
Teagasc Advisory Regional Review *Tipperary*

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Introduction

Teagasc is the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority. It is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. It was established in September 1988 under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988. The organisation 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 activities. The programme currently supports almost 140,000 individual farmers with 44,000 farmers contracted to Teagasc for services annually.

This review of the Tipperary Advisory Region was undertaken in the Teagasc Advisory office, Thurles, Co. Tipperary on November 9th and 10th 2016. The panel (see Appendix 2 for panel composition) prepared this report based on meetings with management, staff representatives, enterprise specialists, farmer stakeholders, and analysis of documents such as the Region's Self-Assessment document, business plan, staff questionnaire and Teagasc Advisory Programme documents. The farmer client panel met with consisted of 3 dairy farmers, one mixed suckler and tillage farmer, one mixed suckler and sheep farmer and one mixed tillage and sheep farmer. Two of the farmers were young farmers.

The overall objective of this review is to identify current strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of quality services and value to the customers of the services provided. The evaluation had four main criteria (a more in depth description of each is outlined in Appendix 3):

1. Quality of management and leadership in the Region
2. Relevance and impact of services to the Region's customers
3. Productivity of staff in relation to key performance indicators and outcomes
4. Positioning of the Region to meet current and future service delivery challenges.

The Tipperary Advisory Region in Context

Tipperary is very dependent on agriculture. The county is mainly good quality limestone land interspersed with mountain ranges and rivers. However, there are some areas of heavy land in the County which require greater management skill to avoid poaching.

There are 7,743 farmers in the region with average farm size of 41 hectares, which is higher than the national average. Of the total number of farmers, 23% are involved in dairy production, 70% in cattle production while 4% of farms in tillage production. Teagasc has 2,940 clients in the region. These include 64% of all dairy farmers, 32% of drystock farmers and 50% of tillage farmers. Over the review period (2013-2015) the number of dairy and drystock clients increased although the number of tillage clients declined.

There are 3 advisory offices in the region; Clonmel, Thurles and Nenagh with a clinic in Tipperary Town. There has been regular investment in the offices; they are modernised and in good condition with the most recent investment being the upgrading in the Thurles office.

Staff numbers have fallen significantly in recent years. For example, between 2008 and 2016 advisory staff numbers fell by 41%. This reduction was a consequence of retirements, redeployment, un-renewed contracts and an embargo on recruitment in the public service. Over the review period 2013-2015, however, staff numbers were relatively static. Looking to the future and given the Tipperary Region targets for 2020, the region's management predict shortfalls in advisor, administration and support staff by 2020 given current trends.

The number of young farmers in the region completing the Green Cert either in one of the 3 regional centres or agricultural colleges increased between 2008 and 2016. Enrolment projections identify a 100% increase in the number of young farmers completing the Green Cert by 2020.

The regional advisory programme is delivered through mass communications, office and phone consultations, farm visits, discussion group activity, farm walks, seminars and other public events. In 2015, this translated into 1,044 farm visits, 4,861 consultations, 376 discussion group meetings, 32 farm walks, 37 meetings/seminars and 276 e-profit monitors and 283 derogation plans being completed.

The Advisory Programme is integrated, through joint programmes, with stakeholders such as Tipperary Co-op, Glanbia, Dairygold, Arrabawn Co-op and ABP Food Group. The recently launched Green Acres dairy to beef programme is supported by Volac, Liffey Mills, Grassland Agro, HSD, Drummonds and the Farming Independent. The BETTER farm programme in the region is supported by ABP Food Group, the Irish Farmers Journal, Dawn Meat, FBD Insurance and Kepak. In addition, Advisory Region staff represents Teagasc on the Tipperary Local Community Development Committee and on the boards of Local Action Groups.

Main report recommendations

1. Management and Leadership

- 1.1 Expand and update cross-enterprise Posts of Responsibility (POR's) not only to ensure critical task completion, but also to motivate advisors and staff. Examples of such cross-enterprise POR's might include environment, young farmers, ICT & innovation.
- 1.2 Consider outsourcing of scheme-related advisory duties so as to redirect time to developmental/technical on farm support.
- 1.3 Explore mechanisms to harness the energy and capabilities of new staff to develop horizontal linkages in order to provide a better service to their clients.
- 1.4 Additional joint programmes on cross-sectoral issues like collaboration and land mobility, fragmentation and overcoming scale limitations could be a good addition to the existing sectoral joint programmes.

