**Ref No: 51082/21**

To ask the Minister for Agriculture; Food and the Marine the considerations he has given to accelerate the adoption of LESS technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

* Pauline Tully

\*For ORAL answer

**REPLY**

Low emissions slurry spreading (LESS) is a technology that has many co-benefits for our farmers and the environment; including savings in chemical Nitrogen use, abatement of Green House Gases, reduction in ammonia losses and improved air and water quality. Our farmers continue to embrace this new technology with its use steadily increasing on Irish farms.

The AgClimatise Roadmap includes an ambitious target of achieving 60% of all slurry spread by LESS equipment by 2022, 80% by 2025 and 90% by 2027, I am confident we can achieve these targets.

The use of this technology is particularly effective in reducing ammonia emissions from our food systems, with agriculture in Ireland being responsible for 99% of national emissions. In October 2020 Teagasc published an Ammonia Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC). This scientific based approach set out a series of actions that will bring the sector into compliance with our national targets for ammonia over the decade ahead. The Teagasc MACC sets out 13 measures for potential adoption on Irish farms, with the use of LESS to apply animal slurry identified as making the single largest contribution, with a potential to reduce emissions by up to 60% compared to current application systems.

My department continues to incentivise the uptake of this technology with the provision of grants through the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) and a LESS measure within the Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS). Through the TAMS schemes my department has funded the purchase of over 3,000 LESS machines, while approximately 4,500 farmers have received payments under GLAS by selecting the LESS measure.

Under TAMS, the Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) Equipment Scheme provides financial aid to farmers to help them buy new slurry-spreading equipment which improves their environmental performance. While farmers in receipt of a Nitrates Derogation are no longer eligible for funding under the scheme, the majority of farmers which are not in receipt of a Nitrates Derogation continue to be eligible to apply.

As part of the Nitrates Derogation rules for 2021, all slurry on the holding must be applied using LESS equipment, this represents a significant step up from previous years. This will significantly increase the quantities of slurry being spread by such technologies nationally and will contribute significantly to achieving our targets.

Ireland’s Draft Nitrates Action Programme, which went out for public consultation earlier this year, has been designed to facilitate the further adoption of LESS technology, with the requirement for more of our animal slurries to be applied using LESS. As drafted the Nitrates Programme proposes that more of our livestock famers will be required to use this new technology, while our tillage farmers applying organic manures to arable land will need to use LESS or incorporate manures within 12 hours of application.

I am confident that the measures my department is implementing will facilitate the continued increase in use of LESS technology on Irish farms and that the sector will achieve the targets set out in the AgClimatise Roadmap.