



AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority

Discussion Groups

- ❑ Teagasc operates 697 discussion groups (dairy, beef, sheep and tillage) with 12,000 farmer members
- ❑ 351 dairy discussion groups with 5,775 farmer members
- ❑ A forum for sharing ideas between members; a place to openly discuss farming issues; and to keep up-to-date with new technology
- ❑ Offer support to farmers through the provision of a social network
- ❑ Primary purpose is to provide a forum suitable for learning to take place
- ❑ Successful discussion groups
 - ❑ Hold regular meetings
 - ❑ Have a committed advisor/facilitator
 - ❑ Identified group chairman and secretary
- ❑ Discussion groups are globally recognised as a very effective Knowledge Transfer tool
- ❑ Since 2009 Government policy has been to support an increase in discussion group numbers

Independent Evaluation of Teagasc Dairy Discussion Groups

- ❑ Why an independent evaluation of Teagasc dairy discussion groups ?
 - ❑ Growth in group numbers
 - ❑ Increased role of groups in Teagasc Advisory Service
 - ❑ Teagasc policy is to evaluate all major programme areas
 - ❑ Value for money and accountability
- ❑ Evaluation Objectives
 - ❑ Determine impact of group membership on financial performance, practice adoption, physical performance
 - ❑ To obtain feedback from discussion group members and make recommendations to maintain or improve groups
- ❑ These evaluation findings and recommendations are relevant to all enterprises

Financial Benefits of Group Membership (Dairy)

- ❑ Discussion group members are up to 20% more likely to adopt new technologies and best management practices
- ❑ This enhanced physical performance also translates into profit
- ❑ 2008 NFS data shows when measurable farm characteristics are controlled for, discussion group members typically earned €247 premium per hectare in gross margin terms
- ❑ 2011 NFS data show that established group members (pre-DEP) earned 2 to 3 cent more per litre than newer group members (DEP) and non-group members
- ❑ When you take into account farm size, location soil type etc there is still a benefit to discussion group membership.
 - ❑ For example take two identical farms in south west with 60 cows (aged 55)
 - ❑ National Farm Survey shows that GM/hectare of group member is likely to be approximately €2600 compare to €2350 for the non- member (a difference of 11% as a result of membership)
 - ❑ DEP members performed better than non- members but would need to be a group member for a longer period for full economic benefit

Impact on Farmers of Participation in Teagasc Dairy Discussion Groups

Report Findings
Dr. Pat Bogue
Broadmore Research

**Broadmore
RESEARCH**

Brief Overview of Method

1. NFS analysis – 2008 to 2011 (Dr. Thia Hennessy)
 - Financial & physical performance of farmers in groups (established & new) & non-members

2. Findings from research in East Cork (Enda Duffy – Walsh Fellow)
 1. Knowledge, behaviour and attitudes of 8 groups

3. Survey and Focus Groups (Dr. Pat Bogue, Broadmore Research)
 1. Survey of 405 Discussion Group Members
 2. 9 Focus Groups (members, non-members and advisors)

Selected Findings - Physical Performance

- ❑ Practices - 39% of members using AI Genomic bulls in 2008 (14% non-members)
- ❑ Achievement (2011) of Teagasc Road Map targets (2018) for yield, quality & feed usage:
 - ❑ Highest % achieving targets were established members; &

	Est	New	Non
Milk Solids \geq 378 kg	53%	49%	37%
Protein \geq 3.4%	54%	37%	35%

- ❑ DEP had positive impact on grassland, breeding and financial management
- ❑ Farmers perceived they were gaining knowledge and benefits
 - ❑ even if it takes time to realise financial benefits

Selected Findings – Survey/Focus Groups

Motivation for Joining and Perceived Benefits

- ❑ Primarily for learning (29%), gaining information (23%) & DEP payment (21%)
 - ❑ 38% of new members identified DEP payment as reason for joining
- ❑ Perceived Benefits: learning from others; up- to- date information; ideas; problem solving; and meeting farmers/social outlet
- ❑ Changes made by group members in last three years: grassland management (70%); breeding and fertility (13%); and reduced costs (11%)