2. Productivity and Service Delivery

- 2.1 Teagasc should ensure, through research and marketing, that farmers are aware of its different advisory service levels and associated costs.
- 2.2 Identify one mentor per discussion group who would share, for example, grass measuring details on a weekly basis through WhatsApp.
- 2.3 Develop and promote easy to implement farm level tools and activities (e.g. weighing cattle; grass measurement stick; silage cores) that can generate accessible Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).

3. Relevance and Impact

- 3.1 Develop a discussion group format and content that is relevant for young farmers who do not yet have farm management / decision-making responsibilities.
- 3.2 Both nationally and regionally there should be more freedom for discussion groups to take responsibility for setting their own agendas.
- 3.3 Align discussion group membership to needs (e.g. young farmers, expansion, succession, gender etc).
- 3.4 Encourage greater ownership of group processes by, for example, rotating chairs; choice of group excursions; integration of family members; inclusion of non-farmer mentors.

4. Positioning for the Future

- 4.1 Approaches to refreshing the regional client list (e.g. with young farmers) should be devised. Look at integrating the education list with advisory list and identify key farm successors.
- 4.2 Teagasc should clarify the regional farm client needs for ICT training and partner with local education providers to facilitate delivery of such training if necessary.

4.3 Facilitate access, or provide training, to enable farmers to better manage / protect their businesses against market volatility, e.g. fixed milk price contracts; forward selling; hedging options.

1. Quality of Management and Leadership in the Region

Management and Leadership

- The Tipperary Advisory Region management produced a comprehensive Self-Assessment document that provided a good overview of the region, advisory activities and impact.
- The demonstration of entrepreneurial/creative management approaches to regional challenges was clear to the panel.
- The panel acknowledge that there is a communication plan in place to support engagement with all staff in the region on a routine basis.
- The panel note the clear portrayal of the role of administrative staff in maximizing potential income from clients while at the same time helping advisors to see the added value of their work and grow to a higher level of focus and performance.
- There is evidence of excellent stakeholder management in place with the Regional Manager overseeing key industry relationships within the region.
- Staff surveyed indicated that they are proud to work in the region and they have a clear understanding of their roles. Some staff were less definite (either positively or negatively) about communications, the extent to which their views were valued in making decisions, having the required support to carry out their roles and being given opportunities to lead initiatives.
- From text cloud analysis of staff suggestions about improvements at local level the words staff, calls discussion, and meetings were reported most frequently. Similar analysis of suggestions at regional level identified the words staff, training, local, communication and technical. Text cloud analysis of regional challenges highlighted clients, advice, administration and service. Possible solutions to the region's challenges identified staff, KT programme and advisors.
- Comments in the staff survey should be discussed at regional level, acted upon and staff informed about progress with these actions. This includes feeding back to staff what will not be addressed and why.

Technical Leadership

- The panel were impressed with the strong technical support given to all farmer clients, good advisory team spirit and training support from specialists to advisors. In the region there is competition from private advisors, and Teagasc is responding to this challenge by ensuring a strong presence as close as possible to farmers, as evidenced by the geographic spread of offices and the clinic in Tipperary town.
- The panel recognise that in engaging in a variety of joint programmes with co-ops and other organisations, the regional management creates opportunities to support farmers in a particular value-added way. By making linkages in the region, Teagasc provides access to a national infrastructure and international network that is complementary to the regional and sectoral scope of the co-ops. Building on this model, the panel are of the view that additional joint programmes on cross-sectoral issues like collaboration and land mobility, fragmentation and overcoming scale limitations could be a good addition to the existing sectoral programmes.
- The panel recognise the support provided by specialists in the region to new advisory recruits, with help on, for example, farm visits, (dual farm calls), visits to research centres and technical training provided to assist new advisers expand their sectoral expertise.

