



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-316264-23

Development	Agricultural shed containing milking parlour and associated works.
Location	Rosconnell Glebe, Attanagh, Co. Laois
Planning Authority	Laois County Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	2340
Applicant	John Mooney
Type of Application	Permission
Planning Authority Decision	Grant Permission
Type of Appeal	Third Party
Appellant	Peter Sweetman and on behalf of Wild Ireland Defence clg
Date of Site Inspection	27 th June 2023
Inspector	Dolores McCague

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1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1.1. The site is located in the townland of Rosconnell Glebe, Attanagh, Co. Laois, 4km east of Durrow on the Laois / Kilkenny border.
- 1.1.2. A large shed, identified on drawings as a slatted dry stock shed, occupies the south-eastern end of the site, surrounded by a concrete yard. The proposed development is to be to the north.
- 1.1.3. The site is given as 0.65ha.
- 1.1.4. The associated landholding is outlined in blue; area not given. It bounds the River Barrow and River Nore SAC to the south-east and Lisbigney Bog SAC to the north-west.

2.0 Proposed Development

- 2.1.1. It is proposed to construct an agricultural shed containing a milking parlour, dairy, plant room, chemical store, office and handling facilities together with external collecting yard, underground effluent storage tank and all other associated works; given as 446sq m in area.
- 2.1.2. The application is accompanied by maps and drawings:
 - A 6" map showing the landholding (per OSI mapping it comprises c 65.430ac, including the dwelling site).
 - A 1:2,500 map showing the location of the site in relation to road and lands.
 - A 1:500 site plan showing the existing site with spot levels.
 - A 1:500 site plan showing the proposed structures.
 - Plans, scale 1:200 and 1:100 of the proposed shed, collecting yard and underground tank.
 - Elevations, scale 1:150 of the building.

The plans indicate that the milking parlour will have 30 stands in a herringbone pattern, either side of the aisle (ie total 60 cows can be milked together, therefore multiples of that number are likely to use the facility).

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

3.1.1. The Planning Authority decision, dated 23rd March 2023, was to grant permission subject to 13 conditions, including:

2. The proposed development shall be constructed in accordance with the structural specification of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Reason: In the interests of public health.

4 Water supply.

5 Construction waste.

6. All storage facilities shall:

a) Be designed, sited, constructed, maintained and managed so as to prevent run-off or seepage, directly or indirectly, into groundwater or surface water of any effluent produced.

b) Comply with such construction specifications for those facilities as may be approved by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Separation distances set out in Department of Agriculture S.123 – Minimum specification for Bovine Livestock Units and Reinforced Tanks (Sept 2017) shall be adhered to.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and in particular to protect against the pollution of surface and ground waters.

7. All clean surface water run-off from roofs, entrances and parking areas shall be collected and disposed of within the site to soakpits, drains or adjacent watercourses. In particular, no such surface water run-off shall be allowed to flow onto the public roadway or adjoining properties. All discharges to and through the surface water collection and disposal system to surface waters shall not be of environmental significance.

Reason: To prevent flooding of the public road, in the interests of traffic safety and in the interests of public health and pollution control.

8 (a) All soiled water, effluent and waste from the proposed development shall be discharged properly to the effluent storage tank. The tanks shall be of suitable capacity, design and construction and shall be properly sealed to prevent any loss of leachate into the ground under or adjacent to it. There shall be no permitted discharges to ground or surface water resources of agricultural effluent or any polluting substances from the development site. The tanks shall be in accordance with the recommendations of the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2022 (SI 113, 2022) or any subsequent amendments to those regulations and shall be of capacity that no overflow occurs between emptying operations.

(b) All slurry and silage effluent shall be collected and deposited in the effluent storage tank, and shall not be allowed flow onto the public roadway or surrounding land, nor cause pollution to any stream, ditch, or watercourse, nor contamination to any source of potable water.

Reason: In the interests of public health and pollution control.

9 (a) All effluent, soiled water and solid waste shall be stored on-site in adequately sized and sited underground watertight structures and shall be disposed of by land spreading in accordance with the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2022. They shall be spread only in accordance with the usage of the land and the capacity of the land to retain, neutralise and decompose them. They shall not be transported over public roads except in approved leak proof transporters.

(b) There shall be no land spreading of organic fertiliser on lands with underlying extreme groundwater vulnerability without the written prior consent of the Planning Authority.

(c) Land spreading shall not encroach upon any adjoining properties.

(d) The developer shall take adequate precautions to ensure that waste disposal does not cause pollution of any stream, ditch, or watercourse, or contamination to any source of potable water. The developer shall also take reasonable steps to preserve the amenity of adjacent residential properties, and shall ensure, as far as possible that injury to amenity is not caused by odour or in any other way.

