

*An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Knowledge Transfer
Groups to date in the Mayo Advisory Region*

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Abstract:

While farmer discussion groups are proven to be an effective method of increasing farm profitability there has been little documented evidence as to whether or not Knowledge Transfer discussion groups are effective at improving farm performance in Ireland. This study identified the knowledge, attitudes and practice changes of 56 beef Knowledge Transfer (KT) group participants. The study also sought to identify the satisfaction rate with the knowledge Transfer Programme amongst participants and ways in which the programme can be improved going forward.

The sample population used was one nominated beef KT group from each of the four advisory offices. This resulted in 63 surveys being handed out with a total of 56 completed surveys being returned. The surveys contained a mix of questions designed to gain an insight into members' openness to new ideas and the adoption of new technologies whilst also learning what improvements have been made to the farm performance and management since joining the discussion group. Farmers were also asked what improvements could be made to the running of the groups.

The study found that beef KT Group members in the Mayo Advisory Region were, contrary to other research, older than 46 years old, weren't farming full time but the majority were educated to certificate level. The use of specialist speakers and tours of model farms were favourable methods for reinforcing discussion group methods. Established discussion group members (continued membership from previous programme) had more knowledge and higher adoption rates than new KT group participants. The continued use of specialist speakers, tours/trips away to outside facilities or farms and less paperwork were suggested as improvements for future Knowledge Transfer programmes.

The study recommends that Teagasc should continue to market the KT programme in order to enhance the awareness of its benefits. In particular non-KT group members should be targeted in order to further improve the efficiency of beef farming in Ireland. It also recommends restructuring in-service training for advisors in order to strengthen their facilitation skills.