Resources

- The panel were satisfied with the evidence presented on the appropriate deployment of advisory staff to address client needs notwithstanding the fact that advisors are coping with a heavy workload due to decline in advisory numbers from 29 in 2008 to 17 in 2016, a decline which led (together with an increase in clients) to an increase in the number of clients per advisor from 100 to 180. The panel note that over the more specific review period 2013-2016, staff numbers were relatively static. Nonetheless, the panel note the prediction from Regional Management that given the Tipperary Region output targets for

2020, on current trends there will be shortfalls in advisor, administration and support staff by 2020.

- The panel note the optimal use of resources with, for example, the participation of regional staff in local research projects (Heavy Soils programme) and local educational colleges (Kildalton and Gurteen Agricultural Colleges).
- The panel were impressed by the capacity of the region to leverage cross-enterprise expertise to promote and foster greater internal efficiencies, enabling greater access/sharing of technical information and continual development of staff.
- Interviewed farmers are very satisfied with the advisory service within the region, are aware of and have empathy with advisors about the increased workload and would like to see advisors use their time to concentrate on farm development and business advisory work.
- The panel acknowledge feedback from regional staff and farmers interviewed that the number of tasks in the Knowledge Transfer Programme has grown resulting in a largely task-driven as opposed to goal-oriented programme leading to frustration among some farmers, advisors and specialists.
- Succession & inheritance and various types of joint farming ventures/collaborations are a key challenge for the future in the region. The panel were aware that these issues demand a new skill set for advisors and were concerned that with only one Teagasc specialist in this area, advisors might not be able to receive adequate in-house support and training. This was considered especially important in relation to the non-financial aspects of these issues such as intergenerational collaboration, support in case of conflicts, mediation, etc. This resource-related issue is pertinent to the Technical Leadership dimension identified in a previous section of this report.
- The panel heard from management how the static number of advisors is limiting the ability to reach new clients and take on new young qualified farmers as clients.
- The panel acknowledge that in addition to permanent Teagasc staff, outsourced personnel (oftentimes Farm Relief Services (FRS)) are used for, for example, REPS records, derogations, schemes such as GLAS, Carbon Navigator and BDGP. In the Tipperary region there are 4 FRS advisory graduates working on scheme support to Teagasc clients. Also annually a cohort of casual labour is taken on in early summer to help with the completion of Single Farm Payment. All soil sampling is done under contract. There are also 2 Masters in Agri Innovation Support students working in the region.

Recommendations

- 1.1 Expand and update cross-enterprise Posts of Responsibility (POR's) not only to ensure critical task completion, but also to motivate advisors and staff. Examples of such cross-enterprise POR's might include environment, young farmers, ICT & innovation.
- 1.2 Consider outsourcing of scheme-related advisory duties so as to redirect time to developmental/technical on farm support.
- 1.3 Explore mechanisms to harness the energy and capabilities of new staff to develop horizontal linkages in order to provide a better service to their clients.
- 1.4 Additional joint programmes on cross-sectoral issues like collaboration and land mobility, fragmentation and overcoming scale limitations could be a good addition to the existing sectoral joint programmes.

2. Productivity and Service Delivery in the Region

Productivity

- The panel note that there is less pent up demand for agricultural education in the region compared to other regions possibly because of the close location of Kildalton and Gurteen agricultural colleges. Nevertheless, there is a waiting list of 100 students for the Green Cert a number that is likely to increase because of the impending departure in early 2017 of the second Education Officer. The panel welcomed the information that measures to redress this situation would be developed in the very near future.
- The panel heard about the identification and clarity of various sectoral Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and understand that management sets targets at the start of each year taking comments of specialists and advisors into account.
- The panel note that over the review period, across the main farming systems of dairy, drystock and tillage, that the number of farm walks and seminars had increased (except for tillage); the number of discussion group meetings declined; number of e-profit monitors for dairy were static while those for drystock farmers declined; the number of derogation plans for dairy farmers increased while those for drystock farmers decreased; the number of visits to all types of farmers declined, while the number of consultations increased except for tillage farmers; course work and preparation increased for all farming system clients. In the soils and environment programme, the number of soil samples taken was static while the number of cross compliance meetings and drainage/reseeding events declined somewhat.
- There are over 60 discussion group meetings on a monthly basis and over the course of a year, numerous farm walks are held with attendance at each walk ranging from 50 to 500. In 2016, there were approximately 1,000 farmers at drystock farm walks alone.