Reason: In the interest of pollution control, aquatic amenity, public health, environmental protection and in particular to protect against the pollution of surface and ground waters.

10 There shall be no increase in the number of livestock being accommodated unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority and in accordance with an approved farm waste and Nutrient Management Plan

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and in particular to protect against the pollution of surface and ground waters.

11 The development shall be managed in accordance with the requirements of the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2022 (SI 113, 2022) and / or any relevant regulations enacted subsequent to the 2022 Regulations.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and to protect public health.

12 All transfers of animal slurries from the farm shall be recorded and maintained as required by Article 23 'Keeping of Records by the Occupier' of the European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2022. Such records shall be available for inspection by Laois County Council.

Reason: In the interest of environmental protection and in particular to protect against the pollution of surface and ground waters.

13 All overground oil, chemical storage tanks shall be adequately bunded to protect against spillage and leakage etc. Bunding shall be impermeable and shall be capable of retaining a volume equal to 1.50 times the capacity of the overground storage tank it is being provided for. Filling and off-take points shall be located within the bunded area.

Reason: In the interest of public health, to avoid pollution, and to ensure proper development.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.3. Planning Reports

3.3.1. Planning Report recommending permission, 23rd March 2023, includes -

Screened for AA, no likely significant impacts are predicted due to the nature of the proposed development.

Not within flood zone A or B. Site is located in 'Lowland Agricultural Areas' per Laois county Development Plan (LCDP) 2021-2027. There are no monuments within 500m.

The site is located in a structurally weak area, (where permanent residential accommodation should be accommodated).

The existing agricultural dwelling is in poor condition and seems to be in situ for a considerable period. The applicants dwelling is adjacent, c 30m west. The proposed development is set 94m from local tertiary road L-17362.

The proposed external collecting yard is proposed to cater for 250 cows.

The development is served by an existing private well. Surface water will be disposed of to ground by way of an on-site soak pit. Wastewater management to a new underground slatted effluent tank.

3.3.2. Other Technical Reports

- 3.3.3. Western Area Roads Dept, Borris-in-Ossory / Mountmellick Municipal District, 27th February 2003 – No difficulty with the application. Notice in place.

3.4. **Prescribed Bodies**

None

3.5. **Third Party Observations**

- 3.5.1. A third party observation on the file has been read and noted.

4.0 **Planning History**

None given.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Development Plan

5.1.1. Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 the operative plan, includes:

DM RL 1 – General Consideration for Agricultural Buildings.

All agricultural buildings should be located an adequate distance from any watercourse to reduce the risk of contamination.

Agricultural developments have the potential to impact on the environment and the landscape. The traditional form of agricultural buildings is disappearing with the onset of advanced construction methods and wider range of materials. Some new farm buildings have the appearance of industrial buildings and due to their scale and mass can have serious major visual impacts.

In dealing with applications for agricultural developments the Planning Authority will have regard to the following:

- 1) Require that buildings be sited as unobtrusively as possible and that the finishes and colour used will blend the development into its surroundings.
- 2) The proposed developments shall meet with the requirements of the Department of Agriculture with regard to storage and disposal of waste.
- 3) The Council accepts the need for agricultural buildings and associated works (walls, fences, gates, entrances, yards) to be functional but they will be required to be sympathetic to their surroundings in scale, material and finishes.
- 4) Buildings should relate to the landscape. Traditionally this was achieved through having the roof a darker colour than the walls.
- 5) Appropriate roof colours are dark grey, dark reddish brown or a very dark green. Where cladding is used on the exterior of the farm buildings dark colours should be used.
- 6) Location and impacts on the road network and other associated uses.
- 7) Ensure it does not have an undue negative impact on the visual/scenic amenity of the countryside and identify mitigating measures where required.

RL 1 - Maintain a vibrant and healthy agricultural sector based on the principles of sustainable development whilst at the same time finding alternative employment in or close to rural areas to sustain rural communities.

RL 2 - Facilitate the development of agriculture while ensuring that natural waters, wildlife habitats and conservation areas are protected from pollution.

ES 17 – Implement the provisions of water pollution abatement measures in accordance with National and EU Directives and other legislative requirements in conjunction with other agencies as appropriate.

ES 18 - Maintain and improve the water quality in rivers and other water courses in the county, including ground waters. The Council will have cognizance of, where relevant, the EU's Common Implementation Strategy Guidance Document No. 20 and 36 which provide guidance on exemptions to the environmental objectives of the Water Framework Directive.

