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# Teagasc Advisory Regional Review 2021 *Cork East* Report

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## Contents

Introduction.....	3
The Cork East Advisory Region in Context .....	4
Observations on Evaluation Questions .....	5
Priority recommendations .....	6
1. Management & Organisational Capability .....	7
2. Productivity and Quality of Service Delivery in the Region.....	10
3. Relevance and Impact in the Region .....	11
Appendix 1 Advisory Regional Review Panel .....	14
Appendix 2 Advisory Regional Review High Level Evaluation Criteria.....	15
Appendix 3 Action Plan for the Implementation of Recommendations.....	16

## Introduction

Teagasc, the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority, is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. Established in September 1988 under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988, Teagasc is funded by state grant-in-aid, fees for research advisory and training services, income from national and EU competitive research programmes and revenue from farming activities and commodity levies.

The overall goal of the Teagasc Advisory Programme is to support the on-going development of sustainable family farms in Ireland, through efficient and effective knowledge transfer (KT) activities. The programme currently supports almost 140,000 individual farmers with 44,000 farmers contracted to Teagasc for services annually.

Teagasc reviews each of its Advisory regions on an approximate six-year cycle. The face-to-face part of the review of the Cork East Advisory Region took place in the Moorepark Advisory Office on October 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 2021. Prior to that, the Peer Review Panel (PRP) had a virtual Briefing Session on September 30<sup>th</sup> and a virtual Pre-Assessment workshop on October 14<sup>th</sup>. The Peer Review Panel (PRP) (see **Appendix 1** for panel composition) prepared this report based on the information exchanged at the virtual meetings, in-person meetings with management, staff representatives, enterprise specialists, farmer stakeholders and analysis of documents. The latter included the Region's Programme Description and Self-Assessment document, business plans, Teagasc Strategic Pathways for the Teagasc Agricultural Advisory Service 2015-2020 document, the Cork East Advisory Region strategy and the Teagasc Statement of Strategy, 2017-2020.

The PRP met with a farmer stakeholder group that consisted of 12 farmers. There were five dairy farmers, three of whom were in the Signpost Programme. There were five beef farmers, one of whom was in the Signpost Programme, another in the Greenacres/Dairy Beef 500 programme, yet another was a suckler farmer carrying out 100% AI, and a father and son (new entrant) partnership with sucklers and tillage. There was one tillage farmer in the Signpost Programme and one organic suckler, sheep and tillage farmer in also in the Signpost Programme.

The overall objectives of the review are: to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of the advisory service in the region; to gather evidence on the nature and scale of outcomes achieved to date and the extent to which these address the aims and objectives of the advisory service, and to learn what works (and why) so as to inform ongoing delivery and the design of the advisory service for the future.

Evaluation questions underpinning these objectives include:

- What activities have been delivered to date, compared to expectations?
- How effectively and efficiently is the programme being delivered, managed and governed?
- To what extent are changes implemented on farms?
- What outcomes and impacts have been achieved to date?
- What factors enable or hinder implementation and progress towards intended outcomes?
- What are the key lessons to inform ongoing delivery and design of future interventions?
- How is the programme performing overall?

The PRP is specifically asked to evaluate or comment on the following:

- Management and organisational capability
- Productivity and service delivery in relation to key performance indicators and outcomes
- Relevance and impact of services to the Region's clients and stakeholders

A more detailed description of each is outlined in **Appendix 2**.

## **The Cork East Advisory Region in Context**

Cork East is an intensive farming area with a diverse range of farm activities with both arable and livestock enterprises and a strong dairying tradition. Land quality is variable with a general deterioration as you head north-eastwards, where drought rarely is an issue compared to the area south of Midleton where almost annual drought restricts grass growth in the summer months. There is a diversity of soil types from heavier soils in the Duhallow area to more free draining soils further east.

There are 7,354 farmers in the region (CSO, 2010) with a mixture of farming enterprises across the region. The average size of farms is 38 ha which is above the national average of 34 ha's. Within Cork East there is a greater percentage of farms greater than 50 Ha at 29.3% versus 18.2% nationally and 25.4% in County Cork.

In 2021, there were 3,439 Teagasc clients in the Cork East region. Dairy farmers account for 50% of the client base with drystock farmers and tillage farmers making up 39% and 11% respectively. There are 33 students currently enrolled on Green Cert the Level 6 modules in the region's education centres. In addition, there are 37 students on the equivalent Distance Education Course.

There are currently 4 advisory offices in the region in Fermoy, Kanturk (leased), Mallow and Midleton. In 2020, the Advisory Programme was delivered through multiple KT channels including 1,495 farm visits, 11,281 consultations, 64 discussion groups and 481 discussion group meetings, 3,436 SPS/BPS applications, 301 ePMs and 792 derogation plans.