Quality of Service Delivery

- The panel acknowledge different staff views on aspects of outsourcing, particularly in relation to quality concerns and reduced client contact.
- The use of the Teagasc clinic in Tipperary town provides a service to those clients not in close proximity to existing offices and allows relationships with those clients to be developed and serviced. Interviewed farmers accept Teagasc's outsourcing of some advisory work but in their opinion Teagasc has the final responsibility for the quality of work done by subcontractors, and the farmers expressed some concern at the possibility for associated reputational danger for Teagasc if there were problems with the quality of the outsourced service.
- The panel acknowledge the feedback from some staff that 'routine-work' like filling forms, applications for schemes etc. is a way to stay in one-to-one contact with clients, and if this work is outsourced, this contact interface is necessarily reduced. Especially for new Teagasc advisors, this 'routine-work' could be considered a fast and efficient way to get to know the clients in their region and begin building a trusting relationship.
- Young farmers (who were decision makers) interviewed by the review panel were very supportive of the discussion group format as a mean of benchmarking their farm against their peers. They also agreed that the social aspect to discussion groups was also very important to their farming businesses.
- After discussion with the farmer panel, the review panel were keen to emphasise that it is important for Teagasc advisors to challenge clients within their business as well as support them.
- Notwithstanding the variety of KT contacts provided by the region (see Productivity and Service Delivery section above) there was some farmer feedback about the reduced lack of one to one contact.
- Typically on Green Cert course per year but in more recent times due to exceptional demand the region has delivered 2 courses. These courses take approximately a year and a half to run. The Green Certs are mainly delivered by the region's two education officers supported by enterprise advisors in combination with a number of host farmers in the Region and the nearby agricultural colleges of Kildalton and Gurteen. In order to

continue to deliver 2 Green Cert courses into the future, 2 education officers are desirable. The most recent cohort of graduates on 30th September 2016 consisted of 64 students.

Recommendations

- 2.1 Teagasc should ensure, through research and marketing, that farmers are aware of its different advisory service levels and associated costs.
- 2.2 Identify one mentor per discussion group who would share, for example, grass measuring details on a weekly basis through WhatsApp.
- 2.3 Develop and promote easy to implement farm level tools and activities (e.g. weighing cattle; grass measurement stick; silage cores) that can generate accessible Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).

3. Relevance and Impact in the Region

Programme relevance

- The panel were satisfied that the region's priorities were aligned to national Advisory and Education Programme priorities and tailored as far as possible to the region's client needs.
- The panel heard how discussion groups under the new Knowledge Transfer (KT) Programme are primarily task-driven rather than goal-oriented. In 'conventional' discussion groups benchmarking is a tool for farmers to use to achieve their goals. In the new KT groups, some advisory staff and farmers reported that the completion of tasks to fulfil scheme criteria often times crowds out space for development work within the group.
- The panel note that the ability of some advisors to do developmental/technical/business advisory work on farms and use their expertise is curtailed by the amount of paperwork they have to do.
- The region has strong links with industry stakeholders as demonstrated by joint programmes with Tipperary Co-op, Glanbia, Dairygold, Arrabawn Co-op and the ABP Food Group. The recently launched Green Acres dairy to beef Programme is supported by Volac, Liffey Mills, Grassland Agro, HSD, Drummonds and the Farming Independent.
- The BETTER farm programme in the region is supported by ABP Food Group, the Irish Farmers Journal, Dawn Meat, FBD Insurance and Kepak.
- Personnel from the region work closely with the local authority on rural development and water quality issues, are involved with the Local Community Development Committee, and represent Teagasc on the boards of Local Action Groups.
- The panel note that county chairpersons of farming organisations such as the IFA and ICMSA are on Teagasc stakeholder committees, and input into the region's Advisory programme development in that way. Teagasc also work jointly with such farming organisations on unforeseen events such as fodder crises or weather problems.
- The completion of e-profit monitors is very much driven by KT Programme requirements. In many cases, the e-profit monitors are mostly completed by an adviser. The panel were of the view that the farmer needs to fully understand the value of completing and taking ownership of the e-profit monitor and their farm plan. Plans must be live and revisited on a regular basis to be of any real benefit.
- The panel are of the view that cross sectoral topics like succession, collaboration and sustainability oftentimes require consideration of the trade-offs among economic, ecological and social aspects of a farm business and suggest that all of these aspects should be considered.
- The panel specifically note the potential trade-offs between tillage and the environment and these trade-offs could provide challenges to advisors given their technical specialisation.

