm grows watercress and contains a salad washing and packing facility. The vegetable wash water effluent is released from the factory in two locations, (1) it is pumped across a set of parabolic screens and a silt trap, and (2) it is pumped to a rotary screen. These screens remove any leaf residue. Both effluent streams are then pumped to two sacrificial watercress beds where the flow through and drop sediment. The water is then fed back into the Bourne rivulet via the eastern carrier. Under current operations, there is a low risk of some traces of pesticides entering the surface and groundwater systems.

The plans and specifics of pesticide sampling can be found in the EMS.

All improvement actions listed in the table below will run in conjunction with the EMS for Lower Link farm to ensure compliance with the permit.

	Improvement Action	**What needs to be done? Possible solutions**	**Proposed timescale**	**Responsibility**
1	Investigate new water management	Investigate options to lower the P level in discharge waters	2024 - 2025	Farm manager & environment team
2	New fertiliser management	Investigate options for slow / control release fertilisers and their efficacy in maintaining commercially viable crop.	2024-2025	Farm manager
3	Direct sowing	Crop will be established through a combination of direct sowing and planting seedlings. From July onwards returned stubbles will form part of the production system and will reduce bed activities and fertiliser requirements.		Farm manager
4	Phosphate monitoring	VSL monthly testing and analysis through i2 analytical - data will be analysed and managed by environment team	Ongoing	Environment team and farms
5	Action if P high	If the P reading at the discharge point is at: • 80% of the allowed P level - UK Senior Farm Manager informed • 90%. of the allowed P level - UK Senior Farm Manager and EA informed and operations will be reviewed Excessively high (>200%) to risk breaching the annualised average then operation will be suspended unless there have been severe weather conditions and UK Watercress Manager and EA informed	Ongoing	Environment team and farms
6	Over-wintering	Stubble crops will remain in the beds to supress weeds and scavenge any residual nutrients and to harvest in the following spring as they are commercial stubble crops	ongoing	Farms
7	Review and data sharing (subject to GDPR)	Written updates to EA regarding any changes as and when required	Ongoing	Environment team