The programme is integrated with stakeholders such as Dairygold, Glanbia, North Cork Creameries and Kerry Agribusiness through Joint Programmes. It is also involved with 3 European Innovation Partnership (EIP) projects, namely the Hen Harrier, Allow and Bride projects.

The number of staff in the region increased from 31 in 2018 to 34 in 2021. This includes 23 advisors, 2 education officers, 6 administrative staff, 2 Walsh Scholars and one regional manager. Expenditure in 2020 was €2.074 million of which €1.35 million (65%) was recovered from advisory service charges.

## Observations on Evaluation Questions

- What activities have been delivered to date, compared to expectations?
  - *The programme has largely delivered on the advisory and education actions outlined in its 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. This has been achieved with the support of increased staff while also responding to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19.*
- How effectively and efficiently is the programme being delivered, managed and governed?
  - *The Cork East Advisory Programme is managed to a high standard and has delivered its programmes in an effective and efficient manner. The shared and delegated responsibilities across experienced staff ensures an effective environment in which young staff are supported to deliver quality services.*
- To what extent are changes implemented on farms?
  - *It is difficult to establish the extent and depth of change on Teagasc client farms in the region. The self-assessment report has indicated improved farm performance in the dairy and drystock sectors through uptake of promoted practices but due to the nature of the measurements used (primarily reflecting activities) it is difficult to attribute on-farm performance to Teagasc advisory and education inputs.*
- What outcomes and impacts have been achieved to date?
  - *This programme has worked with around 3,500 farmer clients (50% of farmers in the region) in supporting the adoption of good farm practices while concurrently availing of the schemes, programmes and entitlements available to them at the time. However, due to the nature of the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) applied it is very difficult to assess actual outcomes and impacts that can be attributed to Teagasc activities in the region.*
- What factors enable or hinder implementation and progress towards intended outcomes?
  - *The synergies between experienced and relatively young staff enable the delivery of high-quality advisory and education services in the region. This is somewhat hindered at certain times each year when scheme deadlines are prioritised over advisors allocated time for farm development activities.*
- What are the key lessons to inform ongoing delivery and design of future interventions?
  - *The new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) brings increased pressures to integrate environmental management with good production practices. The Advisory Environment Programme developed in the region provides a good basis to address this challenge while it is important that KPIs for staff are aligned with this work. Future interventions need to consider how they measure behaviour change by farms/ farm households in an effort to better understand and assess the true impact of advisory and education services.*
- How is the programme performing overall?
  - *The programme is performing to a high standard as borne out by the high levels of farmer-clients' satisfaction in the service and the relatively high levels of farm development and performance reported for the region. However the evidence which supports Teagasc influence on farm-based changes is weak and merits more attention, especially in the context of the new CAP and its proposed changes.*

## Priority recommendations

The PRP makes 21 recommendations. However, the following 13 recommendations are prioritised.

### 1. Management & Organisational Capability

- 1.1 Acknowledging the important role of the administrative staff in the Region, a close examination of their training needs and CPD offerings for administrative staff is recommended and in particular how staff can be incentivised to engage in this training.
- 1.2 Overcoming the annual periods in which scheme and programme deadlines override the farm development work of the service needs to be addressed in a more strategic and long term way to ensure the best balance is achieved in supporting clients towards best returns from farming. The preferred solution to this issue, articulated by the staff, is the recruitment of contract staff into Teagasc which reduces the reputational risk associated with outsourcing of scheme-related services.
- 1.3 In addition, private sector agricultural advisors in the region offer non-contractual opportunities for synergies around scheme-related work which could enable more time for core farm development work by Teagasc. Discussions between Teagasc and these local agri-consultants are encouraged with a view to identifying win-win situations which benefit the vast majority of farmers in the region.
- 1.4 Additional resources need to be committed to core areas of agricultural and rural development in the region that align with Teagasc's overall strategy which include: sustainability; health and safety; generational renewal; and farm diversification (incl. organic production).

### 2. Productivity & Quality of Service Delivery

- 2.1 Prioritisation of staff resources (particularly during periods of peak demand) should be considered to ensure the staffing complement is delivering to maximum capacity in terms of qualification and technical competency.
- 2.2 The annual productivity variance analysis of advisory output should be reviewed to maximise impact within the region.
- 2.3 A quality management system/plan to demonstrate improvement in service delivery should be considered.
- 2.4 Embedding evaluation measurements in programmes at the initiation stage is recommended. This has the potential for other regions to adopt best practice in delivery models/programmes.

