

Profiling on-farm demonstrations in Ireland

A team of **TEAGASC** research and advisory staff has collected information on the profile of Irish demonstration farms.

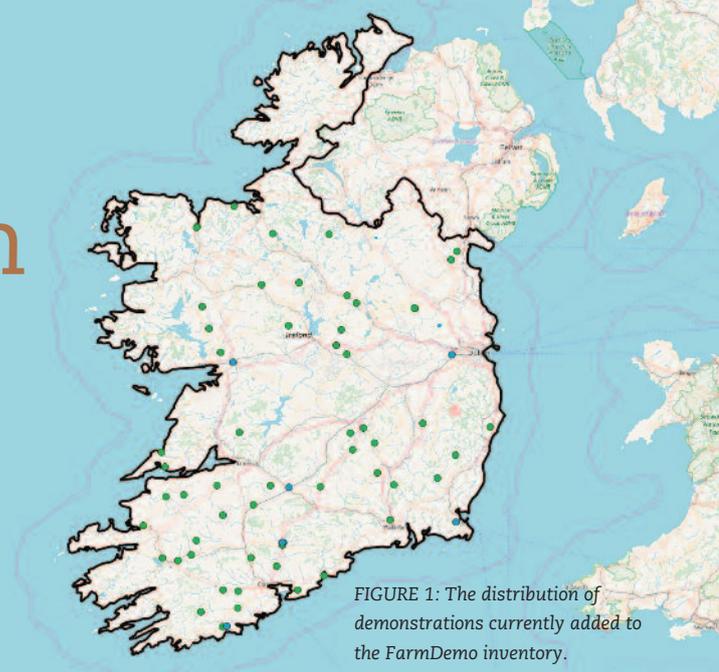


FIGURE 1: The distribution of demonstrations currently added to the FarmDemo inventory.

Introduction

There is ample evidence that farmers tend to be most influenced by farming methods demonstrated by their peers. In this context, the literature suggests that demonstration activities hosted by farmers on their own or research farms can prove effective in supporting farmer-to-farmer learning. The aim of the FarmDemo survey (serving two EU Horizon 2020 consortia: 'Agridemo-F2F' and 'PLAID') is to profile on-farm demonstrations across Europe and present them in a comprehensive geo-referenced database (<http://www.farmdemo.eu>). The survey takes a broad definition of 'demonstration' farm, which includes open days, farm walks, monitor farms, focus farms (such as restaurant chain McDonald's farms) and industry, e.g., processor-owned farms.

Methodology

The FarmDemo survey aims to partially populate a comprehensive database of demonstration farms in Europe, which will be ultimately self-populated by farmers, researchers, advisers and others on an ongoing basis. The aim of the survey is to collect data on demonstration farms, testing the information categories that will eventually be used to structure the database, and generating information for the first swathe of database entries. In Ireland, 117 individuals participating in, or organising, demonstration farm programmes (particularly representing the sheep, beef, dairy and organic sector) and/or demonstrations on research farms, have been contacted. So far, 59 farmers (19 beef, 34 dairy, six sheep including one organic) and 20 organisations (Teagasc and external organisations) involved in on-farm demonstrations have

been profiled using the FarmDemo survey for the purposes of populating the database (Figure 1). Actors involved in demonstration farms will be contacted on an ongoing basis to encourage self-population of the database and achieve maximum representation of all Irish demonstration farms. Furthermore, in-depth case studies of demonstration events in agroforestry and tillage are underway.

On-farm demonstration approaches in Ireland

When were on-farm demonstrations first used?