Knowledge Transfer

- The panel heard how young farmers who are members of discussion groups often do not have management / decision-making responsibilities on the home farm and/or access to financial data. Therefore, discussion group topics should be relevant to the young farmers' current level of "authority" on the farm i.e. where succession plans are not in place should topics be more focused on personal development (e.g. leadership, succession, work life balance, management skills) and/or (personal) skills development rather than management and/or decision-making focused?
- As the adoption of innovation is lower among part time and older farmers, there is a need for support networks to encourage greater innovation uptake. As one example, to encourage the use of agri-ICT (ICBF, on-line banking, PastureBase etc), is to provide simple "easy reference" guides detailing key support numbers/contact names.
- The panel acknowledge the variety of evidence they heard on practice change, some of which was directly associated with Teagasc clients in the Tipperary Advisory Region and other information from broader surveys of Teagasc clients nationally.

- The panel were pleased to hear that experienced farmers are open to sharing their knowledge with younger farmers through mentorship, but experienced farmers also want the continued opportunity to exchange knowledge with their own peers. The use of non-farmer mentors was also raised as a possibility.
- Some discussion groups prefer not to be associated with the KT Programme and instead participate in discussion groups that allow them greater flexibility and ownership of the topics discussed in their group.
- The panel heard a variety of insights into the discussion group model, which should inform its continued use as a key knowledge transfer method. For example, 'building trust in a discussion group takes 3 years' and 'not everyone fits into a discussion group'. These statements confirm the challenges faced with group-building processes and these insights have to be integrated into the formation and support of groups formed around broader programmes.
- It is challenging for advisors to activate (motivate) 'silent KT-groups' or groups whose activities are mainly linked to fulfilling the conditions to receive a payment.
- The panel also note that a variety of data which could be valuable to support advisory work is collected as part of some of schemes but this data is not always easily accessible or available to inform decision making.

Reputation

- The panel commended Teagasc as an organisation and were of the view that it should be proud that it had raised its performance and adapted to the challenges associated with the recession, reduced public expenditure and recruitment embargos, by doing 'double with half'.
- In the context of outsourcing activities to the private sector, perhaps the 'four eyes principle' should be adoption, if not already in place, to help protect Teagasc against reputational risk associated with outsourcing.
- Survey evidence from the region reports high satisfaction levels (95%) with regional services, reporting a professional and reliable service, knowledgeable and efficient advisors and promptness, efficiency and personal interest as the top 3 positive aspects of the service delivered in the region. Hiring more advisors was reported by the same survey in the top 3 responses to suggestions about how to improve the quality of services in the region. The panel noted that the regional survey was administered to 114 respondents.
- Teagasc will maintain its reputation for independence by openly discussing potential contradictory objectives between top-down programmes and bottom-up farmer demands.

Recommendations

- 3.1 Develop a discussion group format and content that is relevant for young farmers who do not yet have farm management / decision-making responsibilities.
- 3.2 Both nationally and regionally there should be more freedom for discussion groups to take responsibility for setting their own agendas.
- 3.3 Align discussion group membership to needs (e.g. young farmers, expansion, succession, gender etc).
- 3.4 Encourage greater ownership of group processes by, for example, rotating chairs; choice of group excursions; integration of family members; inclusion of non-farmer mentors.