### 3. Relevance and Impact

- 3.1 Further training and use of technology as solutions (such as CRM) could ease the workload of staff and requires investment and training to secure the benefits.
- 3.2 In relation to advisors supporting behavioural change and practice adoption (especially on environment-related practices) a holistic view of the farm is needed.
- 3.3 Renewed emphasis should be placed on the discussion group format post COVID-19 to get people to re-engage with the peer-to-peer social elements which can have impact on behavioural change.
- 3.4 The differentiation in quality between Teagasc education courses and other approved courses should be clarified to staff and students. Assess if this is warranted and publicise accordingly.
- 3.5 Measuring the impact of advisory and education services through behaviour change rather than the more standard farm productivity measurements deserve greater consideration as farming and rural policies place more emphasis on sustainability outcomes.

## 1. Management & Organisational Capability

### Management

- The Review Panel acknowledges the strong management system in place that enables a high level of collegiality amongst staff and which in turn facilitates both a dynamic workplace and a good support structure for young and new staff in the region.
- There was recognition of the increase in staff numbers over the past three years and in particular the cohort of young staff in the region and the challenge (and benefits) this poses to management to ensure continuity of high-quality services. A particular challenge identified here is the relatively high staff turnover as young staff re-locate to their home region when such opportunities arise.
- There is a good leadership structure in place which sees the Regional Manager delegate responsibilities across the five Posts of Responsibility (PoR) who in turn undertake these functions through their support and structured mentoring of the advisory and education staff.
- Teagasc staff have a strong affinity to their clients as supported by the discussion with the group of 12 farmers during the review visit and supplemented by the Net Promoter Score (NPS) result. This relationship was recognised by the farmers as being key to good advisory work that supports them in making good farm business decisions.
- The role of the six administrative staff in the region is key to maintaining good relations with clients and supporting the effective delivery of programmes and schemes. This key role is particularly highlighted when there are staff changes and there is a need for continuity in delivery of services and maintaining client relationships as new staff settle in.
- The annual Level 3 Business Plans are critical building blocks in service delivery. While the activities and targets for the Cork East Region largely align with the Teagasc national priorities and goals (*“Cork East fits beautifully within the Teagasc National Strategy”*) there remains the on-going challenge of connecting these individual Business Plans to the broad set of National Programmes and ultimately to the wider Teagasc Strategy. The challenge here lies in the balance between the unique needs and capabilities of farmer clients and the wider priorities of Teagasc as an organisation responsible for the delivery of discrete public policy measures.

### Technical Leadership

- There are substantial and effective technical knowledge supports available to the advisors in the Region which are accessed through the combination of mentoring by experienced staff and regular links with specialists. The specialists provide timely technical training sessions and one-to-one trouble shooting which is also supported by the Technology Adoption Groups.
- There are good CPD Programmes including the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) and the Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas (CECRA) as well as in-service training offerings available to the advisory and education staff and this is identified and guided through the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) process.
- The presence of the Teagasc Moorepark Centre in the region provides an additional connection to specialists, and by extension to Researchers, which adds value to the dynamic of the service (*“operating in the shadow of Moorepark”*).
- The administrative staff recognised that there are limited CPD opportunities. The absence of promotional opportunities associated with remaining in the region also mitigates against the uptake of the limited CPD opportunities that exist.

## **Resources**

- The key resource in the Region is the advisory, education and administrative staff who are committed to delivery of high-quality services to clients and this contributes to a dynamic workplace that supports innovation.
- The high quality mentoring support through the PoR holders and other experienced staff helps to augment and accelerate the professional development and progression of the young and inexperienced advisory staff through building their confidence in service delivery.
- The Review Panel noted the strong relationships and on-going engagement with stakeholders in the Region as evidenced by the Joint Programmes (4) and suite of European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) (5) that staff are involved in. These connections to other stakeholders in the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) help build the reach and influence of Teagasc in this advisory region.

## **Robustness & sustainability**

- The good reputation of Teagasc staff in this region, in delivering quality services to farmers was supported by the Panel's discussion with the group of farmers and the NPS results underscore the robustness of the services provided.
- It is envisaged that the robustness of the advisory and education services in the region will continue to be tested over the coming five years as the changes associated with the new CAP and associated climate change measures are applied.
- The Cork East Advisory Region is already positioning itself to meet the new demands of sustainable agriculture and its Environment Advisory Programme sets out a comprehensive and coherent approach to bringing together the range of activities and actors to meet this challenge.
- The embedded collegiate approach which exists amongst the staff positions the Region well to meet future challenges and opportunities associated with the new CAP measures
- The Region's current work portfolio and focus is well positioned to adjust to the priorities set out in Teagasc's Statement of Strategy (2021-2024) which in turn reflects the new challenges for the next decade.
- The Cork East Region's Education Programme provides a unique connection to young and future farmers and has the potential to influence how young farmers engage with advisory services into the future, including their willingness to work through Discussion Groups.
- The range of stakeholders engaged with in the Region's programmes provides a strong platform for addressing the overarching goal of Sustainability. It was also noted that there may be increasing scope to engage more, in a non-contractual way, with private sector agricultural consultants in securing the optimum returns for farmers from the wide range of agri-environmental and other measures that will emerge from the new CAP.