Selected Findings – Survey/Focus Groups

Satisfaction with Groups and Advisors

- Overall satisfaction high but some uncertain of continuing post DEP
 - Not yet convinced of benefits
- High level of satisfaction with advisor – group facilitation & knowledge and ability to target advice to individuals
- High dependence on advisor ‘*Teagasc group not farmer group*’
 - Active chairperson, plan and worksheets (53% have all three)
 - Needs a greater level of farmer ownership
- Satisfaction with:
 - Running of groups: overall satisfaction (91%);
 - Member participation: overall satisfaction (85%); and
 - Outcome of meetings: overall satisfaction (89%).

Chairperson 79%
Annual plan 75%
Worksheets 63%

Selected Findings – Survey/Focus Groups

Perceptions of the DEP

- ❑ Widened the benefit to more farmers, provided regular advisory contact and a structured programme
- ❑ Criticisms include: structure too rigid; advisers found the administration limited preparations for each meeting; non-committed group members were unsettling group
- ❑ Lessons for future programmes
 - ❑ Less paperwork & more group control over content

- ❑ All group members: 81% intended to continue post DEP (12% uncertain)
- ❑ New members: 71% intended to continue (18% uncertain)

Selected Conclusions

- ❑ Effective approach for the delivery of advice and information
 - ❑ Impacting on management and efficiency
- ❑ 11% profit premium to groups – new technology and improved practices
 - ❑ Improvement in financial performance takes time
- ❑ Motivation to join is hunger for knowledge & information for application on own farm
- ❑ High dependence on the facilitator
 - ❑ Greater potential member roles and inputs
- ❑ DEP successfully attracted more farmers
- ❑ Challenges to integrating new members

Selected Recommendations

- ❑ Develop a strategy for development of groups
 - ❑ Long-term vision, promotion, recruitment, integration of new members
- ❑ Consider streaming of groups – intensive and less intensive
- ❑ Focus on improved group functioning
 - ❑ Greater member ownership and involvement
 - ❑ Group dynamics
 - ❑ General operation
 - Meetings, chairperson, worksheets, recommendations, outcomes

Groups are working, delivering for farmers and advisors but need care and attention for their long-term development

Impact on Farmers of Participating in Teagasc Dairy Discussion Groups

Teagasc Response to Report Recommendations:

Tom O' Dwyer
Head of Dairy Knowledge Transfer
Teagasc

Actions by Teagasc arising from Report Recommendations

- ❑ Managers and Advisers briefed
- ❑ Training for discussion group chairpersons
 - ❑ Role of chairperson
 - ❑ The importance of an annual plan
 - ❑ Making recommendations and taking action
 - ❑ Recruitment and involvement of new members
- ❑ Action Plan to be formulated to incorporate other elements
- ❑ Best Practice Protocol being updated/ revised
 - ❑ Consultation required with Managers and Advisers before roll-out

Best Practice Protocol

- Interpersonal relations
- Group size
- Chairperson
- Annual General Meeting (agm)
- Number of meetings
- Facilitator
- Host farmer
- Preparation visit
- Group projects
- Bio-security
- Purchasing groups

New Members

- ❑ Teagasc welcomes the announcement on new DPD
- ❑ And will seek to recruit new members to existing, and new, groups
- ❑ Copies of recently published newsletter available

Discussion Groups as a Technology Transfer Tool – Take Home Messages

- Discussion groups are a key methodology used by Teagasc to transfer new technology to farmers
- Proven to increase adoption of technology and management practices
- Evaluation shows increased financial benefits to members -over €9,600 for 40 hectare farm (€240 x40)
- Broadmore survey results show that farmers join groups primarily for purposes of learning and gaining information
- Discussion groups provide a valuable peer-to- peer learning environment
- 81% of all respondents stated their intention to continue in the group; for DEP members, 71% intend to continue as members
- The benefits of group membership need to be continually highlighted
- Teagasc will continually ensure groups are working effectively and take on board report recommendations