4. Positioning of the Region for the Future

Robustness and Sustainability

- **Strategic Planning:** The Regional Business Plan was prepared and submitted for a 12 month period and the key objectives and target of this short-term plan are aligned to achieve the longer term targets and key deliverables as outlined in Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025. Regional targets are benchmarked with national targets to ensure consistency of delivery and outputs across all sectors.
- **Financial Planning:** Administrative personnel are clearly attentive to the concept of upselling additional services to maximise additional revenue potential for the region. Joint industry initiatives help to provide additional income revenues for the region to deliver on key partnership objectives for the region.
- **Expertise within the Region:** Significant expertise exists within the region with good mentoring in place with specialist advisers. There is communication between the Regional Manager and all staff to identify opportunities and solutions on a regular basis. The very active and extensive portfolio of joint industry programmes across the region should be continued and expanded to include cross-sectoral topics.
- **Staff Mobility:** Loss of an education officer within the region impact the ability to deliver to potential students. There is a need to develop a solution to ensure continuity of service and also address pent up education demand in the region.
- **Ability to take on new challenges:** Based on recent research findings relayed to the panel, a joint programme to focus on land mobility and fragmented farms has been identified in the region to enable expansion by those clients who are already efficient at their current scale. There is a need to understand farmer ICT needs, training requirements and the possibilities for business use. There are opportunities to develop/expand the use of apps on smart phones, for example, for tillage farmers (fertilisers/sprays), BASF Weed ID; Herdwatch – farm management etc. Beef Price watch (cattle prices). Both farmers and advisory staff need to be knowledgeable about these opportunities. The tillage sector is under pressure from market changes and societal/environmental/climate changes and tillage farmers need training in tools to manage such volatility and change.
- **Capacity to Self-Evaluate:** Regional client surveys demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the advisory service they are receiving. Continuation and expansion of an internal evaluation programme, using surveys, feedback tools and focus groups, is important to encourage and maintain high levels of productivity and manage/implement changes more effectively.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

- Consistent client base maintained despite fall in advisory numbers. Indicative of excellent service received by clients.
- Team of excellent advisory, admin and managerial staff in place.
- Extensive and enduring relationships with external stakeholders maximise engagement and knowledge sharing opportunities in the region.
- The regional personnel specifically, and Teagasc generally, are recognised as a credible source of independent advice and research.

Weaknesses:

- No internal systems in place to facilitate on-going engagement with past students potential farm successors to ensure continuity of client numbers into the future. Possibility to develop, for example, student/alumni database, alumni, WhatsApp groups etc.
- Workload bottlenecks associated with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine scheme deadlines impact advisors' ability to provide key supports (e.g. grass budgeting etc) to their farmer clients especially in the spring. Engagement with the

Department in an attempt to streamline these deadlines more evenly throughout the year should be preserved with. The task-driven as opposed to the goal-oriented nature KT Programme discussion groups restrict agenda's in line with the strategic objective for the schemes. The structure and purpose of such programmes and groups should be continually reviewed to ensure they serve the needs of the farmer. A key challenge for Teagasc is to cater for a diverse range of enterprises and demographics within the region.

- Use of social media within the region is limited and expansion of its use could serve as a mechanism for greater engagement and shared learning.

Opportunities:

- From 2008 to 2016 the challenges was dealing with reduced human resources. Now the challenge is how to work smarter by innovation and integration.
- Maintain register of past students to encourage attendance at Teagasc events and seminars so as to develop a relationship until the student becomes a decision maker on the farm.
- Investigate the formation of groups for female stakeholders to cater for specific industry needs and requirements.
- Teagasc has a role in facilitating the need for farm collaboration, partnerships and land mobility within the region due to the fragmented nature of farms.
- While vertical integration is evident within the region greater horizontal integration would serve to improve internal efficiencies and ultimately provide a better service to clients.
- There is potential to generate additional advice revenues to Teagasc from the strong Artisan foods/agri tourism in the area.