## **SWOT Analysis**

- The analysis presented in Appendix 2 of the Self-Assessment Report provides a valuable reflection by staff on the Region's Strategic Plan (2015-2020) and reports the delivery (full or partial) of the objectives set out in 2015. It acknowledges the collaborative approach across enterprises which emerged in response to the fodder crisis of 2018 however as it was compiled in a pre-Covid era it does not capture or report on the lessons learned in response to delivery of services in the COVID-19 era.
- The SWOT analysis presented in Section 13 (p.46) of the Self-Assessment Report highlights the important challenge (also raised by staff and specialists during the review visit) of the conflict which arises each year in the periods when scheme and programme deadlines overlap with critical on-farm decisions by farmer clients. These annual demands are addressed by employing temporary advisory staff while applying an 'all hands on deck' approach by existing staff. It was noted that this approach often compromises the farm development work at the expense of meeting critical deadlines for schemes and programmes. There is a strong concern that the future demands which will arise from the

- new CAP will increase the 'scheme administration' demands at the expense of core farm development work with clients.
- The challenge associated with generational renewal of farm businesses was identified as being important to dairy and drystock farms, while access to skilled labour for dairy farms was also identified as a current and future issue relevant to the region. Teagasc is in a unique position with its clients to play an increased and important role in guiding decisions on these issues which fundamentally shape the future and sustainability of family farms in the region.
  - Promotion of good farm health and safety practices is already a focus of the Region's Education Programme coupled with the initiative on addressing stress and mental health issues with dairy farmers. This is set to become a greater priority for Teagasc in its new national strategy (2021-2024) and the Cork East Region is well placed for greater engagement on this issue.

### Recommendations

- 1.1 Acknowledging the important role of the administrative staff in the Region, a close examination of their training needs and CPD offerings for administrative staff is recommended and in particular how staff can be incentivised to engage in this training.
- 1.2 Overcoming the annual periods in which scheme and programme deadlines override the farm development work of the service needs to be addressed in a more strategic and long term way to ensure the best balance is achieved in supporting clients towards best returns from farming. The preferred solution to this issue, articulated by the staff, is the recruitment of contract staff into Teagasc which reduces the reputational risk associated with outsourcing of scheme-related services.
- 1.3 In addition, private sector agricultural advisors in the region offer non-contractual opportunities for synergies around scheme-related work which could enable more time for core farm development work by Teagasc. Discussions between Teagasc and these local agri-consultants are encouraged with a view to identifying win-win situations which benefit the vast majority of farmers in the region.
- 1.4 Additional resources need to be committed to core areas of agricultural and rural development in the region that align with Teagasc's overall strategy. More specifically:
  - Teagasc staff are at the coalface of generational renewal issues with their farmer clients and this important role would benefit from being more clearly defined and resourced accordingly
  - Farm health and safety issues are given greater priority and attention in the new Teagasc Strategy. The Cork East Region is well placed to build and expand on its work in this area and in particular in supporting farmers' mental health and well-being in the context of an increasingly isolated and stressful profession.
  - Teagasc's support to rural development and diversification (incl. organics) by farm households into the future needs to consider resource commitment to avoid becoming a bottle neck for emerging opportunities, particularly in light of increased diversification activities driven by the new CAP.
- 1.5 The strong and effective management system which exists should be maintained and where possible continue to be strengthened. It is clear that the role of mentoring is contributing to this effective system and so should be considered across all functions and at all levels in the region.
- 1.6 As the role of Teagasc in working with farm households to deliver public goods that underpin the future sustainability agenda becomes more to the fore, there is both a growing need and benefit to determine measurements of results and impact at both farm and regional level. This is particularly important when it comes to the Environment Advisory Programme as it attempts to integrate and co-ordinate so many of its activities in the Region.

