

The survey was managed by DAFM in partnership with IGFA and aims to provide accurate information on current practices. The results show that overall protein levels have continued to follow a positive environmental downward trend since 2015.

Crude protein is required in animal diets to ensure optimal health and production but levels in excess of what is necessary can be associated with ammonia and nitrous oxide emissions. This is why the government's Climate Action Plan and the DAFM Ag-Climatise roadmap contain goals to reduce excess protein in animal diets.

The survey was completed by feed manufacturers on crude protein levels in compound feed in 2021 and added to the information already collected from the industry in 2020 for the years 2015, 2017 and 2019. The results highlight an excellent response rate to the survey, representing 99.7% of overall national feed production. This latest data confirms that overall protein levels continue to follow a positive environmental downward trend since 2015. A reduction in crude protein was recorded for dairy and beef and although there was a slight increase for poultry, the biggest reduction has been in pig feed with an overall reduction of 1.3% over the period.

The report also notes that the actual quantities of crude protein in animal feed has increased over this time period due to increases in volumes of feed. Although outside the scope of the report, it is important to note that the increase in the volume of feed manufactured, especially the increase in 2021, was due to increased demand from farmers for compound feed. This was a response to weather conditions that resulted in reduced availability and therefore intake of grass and fodder in some parts of the country. Farmers were more reliant on compound feed to ensure the health, welfare, and productivity of their animals and to compensate for the consequent drop in grass intake levels.

Commenting on the Survey results Maeve Whyte, IGFA Director General said

“It is clear from the excellent response rate to the survey that this is an accurate picture of crude protein levels in livestock rations. It is so important to have relevant, reliable data so that future policy decisions in this area are based on accurate, correct information”.

“IGFA members will continue to talk to their farming customers about reducing crude protein where possible. Higher protein levels are sometimes necessary in an animal's diet, but we are working to ensure that the needs of the animal and environmental concerns are taken into consideration. As always, we encourage farmers to discuss feed options with their feed suppliers”.