Threats:

- Increased market volatility poses a threat and there is a need for greater farmer support and awareness around key industry tools and mechanisms to hedge against these threats.
- While outsourcing provides an opportunity to reduce the administrative workload for advisors, there is a potential reputation and litigation risk to Teagasc if adequate controls are not put in place.
- ICT usage is constantly evolving and Teagasc should adapt and innovate their internal systems so as to maximise their impact within the sector.

Recommendations

- 4.1 Approaches to refreshing the regional client list (e.g. with young farmers) should be devised. Look at integrating the education list with advisory list and identify key farm successors.
- 4.2 Teagasc should clarify the regional farm client needs for ICT training and partner with local education providers to facilitate delivery of such training if necessary.
- 4.3 Facilitate access, or provide training, to enable farmers to better manage / protect their businesses against market volatility, e.g. fixed milk price contracts; forward selling; hedging options.

Conclusion

Tipperary is very dependent on agriculture. The county is mainly good quality limestone land interspersed with mountain ranges and rivers although there are some areas of heavy land in the county which require greater management skill to avoid poaching.

There are 7,743 farmers in the region with average farm size of 41 hectares, which is higher than the national average. Teagasc has 2,940 clients. These include 64% of all dairy farmers, 32% of drystock farmers and 50% of tillage farmers. Over the review period (2013-2016) the number of dairy and drystock clients increased although the number of tillage clients declined.

The review panel makes 14 recommendations encompassing a variety of issues. Key issues include the use of social media, ICT and volatility management tools; outsourcing of scheme-related activities and reputational protection; tools and activities for easily implementable on-farm KPI's; refreshing the regional client list; using research and marketing to ensure that farmers are aware of Teagasc's different advisory service levels and associated costs; expand and update cross-enterprise posts of responsibility.

There are quite a few recommendations about discussion groups, reflecting the extensive discussion and feedback on this topic during the review from farmers and advisory region staff. Those main recommendations centre on promoting groups with appropriate focus for young non-decision-making farmers; for women; aligning group membership to needs (young farmers, expansion, succession, gender etc); freedom for discussion groups to take responsibility for setting their own agendas; encourage greater ownership of group processes and establishing groups of young farmers who could be mentored by experienced farmers or non-farmers.

Review of Tipperary Advisory Region 2016

Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations

Date: Wednesday 4th October 2017

Submit to: Dr. Tom Kelly, Director of Knowledge Transfer

This action plan outlines the recommendations from the report on the *Tipperary Advisory Region 2016 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.

1. Recommendations for Management & Leadership

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
1.1	Expand and update cross-enterprise Posts of Responsibility (POR's) not only to ensure critical task completion, but also to motivate advisors and staff. Examples of such cross-enterprise POR's might include environment, young farmers, ICT & innovation.	a) POR's will hold bi-monthly cross enterprise meetings to help motivate and update advisors. b) A POR will be appointed to promote the service to young farmers.	Enterprise P.O.R.'s D.Mullane & HR	October 2017 March 2018
1.2	Consider outsourcing of scheme-related advisory duties so as to redirect time to developmental/technical on farm support.	Environmental and Infrastructural Schemes and a proportion of Single Farm Payment will continue to be outsourced.	D. Mullane	Immediately
1.3	Explore mechanisms to harness the energy and capabilities of new staff to develop horizontal linkages in order to provide a better service to their clients.	Aim to provide shadowing and mentoring for new staff taking over impending retirees.	D. Mullane & HR	April 2018
1.4	Additional joint programmes on cross-sectoral issues like collaboration and land mobility, fragmentation and overcoming scale limitations could be a good addition to the existing sectoral joint programmes	Programmes incorporating "Transferring the Family Farm" Clinics to be provided on an ongoing basis and collaboration and land mobility will be included in Joint Programmes.	D. Mullane & P.O.R.'s	December 2017

2. Recommendations for Productivity and Service Delivery

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
2.1	Teagasc should ensure, through research and marketing, that farmers are aware of its different advisory service levels and associated costs.	A marketing booklet will be developed for the Region which will outline the levels of service and associated costs.	D. Mullane	May 2018
2.2	Identify one mentor per discussion group who would share, for example, grass measuring details on a weekly basis through WhatsApp.	One participant per group to be identified to share information through WhatsApp	Enterprise Advisors	January 2018
2.3	Develop and promote easy to implement farm level tools and activities (e.g. weighing cattle; grass measurement stick; silage cores) that can generate accessible Key Performance Indicators (KPI's).	Equip advisors with up to date tools e.g. digital thermometer, silage analyser etc.	D. Mullane	February 2018