## **2. Productivity and Quality of Service Delivery in the Region**

### **Productivity**

- The Cork East Advisory Region delivers a very good service to clients in the area. There are 23 advisors and approx. 3,500 clients with an average advisor:client ratio of approx. 150.
- The advisory region is very focussed on delivering a wide range of products and services to meet the needs of their farmers. The services range from support to farmers within EU schemes through to business planning and technical discussion groups.
- The models of delivery vary from social media, publications, individual farm visits and on-farm training events. The Advisory Region also demonstrates good partnership/collaboration work with key industry stakeholders in the region e.g. Dairygold, Glanbia, Kerry Agribusiness and North Cork creameries.
- Presentations by staff to the Review Panel were excellent and demonstrated a number of areas where they are delivering real impact and could be considered as exemplary e.g. Environment Advisory Programme.
- It is also evident that there are competing pressures for Teagasc resources at particular times during the year. This is very apparent in the spring when significant resources are utilised around the BPS application period. It is clear that this creates some tensions for staff and farmers particularly those clients who have packages which are much broader than the basic BPS support.
- The Advisory Region has a technically competent team with a good mix of experience and younger staff and there is clear evidence which supports good mentoring practice to ensure productivity and quality are maintained.
- The existing productivity variance exercise benchmarks advisory outputs across advisors within the region, and also across regions. However, the PRP are of the opinion that due to variations between adviser outputs it would be helpful if the various elements of the productivity analysis were prioritised or weighted so as create a profile of the defined outputs of an adviser in the top 10% delivering impact in the region. Then other advisers could aspire to reach that output profile.
- The education programme in the region is highly valued and the presentation to the panel included reference to an Alumni Programme. This is an excellent initiative which should be further developed, evaluated and has the potential to be rolled out across other advisory regions.

### **Quality of Service Delivery**

- The Advisory Region provided strong evidence of quality of delivery from staff presentations supported by plans and the farmer discussion session.
- There is evidence of conflicting Teagasc messages between advisory and research programmes. This was mentioned during the meeting with farmers and although not a major issue it is vital that consistency across Teagasc in communication of messages is delivered to ensure quality is maintained.
- Although it is apparent that service delivery is highly valued by farmers in the region there are no definitive quality standards/KPIs reported on so it is difficult to pick up a clear and consistent message.

### **Recommendations**

- 2.1: Prioritisation of staff resources (particularly during periods of peak demand) should be considered to ensure the staffing complement is delivering to maximum capacity in terms of qualification and technical competency.
- 2.2: The annual productivity variance analysis of advisory output should be reviewed to maximise impact within the region.
- 2.3: A quality management system/plan to demonstrate improvement in service delivery should be considered.
- 2.4: Embedding evaluation measurements in programmes at the initiation stage is recommended. This has the potential for other regions to adopt best practice in delivery models/programmes.

## **3. Relevance and Impact in the Region**

### **Programme relevance**

- Since 2015, the impact and relevance of Teagasc in this region has been really clear and focused on 'Grow the business' and 'Maximize grass and increase milk solids.' It has been very successful in terms of supporting farm profitability and from an environmental perspective there has been discreet changes evident (EBI, grass measurement).
- In relation to the relevance of the Teagasc programme in the region, there is a need to closely align the environmental imperatives and the technical aspects of production for farmers.
- A tension exists between the quality and enhancement of the environment and the technical aspects of production in terms of what is achievable. The message and expectations associated with farming have changed and this has happened quite suddenly for farmers. Teagasc plays a vital role in easing this transition.
- The impact of Teagasc services in the region can be measured quantitatively in terms of physical environmental and farm production improvements and also in incremental behavioural change, not all of which can be attributed to Teagasc.
- In this region the environmental challenge facing farmers, especially dairy farmers, is front and center in the minds of all. It is agreed that solutions to many of these challenges are technical with Teagasc well positioned to deliver on technical advice. This makes the organization uniquely relevant to not only farmers but to wider society.
- The environmental challenge is quite a focal point in this region. Moorepark, Johnstown Castle, Grange and Athenry as acknowledged 'solution centres' to combat these challenges are positive influences in terms of alignment with national strategy.
- In the Education Programme, courses are in high demand but there is competition for students in the region. Education staff expressed frustration that non-Teagasc courses are not of an equivalent standard to the Teagasc courses.
- Delivering on the behavioural changes required to meet Teagasc' strategic goals requires filling gaps in staffing at critical pinch-points (e.g. derogation). This may need to be considered within a longer term model, taking on board that behaviour modification is incremental and slow.
- There is a concern that many farmers in the region (clients and on-clients) will not be able to keep pace with the speed of change (environment, regulation, costs).
- The new Teagasc strategy, that was referred to as "moving from production agriculture to sustainability agriculture", while recognised, merits being more visible in the strategy for the region.
- Management do not want client numbers to be the key measure of activity and place a high emphasis on interaction at the discussion group level and with peer-to-peer learning.