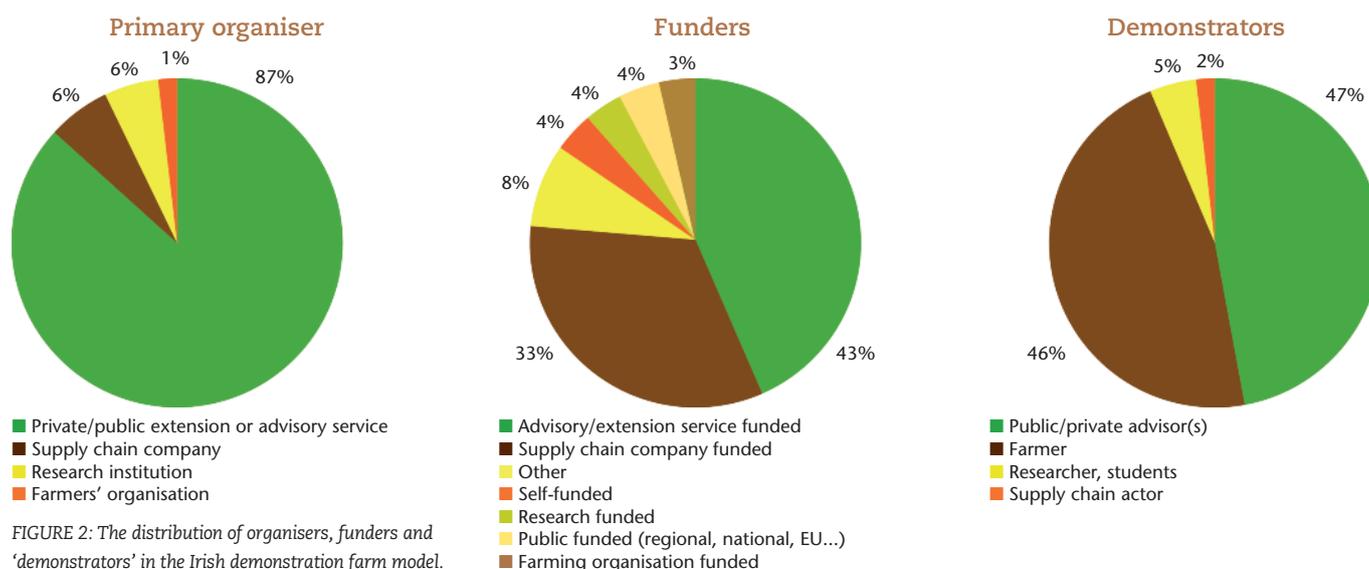
The use of demonstrations on organisation farms in Ireland can be traced back to 1839 (the Royal Dublin Society's annual Spring Show) (O'Loughlin and Sullivan), 1907 (An Foras Talúntais [AFT] agricultural demonstration stations in Ballyhaise and Athenry), and 1963 (AFT dairy research farm Moorepark) (Miley M., 2008). There is photographic evidence of demonstrations on private farms taking place as early as 1974 (O'Loughlin and Sullivan). Since the 1990s, there has been a tendency towards the co-ordinated organisation and delivery of demonstration events on 'ordinary' farms in collaboration with industry partners.

What is demonstrated in Ireland?

It is important to note that the 59 farms that we have profiled thus far do not comprise a representative sample of all Irish farms on which demonstration activities occur. However, the sample of 59 sheep, beef and dairy farms gives us a partial insight into their demonstration activities. The standard FarmDemo survey found that the following topics

Table 1: Range and distribution (by sector) of demonstration topics.

Demonstration topics	Beef	Dairy	Sheep	All
Pasture management	95%	100%	100%	98%
Animal nutrition/feeding	84%	82%	100%	85%
Housing and rearing systems	89%	74%	100%	81%
Animal health management and welfare	79%	74%	100%	78%
Quality enhancement and promotion	68%	74%	100%	75%
Strategies to reduce risk of antibiotic resistance development	79%	62%	100%	71%
Technologies	37%	62%	100%	58%
Business development (e.g., business planning, cost efficiency, labour management)	-	-	-	54%
Climate change mitigation and adaptation	31%	35%	17%	32%
Waste management	21%	35%	33%	31%
Biodiversity and nature management	21%	29%	33%	27%
Processing to food/feed	11%	12%	0%	20%
Renewable energy and energy efficiency issues	0%	26%	0%	15%
CAP/State subsidies and schemes	-	-	-	14%
Machinery	16%	12%	0%	12%



were most prevalent on Irish farms (Table 1): pasture management; animal nutrition and feeding; housing and rearing systems; animal health management and welfare; quality enhancement and promotion; and, strategies to reduce risk of antibiotic resistance development. In addition, 54% of demonstration farmers reported that on-farm demonstrations focused on business development, planning and labour efficiency issues. Topics focusing on the environment, such as biodiversity and nature management/climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as the topics processing to food/feed, machinery and waste management, were less prevalent (Table 1).

How are the demonstration activities organised and funded?

Teagasc is leading a number of 'joint programmes' co-funded by other actors (categorised as 'supply chain company' and 'other') across Ireland (Figure 2). On the demonstration farms profiled thus far, the Teagasc adviser is stated to be the 'main demonstrator' and occupies 47% of the role as demonstrator (Figure 2).

What is the role of the farmer (according to the farmer)?

On the farms profiled thus far, the demonstration farmer is most commonly stated as the 'secondary demonstrator'. Most demonstration farms in Ireland host up to three events per year and these are both 'smaller' (approximately 20 farmers) and 'larger' (80-1,000 participants) events. It was reported that the nature of the farmers' roles varies between farmers and reflects the size of the event.

The majority of farmers considered the demonstration activities on their farms to be initiated more by an external organisation than completely farmer led. Farmers in Ireland, as opposed to some other countries in Europe, generally do not lead their own demonstrations independently of their extension programme or local/programme adviser.

The five main motivations for Irish farmers to host demonstration activities (selected from a predefined list of categories) were: information gathering/sharing; competitiveness/productivity; monetary/financial; educational and training opportunities; and, research implementation.

Who attends demonstration farm events?

Demonstration farmers reported that more than 75% of attendees were male and women are underrepresented. The majority of attendees were described as aged over 40.

Conclusions

The study reported here has outlined the profile of 59 Irish demonstration farms (non-representative). Future research by the AgriDemo-F2F consortium will be undertaken to complete the FarmDemo inventory and to identify novel approaches to enabling peer-to-peer learning EU wide. For more information, visit AgriDemo-F2F – www.agridemo-h2020.eu/; and, PLAID – www.plaid-h2020.eu/.

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