BHN 1 – 9 - Policy Objectives for Biodiversity and Designated Sites - to conserve and protect habitats and species listed in the annexes of the EU Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive.

5.2. EPA Pollution Impact Potential Mapping

- 5.2.1. EPA have mapping under the heading Pressures & Activities include Pollution Impact Potential Mapping (PIP) for Nitrates and Phosphorus.

5.3. Groundwater Protection Responses to the Landspreading of Organic Wastes

- 5.3.1. This document was produced by the DoELG/EPA/GSI and published by the department of the Environment and Local Government, in 1999 to guide the use of organic wastes by landspreading. It includes a response matrix which is re-produced in the 2004 EPA document Landspreading of Organic Waste – Guidance on Groundwater Vulnerability Assessment.

5.4. Natural Heritage Designations

- 5.4.1. The nearest Natura sites are the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162) located c 150m, straight line distance to the south, and Lisbigney Bog SAC (000869) located c 450m, straight line distance to the north.

5.5. EIA Screening

- 5.5.1. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development and the absence of any significant environmental sensitivity in the vicinity there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment arising from the proposed development. The need for environmental impact assessment can, therefore, be excluded at preliminary examination and a screening determination is not required.

6.0 The Appeal

6.1. Grounds of Appeal

- 6.2. The grounds of the third party appeal include:

The judgement of the CJEU, case C-293/17 and C-294/17 states:

Article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora must be interpreted as meaning that the grazing of cattle and the application of fertilisers on the surface of land or below its surface in the vicinity of Natura 2000 sites may be classified as a 'project' within the meaning of that provision, even if those activities, in so far as they are not a physical intervention in the natural surroundings, do not constitute a 'project' within the meaning of Article 1(2)(a) of Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.

The decision of the planning authority includes the following:

The reason for condition 5 is stated as: 'In the interest of environmental protection and in particular to protect against the pollution of surface and ground waters'.

This proves that the development may have an effect on the SAC as the building is within 200m of the SAC.

The reason for condition 6 is stated as: 'In the interest of environmental protection and in particular to protect against the pollution of surface and ground waters'.

Condition 9 is quoted.

The fact that the referred decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union showed that the European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2002, was not to be used instead of an Appropriate Assessment, was ignored.

Condition 10 There shall be no increase in the number of livestock being accommodated unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority and in accordance with an approved farm waste and Nutrient Management Plan.

The planning authority has failed to address the compliance with the Farm Waste and Nutrient Management Plan.

Condition 11 is quoted.

The Appropriate Assessment Screening Report is not a valid Appropriate Assessment Screening Report:

Board Pleanála's legal functions in performing that assessment:

An Bord Pleanála has three distinct sets of legal tasks:

- 1 The Planning Acts
- 2 The Environmental Impact Assessment Directive
- 3 The assessment under the Habitats Directive.

- 1 The Planning Acts:

It must examine the application to ascertain if the contents comply with the planning regulations.

It must assess the planning merits of the application.

- 2 The Environmental Impact Assessment Directive:

Article 4(4) provisions are listed.

The Board is required to form and record a view as to the environmental impacts of the development considering the EIA report, the views of the public concerned and applying its own expertise, or, if no EIAR is submitted, to screen the development for EIA.

3 An Bord Pleanála is the competent authority having responsibility under the Habitats Directive, to screen the development under Article 6.3 and make a decision under 6.3.

The legal case for screening is found in AG Sharpson in the opinion 259/11, *Sweetman & Others v An Bord Pleanála*. Paragraph 47 is quoted.

This is implemented into Irish law by Finlay Geoghegan J in *Kelly v An Bord Pleanála* (2014 IEHC 400). Paragraphs 26 and 47 are quoted.

26 There is a dispute between the parties as to the precise obligations imposed on the Board in relation to the stage 1 screening by s.177U but its resolution is not strictly necessary in these proceedings. There is agreement on the nature and purpose of the screening process which is well explained by Advocate General Sharpston in Case C-258/11 Sweetman at paras 47-49:

47. It follows that the possibility of there being a significant effect on the site will generate the need for an appropriate assessment for the purposes of Article 6(3). The requirement at this stage that the plan or project be likely to have a significant effect is thus a trigger for the obligation to carry out an appropriate assessment. There is no need to establish such an effect.

On the basis of the total lack of certainty in the information submitted, it is not possible for An Bord Pleanála to make a decision to grant permission which would comply with the following:

So far as concerns the assessment carried out under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, it should be pointed out that it cannot have lacunae and must contain complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt as to the effects of the works proposed on the protected site concerned.

The threshold Appropriate Assessment must pass in this context is explained in paragraph 44 of CJEU Case 258/11.