## **Knowledge Transfer**

- The peer-to-peer Knowledge Exchange achieved through discussion groups, which includes a social aspect between the farmer participants themselves as much as the facilitator, has been highly effective in supporting good decision making by farmers.
- Some of the farmer discussion groups initially set up on the back of funding are nonfunctioning with members joining to secure the payment only. Many of the groups that formed with a more technical or proactive attitude towards learning are continuing.
- Relevance to farmers is rooted in the highly competent advisory team who provide trusted technical advice that has been proven to strengthen farm profitability.
- The “avalanche of new policy-related measures coming in 2023” is a source of concern for staff.
- In many cases, scheme application and advice pertaining to new schemes is an entry point for an advisor to a farm.
- A dependence on office-based consultations for administration of scheme work with no interaction on farm or at events compromise the advisor-client relationships that have been so beneficial to farmers.
- There is a relatively large group of young staff in the organization and they are getting great support in terms of building their advisory and technical competencies.
- Advisory staff based in Moorepark and in the region, with direct access to the researchers creates a very natural feedback loop in dairy. Discussions during the review would suggest that this relationship with research at Grange, Athenry, Oakpark continues to be strengthened.

## **Reputation**

- Technology and remote working have potential to improve performance and the conditions for staff in the region.
- Many clients demand more from Teagasc in terms of service and not all farmers want the same things. It is increasingly difficult to continue to add additional elements to the service without something else suffering. This could weaken the relevance of Teagasc to its clients and ultimately impact on reputation.
- The relatively large number of young advisors in the region is a constantly changing group which presents a challenge to the service in terms of retention and continuity with them wanting to move closer to home.
- Although the relationship between farmer and advisor is a key element of the service, how Teagasc represents farming in public debate (e.g. media commentary) can be a source of tension as the science and economics might not always support the priorities of client farmers.
- Farmers using Teagasc for production advice and private consultants for business planning and finance is an example of the divestment of some activities from Teagasc.

## Recommendations

- 3.1 Further training and use of technology as solutions (such as CRM) could ease the workload of staff and requires investment and training to secure the benefits.
- 3.2 In relation to advisors supporting behavioural change and practice adoption (especially on environment-related practices) a holistic view of the farm is needed.
- 3.3 Renewed emphasis should be placed on the discussion group format post COVID-19 to get people to re-engage with the peer-to-peer social elements which can have impact on behavioural change.
- 3.4 The differentiation in quality between Teagasc education courses and other approved courses should be clarified to staff and students. Assess if this is warranted and publicise accordingly.
- 3.5 Measuring the impact of advisory and education services through behaviour change rather than the more standard farm productivity measurements deserve greater consideration as farming and rural policies place more emphasis on sustainability outcomes.
- 3.6 Assess what programmes are delivering most value to farmers across all four pillars (economic, social, innovation, environmental) in this region.
- 3.7 When there is a disparity between client needs and science, communication must be carefully managed to avoid damaging farmer / advisor dynamics. Specialists play a key role in guiding Teagasc' position on this.
- 3.8 Staffing for the environmental challenges ahead will need a different mind-set to what came before. An economically feasible environmental model that still appeals to the needs of farm families in the region is required.
- 3.9 Schemes are the buy-in on many farms, so caution is required when outsourcing this work. The relationships built in supporting farmers in schemes can be a key to environmental practice adoption.
- 3.10 Investment in servicing the needs of clients in relation to schemes is an important activity for Teagasc advisory services in the region. However, it cannot take away from the technical work and therefore an outsourcing / temporary staff / administration / technology solution at pinch points (derogations, BPS applications) is advised.
- 3.11 With the Options Programme, a mind-set change is needed. Differentiation at farm level should not be viewed as "needed due to failure of the existing operation". Success economically and viability wise should be the benchmark.

**Appendix 1     Advisory Regional Review Panel**

Function / Role	Name
Chair	Jim Kinsella is the Professor of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development in the School of Agriculture and Food Science, UCD. His teaching and research work over the years has focused on agricultural innovation and extension systems both in Ireland and abroad. He lives on a drystock farm in Kilkenny.
KT Professional with Advisory and/or Education background	Martin McKendry qualified with a BSc in Agriculture Engineering from Cranfield University and is currently the Director of CAFRE in NI. The college delivers education programmes to those entering the agri-food industry from Level 2 to MSc and also provides KT and Innovation programmes for those working within the industry.
Farmer stakeholder	L. J. Ryan is a dairy farmer from Co. Tipperary. He is Chairperson of his local discussion group and very involved in Grass Management Programme. He is a member of the Advisory Committee of Tipperary Co-Op. He has participated in the Monitor Farm Programme and was a European Dairyman Pilot Farm.
Industry stakeholder	Amii McKeever is editor of Irish Country Living, the Irish Farmers Journal magazine. Amii holds BAgSc and MAgrSc degrees as well as a Diploma in Strategic Growth from UCD and is currently studying for an MBA from Trinity Business School. Amii is a past president of the Agricultural Science Association, a Nuffield Scholar and treasurer of Agri Aware.
Independent Teagasc Representative & Secretariat	Dr Kevin Heanue Teagasc's Evaluation Officer, leads the development of an evaluation culture in Teagasc through the cyclical evaluation of its research programmes, extension activities and once-off evaluations of organisational activities and functions. He provides a secretariat to the Peer Review Panel.