3. Recommendations for Relevance and Impact

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
3.1	Develop a discussion group format and content that is relevant for young farmers who do not yet have farm management / decision-making responsibilities.	Establish a new discussion group for young famers.	D. Mullane & Advisors	March 2018
3.2	Both nationally and regionally there should be more freedom for discussion groups to take responsibility for setting their own agendas.	Agreed	Tom Kelly, Dermot McCarthy & Donal Mullane	January 2018
3.3	Align discussion group membership to needs (e.g. young farmers, expansion, succession, gender etc).	Specific issues for members of discussion groups will be dealt with through workshops	Enterprise Advisors	June 2018
3.4	Encourage greater ownership of group processes by, for example, rotating chairs; choice of group excursions; integration of family members; inclusion of non-farmer mentors.	Greater ownership of groups processes will be promoted through rotation of chairs, further expansion of excursions, involvement of family members where relevant and inclusion of on farm mentors where relevant.	Enterprise Advisors	April 2018

4. Recommendations for Positioning for the Future

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
4.1	Approaches to refreshing the regional client list (e.g. with young farmers) should be devised. Look at integrating the education list with advisory list and identify key farm successors.	Develop a programme for young farmers which includes service and appropriate charges. Integrate the advisory and educational lists with a view to bringing more farm successors on board as clients.	D.Mullane & P.O.R. & Education Officer	June 2018
4.2	Teagasc should clarify the regional farm client needs for ICT training and partner with local education providers to facilitate delivery of such training if necessary.	The ICT training needs will be clarified and segmented. Partnerships to be established to ensure relevant training. Short training and updates on Smartphone use will be delivered by local advisors.	D. Mullane & Advisors & Education Officer	Mid 2018
4.3	Facilitate access, or provide training, to enable farmers to better manage / protect their businesses against market volatility, e.g. fixed milk price contracts; forward selling; hedging options.	Training sessions/workshops and information sessions will be provided to farmer clients to help them to protect their business and manage again market volatility	Enterprise Advisors	July 2018

Appendix 2 Advisory Regional Review Panel

Function / Role	Name
Chair	<p>Peter Páire. Programme Leader Health and Smart Farming. He has experience as generalist in Agrobiodiversity, Soil Conservation, Precision Agriculture (member of EIP Focus group), ICT, Plant protection, Human/Animal health, Communication to farmers. Competences in project management, networking. As a farmer's son he followed his studies in Wageningen. He started as Socio Economic Advisory service in a farmer's organization. Since 1990 he develops projects in new areas for farmers, such as Precision Agriculture, New Economic Opportunities, and Environmental management.</p> <p>Peter was founder of the ZLTO project unit in 1993 that built out to 35 people 20 years later. This is now incorporated in the ZLTO department of Craftmanship & Entrepreneurship</p>
KT Professional with Advisory and/or Education background	<p>Bruno Häller is Professor at the Teaching and Advising Unit at the Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agriculture, Forest and Food Sciences, Zollikofen Switzerland.</p> <p>He previously worked as Head of the Extension Service of the Agricultural Institute, Grangeneuve, Fribourg.</p>
Farmer stakeholder	<p>Dairy farmer John Corry, Castlefarm Church Road Croom, County Limerick.</p>
Independent Industry Representative	<p>Noreen Lacey, National Agri-Business Manager, Sector Specialists – Business Banking AIB Group, 3/4 High Street, Kilkenny, Ireland</p>
Independent Teagasc Representative	<p>Dr Kevin Heanue, Evaluation Officer, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway</p>

Appendix 3 Advisory Regional Review High Level Evaluation Criteria

1. Management and Leadership

Management and Leadership refers to the coordination and administration of activities in the Region. The focus in this area includes how the organization 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.

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 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.

4. Positioning for the Future

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