So far as concerns the assessment carried out under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, it should be pointed out that it cannot have lacunae and must contain complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt as to the effects of the works proposed on the protected site concerned

This is a strict standard and An Bord Pleanála does not have legal jurisdiction to give permission if it is not met.

6.3. Applicant Response

6.3.1. The applicant has not responded to the third party appeal.

6.4. Planning Authority Response

6.4.1. The planning authority have not responded to the appeal.

7.0 Assessment

7.1.1. I consider that the main issues which arise in relation to this appeal are as follows: appropriate assessment, the principle of development, and groundwater protection and the following assessment is dealt with under those headings.

7.2. Appropriate Assessment

7.2.1. In accordance with obligations under the Habitats Directives and implementing legislation, to take into consideration the possible effects a project may have, either on its own or in combination with other plans and projects, on a Natura 2000 site, there is a requirement on the Board, as the competent authority in this case, to consider the possible nature conservation implications of the proposed development on the Natura 2000 network, before making a decision.

7.2.2. The planning authority carried out a preliminary screening for appropriate assessment and arrived at a conclusion of no potential significant effects.

7.3. Screening for Appropriate Assessment

7.3.1. The proposed development comprises:

The construction of an agricultural shed containing a milking parlour, dairy, plant room, chemical store, office and handling facilities together with external collecting yard, underground effluent storage tank and all other associated works; given as 446sq m in area.

The plans indicated that the milking parlour will have 30 stands in a herringbone pattern, either side of the aisle (ie total 60 cows can be milked together).

In the supplementary application form it is stated that the number and type of animals to be accommodated in the proposed development is N/A; and that the proposed feeding method is N/A.

No information is available on the file, on livestock on the farm, the farm stocking rate or the alterations to the farm operations arising from cows associated with the proposed milking parlour.

- 7.3.2. Pollution Impact Potential (PIP) mapping, for Nitrates, indicates that the lands immediately adjoining the subject site are rank 1, rank 3 and rank 4; rank 1 being the highest risk level.
- 7.3.3. Pollution Impact Potential (PIP) mapping, for Phosphorus, indicates that the lands immediately adjoining the subject site are rank 1, rank 5 and rank 7 lands; rank 1 lands, the highest risk level, occur along the river.
- 7.3.4. The nearest Natura sites are the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162) located c 150m to the south and Lisbigney Bog SAC (000869) located c 450m to the north. Lands associated with the proposed development adjoin the Natura sites.
- 7.3.5. I am satisfied that no other protected sites need to be considered.
- 7.3.6. Site specific conservation objectives have been developed for the River Barrow and River Nore SAC which could be summarised as, to restore and or maintain the favourable conservation condition of the qualifying interest habitats and species.
- 7.3.7. The conservation objectives for Lisbigney Bog SAC are to restore and or maintain the favourable conservation condition of the qualifying interest habitats and species.
Lisbigney Bog SAC
- 7.3.8. The lands are separated from Lisbigney Bog SAC by a public road. It is a wetland dominated by fen vegetation, a former lake basin, now criss-crossed by streams.
- 7.3.9. The site synopsis notes, under the heading ecosystem function - water quality, '*fens receive natural levels of nutrients (e.g. iron, magnesium and calcium) from water sources. However, they are generally poor in nitrogen and phosphorus, with the*

latter tending to be the limiting nutrient under natural conditions. Water supply should be also relatively calcium-rich. Water drains into the habitat in the SAC from the surrounding intensively managed farmland; hence any fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides used on the farms may be washed into the SAC' (NPWS, 2005).

River Barrow and River Nore SAC

7.3.10. The drain along the eastern boundary of the lands flows south to the Ownebeg river which is part of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC and which flows south to the River Nore. The SAC adjoins the south eastern and southern boundary of the lands.

7.3.11. There are locations close to the south of the site, indicated on Map 7 of the conservation objectives, for White-Clawed Crayfish.

7.3.12. The Site Synopsis notes one of the main threats to the protected site, as agricultural run-off.

7.3.13. Construction Phase Impacts

Potential Indirect Impact

7.3.14. The site of the proposed development is c 150m from the Owenbeg River which is part of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC. In the absence of mitigation, there is potential for significant indirect effects on the qualifying interest and special conservation interests of the River Barrow and River Nore SAC from the construction of the proposed development. This would need to be examined in a NIS.

7.3.15. Operational Phase Impacts

Potential Indirect Impact

7.3.16. In the absence of mitigation there is potential for impact on surface water and groundwater from activities at the farmyard and hence potential for significant indirect effects on protected downstream sites.