## **Appendix 2    Advisory Regional Review High Level Evaluation Criteria**

### **1.        Management and Organisational Capability**

Management and Organisational Capability refers to the coordination and administration of activities in the Region. The focus in this area includes how the organisation structure in place supports programme delivery, communication between staff and management (including staff in a coordinating role), the extent to which staff feel that their role is well defined, the scope for them to develop professionally and personally while contributing to programme objectives. How well regional objectives, resources, activities, and outputs are communicated internally and externally.

The Region's capacity to plan for and respond to present and future challenges. Included in this are resources, expertise, and strategy in place. The strengths, opportunities, threats and weaknesses of the Region are taken into account.

### **2.        Productivity and Service Delivery**

Productivity reflects the relationship between input and output. Output should always be judged in relation to the mission and resources of Teagasc and the Region and the needs of the customer. When looking at productivity, a verdict is usually quantitative in nature. In this case the list will include metrics such as client numbers, visits, discussion groups, meetings held, Teagasc eProfit Monitors, derogations, farm plans and so on. The panel are asked to include other forms of (qualitative) information in their assessment. The suitability of service delivery methods to customer needs and regional resources should also be assessed.

### **3.        Relevance and impact**

Relevance and Impact refer to how well the services delivered by the regional staff are aligned to national Advisory and Education Programme priorities, and the needs of the region's customers. The extent to which staff from the Region collaborate with community actors is also relevant in this context. The extent to which customers have improved their economic activities resulting from interaction with Teagasc is relevant, if this information is available. Feedback from customers and stakeholders gives an insight to the Region's reputation with stakeholders and customers.

**Appendix 3    Action Plan for the Implementation of Recommendations**

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**Review of Cork East Advisory Region 2021**

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**Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations**

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Date:                      April 11<sup>th</sup> 2022

Submit to:                Dr. Stan Lalor, Director of Knowledge Transfer; Dermot McCarthy, Head of Advisory Service

This action plan outlines the priority and ordinary recommendations from the report on the *Cork East Advisory Region 2021 Peer Review*. To complete this action plan please specify the actions to be taken, if any, to implement the recommendations outlined, allocate responsibility for these actions and set a target date by which the recommendation is to be implemented.



		<p>work in this area and in particular in supporting farmers' mental health and well-being in the context of an increasingly isolated and stressful profession.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teagasc's support to rural development and diversification (incl. organics) by farm households into the future needs to consider resource commitment to avoid becoming a bottle neck for emerging opportunities, particularly in light of increased diversification activities driven by the new CAP.</li> </ul>	<p>conjunction with HSE and other organisations. Rural development &amp; diversification including organics to be managed on a whole farm approach with support from the relevant specialists.</p>	<p>Noreen O'Rahilly  Ml. Bourke</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
1.5	○	<p>The strong and effective management system which exists should be maintained and where possible continue to be strengthened. It is clear that the role of mentoring is contributing to this effective system and so should be considered across all functions and at all levels in the region.</p>	<p>Management works closely with PORs and mentors and lead advisers ensuring an effective system of management. Staff Officer leads through G3 Admin person and regular communication in both directions between Staff Officer and admin staff.</p>	<p>John Horgan  Siobhan Luttrell</p>	<p>Ongoing  Ongoing</p>
1.6	○	<p>As the role of Teagasc in working with farm households to deliver public goods that underpin the future sustainability agenda becomes more to the fore, there is both a growing need and benefit to determine measurements of results and impact at both farm and regional level. This is particularly important when it comes to the Environment Advisory Programme as it attempts to integrate and co-ordinate so many of its activities in the Region.</p>	<p>Investigate evaluation methods to determine the measurement of impact at both farm and regional level. Seek assistance from Specialists and Research in the design of this evaluation of behavioural change.</p>	<p>John Horgan Evaluation Unit Kevin Connolly</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

**2. Recommendations for Productivity and Quality of Service Delivery**

No.	Priority or ordinary	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
2.1	<b>P</b>	Prioritisation of staff resources (particularly during periods of peak demand) should be considered to ensure the staffing complement is delivering to maximum capacity in terms of qualification and technical competency.	Re-organisation of staff priorities through good management.	John Horgan	Ongoing
2.2	<b>P</b>	The annual productivity variance analysis of advisory output should be reviewed to maximise impact within the region.	This action is already undertaken twice yearly and results discussed with individual staff members at PMDS meetings with a view to acknowledging achievement and seek improvements where necessary.	John Horgan	Ongoing
2.3	<b>P</b>	A quality management system/plan to demonstrate improvement in service delivery should be considered.	Yes we need to develop a quality management system which recognises impact and behavioural change as a result of our services to clients.	John Horgan Evaluation Unit	Ongoing
2.4	<b>P</b>	Embedding evaluation measurements in programmes at the initiation stage is recommended. This has the potential for other regions to adopt best practice in delivery models/programmes.	As above – a model needs to be developed by researchers. Behavioural factors affecting the adoption of sustainable farming in the context of considering behavioural change.	John Horgan Evaluation Unit	Ongoing

### 3. Recommendations for Relevance and Impact

No.	Priority or ordinary	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person Responsible	Date for Completion
3.1	<b>P</b>	Further training and use of technology as solutions (such as CRM) could ease the workload of staff and requires investment and training to secure the benefits.	All technologies and new equipment that are beneficial to be provided within budget constraints. CRM has been a disappointment to date in this regard.	John Horgan	Ongoing
3.2	<b>P</b>	In relation to advisors supporting behavioural change and practice adoption (especially on environment-related practices) a holistic view of the farm is needed.	Advisers to adopt a holistic view of the farm and consult with all professionals involved with the client.	All advisory staff	Ongoing
3.3	<b>P</b>	Renewed emphasis should be placed on the discussion group format post COVID-19 to get people to re-engage with the peer-to-peer social elements which can have impact on behavioural change.	Discussion groups have increased activities post COVID in this regard.	All Advisers	Ongoing
3.4	<b>P</b>	The differentiation in quality between Teagasc education courses and other approved courses should be clarified to staff and students. Assess if this is warranted and publicise accordingly.	This issue has been raised at national level within Teagasc and is a real concern.	AnnMarie Butler	Ongoing
3.5	<b>P</b>	Measuring the impact of advisory and education services through behaviour change rather than the more standard farm productivity measurements deserve greater consideration as farming and rural policies place more emphasis on sustainability outcomes.	As previously agreed a system of modelling and measurement of behavioural change needs to be developed at research level for implementation in the regions.	Evaluation Unit	Ongoing
3.6	<b>O</b>	Assess what programmes are delivering most value to farmers across all four pillars (economic, social, innovation, environmental) in this region.	This would be the basis for a research programme to be carried out centrally.	Stan Lalor	Ongoing

No.	Priority or ordinary	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person Responsible	Date for Completion
3.7	O	When there is a disparity between client needs and science, communication must be carefully managed to avoid damaging farmer / advisor dynamics. Specialists play a key role in guiding Teagasc' position on this.	Advisors need to be cognisant of the importance of recognising advances in research even when this apparently conflicts initially with farmers' expectations.	All Advisers	Ongoing
3.8	O	Staffing for the environmental challenges ahead will need a different mind-set to what came before. An economically feasible environmental model that still appeals to the needs of farm families in the region is required.	Recognition that sustainable agriculture also has a cost associated with it and that the priorities of production led agriculture were different.	All Advisers	Ongoing
3.9	O	Schemes are the buy-in on many farms, so caution is required when outsourcing this work. The relationships built in supporting farmers in schemes can be a key to environmental practice adoption.	Maintain involvement in scheme delivery while recognising the development role of Teagasc advisers	Stan Lalor Dermot McCarthy	Ongoing
3.10	O	Investment in servicing the needs of clients in relation to schemes is an important activity for Teagasc advisory services in the region. However, it cannot take away from the technical work and therefore an outsourcing / temporary staff / administration / technology solution at pinch points (derogations, BPS applications) is advised.	Sufficient staff to meet the needs of a changing agricultural environment is the overarching requirement and recognised by Teagasc senior management.	Stan Lalor Dermot McCarthy	Ongoing
3.11	O	With the Options Programme, a mind-set change is needed. Differentiation at farm level should not be viewed as "needed due to failure of the existing operation". Success economically and viability wise should be the benchmark.	It has been our experience in the region over many years that the most successful farmers who become involved in alternative enterprises were previously highly successful in their traditional enterprise.	Ml. Bourke	Ongoing