7.3.17. In the absence of mitigation there is potential for indirect impact on groundwater and surface water from landspreading associated with the proposed development and hence potential for significant indirect effects on protected downstream sites.

7.3.18. Conclusion of Screening

7.3.19. There is potential for impact during construction and operation and for significant effects on protected sites, such that Appropriate Assessment stage 2, is required.

7.3.20. The applicant should be requested to provide a NIS, including a nutrient management plan giving details of all currently associated landspreading areas including their suitability; and a detailed construction management plan.

7.3.21. Screening summary matrix

European Site	Site Code	Relevant QI & SCI	Distance
River Barrow and River Nore SAC	0024162	<p>Estuaries</p> <p>Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide</p> <p>Reefs</p> <p>Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand</p> <p>Atlantic salt meadows</p> <p>Mediterranean salt meadows</p> <p>Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitriche-Batrachion vegetation</p> <p>European dry heaths</p> <p>Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels</p> <p>Petrifying springs with tufa formation*</p> <p>Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles</p> <p>Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior*</p> <p>Desmoulin's Whorl Snail</p> <p>Freshwater Pearl Mussel</p> <p>White-clawed Crayfish</p> <p>Sea Lamprey</p> <p>Brook Lamprey</p> <p>River Lamprey</p>	<p>c 150m, straight line distance to the south.</p> <p>Associated lands, potential landspreading areas, extend to the edge of the protected site.</p>

		Twaite Shad Salmon Otter Killarney Fern Nore Pearl Mussel	
Lisbigney Bog SAC	000869	Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> * Desmoulin's Whorl Snail	c 450m, straight line distance to the north. Associated lands, potential landspreading areas, extend to the edge of the protected site.

* Priority habitat

7.3.30. In my opinion in the absence of sufficient details on the of the construction and operation, the Board is not in a position to conclude the proposed development would not have significant indirect effects on the adjacent European sites.

7.4. Groundwater Protection

- 7.4.1. The site and associated lands are located in an area of moderate groundwater vulnerability, identified on Geological Survey of Ireland mapping, as overlying a regionally important karsified diffuse aquifer. The 'Groundwater Protection Responses to the Landspreading of Organic Wastes', recommendation is that these lands are suitable for landspreading of organic wastes subject to normal good practice.
- 7.4.2. A nutrient management plan was not provided with the application and it is unlikely that the lands adjoining the site are sufficient to support a development of this scale.
- 7.4.3. This issue was not raised by the planning authority and should be requested. Details of all currently associated landspreading areas should be provided, and, if it is necessary to provide evidence of soil depth in accordance with the groundwater protection responses to the landspreading of organic wastes, such evidence should be included in the response.

8.0 Recommendation

- 8.1.1. Since the applicant was not previously requested to provide a NIS or information on groundwater impact, I consider it appropriate for the Board to request the applicant to submit a Natura Impact Statement, a detailed construction management plan, and a nutrient management plan which gives details of all currently associated landspreading areas. Evidence of the suitability of landspreading areas, in accordance with the document 'Groundwater Protection Responses to the Landspreading of Organic Wastes', is required for any lands with extreme groundwater vulnerability.
- 8.1.2. I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.

Planning Inspector

6th February 2023

Appendix 1 - Form 1

EIA Pre-Screening

[EIAR not submitted]

An Bord Pleanála Case Reference	316264
Proposed Development Summary	Construct an agricultural shed containing a milking parlour, dairy, plant room, chemical store, office and handling facilities together with external collecting yard, underground effluent storage tank and all other associated works;
Development Address	Rosconnell Glebe, Attanagh, Co. Laois.

1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (that is involving construction works, demolition, or interventions in the natural surroundings)		Yes	/
		No	No further action required
2. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 1 or Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) and does it equal or exceed any relevant quantity, area or limit where specified for that class?			
Yes			EIA Mandatory EIAR required
No	/		Proceed to Q.3
3. Is the proposed development of a class specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) but does not equal or exceed a relevant quantity, area or other limit specified [sub-threshold development]?			
		Threshold	Comment (if relevant)
No	/	/	No EIAR or Preliminary Examination required
Yes		Class/Threshold.....	Proceed to Q.4

4. Has Schedule 7A information been submitted?		
No	/	Preliminary Examination required
Yes		Screening Determination required

Appendix 2 Photographs

Appendix 3 Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 extracts

Appendix 4 Site Synopsis, River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162), extract

Appendix 5 Cathcmments.ie - Pollution Impact Potential Mapping (PIP) for Nitrates and Phosphorus, extracts

Appendix 5 Groundwater Protection Responses to the Landspreading of Organic Wastes