

Education options for a career in dairy farming

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Summary

- The continued growth and sustainability of the Irish dairy industry is dependent on highly skilled dairy farmers.
- Formal agricultural education is associated with greater farm size, income per hectare and overall farm efficiency compared with those with no formal agricultural education.
- The Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Dairy Herd Management and the Level 7 Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management (PDDFM) equip the next generation of dairy farmers with the skills and technical knowledge required for success.
- There are a number of roles available on dairy farms including relief work, farm operatives, and farm management. Furthermore, there are a number of progression opportunities such as leasing, partnerships and share farming.

Introduction

The Irish national dairy herd is continuing to grow, both within existing herds and through dairy start-ups. The sustainability of the expanding industry is reliant on skilled farmers who have the ability to manage financials and people as well as day-to-day farm tasks. Furthermore, due to the rapid and significant change that is occurring within the industry, farmers need to keep up-to-date with skills and knowledge, adopting new technologies and methods relevant to their farming system. The next generation of farm owners and managers should avail of every training opportunity available to them in order to achieve the requisite knowledge, skills and experience to secure the long term future of their dairy business. Work experience with high quality dairy farmers reinforces learning experiences and offers mentors throughout future farming careers.

Advanced certificate in Dairy Herd Management

The Level 6 programme provides graduates with the knowledge and technical skills required to operate dairy herds. Having completed one year in agricultural college, students typically spend a further year completing the Advanced Certificate which consists of 22 weeks college and 16 weeks of practical learning with a host farmer in Ireland or abroad. Course content is a combination of technical (grassland management, breeding, nutrition and health) and farm business planning modules. Students who successfully complete the Level 6 programme have the skills and competencies to join the dairy industry as a skilled operative. Progression from the Level 6 programme includes Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management (PDDFM) or agricultural courses in the Institutes of Technologies.

Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management

The Level 7 specific purpose programme is the gold standard for farm ownership and farm management training. The programme aims to provide enthusiastic dairy farmers with the latest research and best practice management knowledge to successfully run dairy operations.

The main component of the programme is two years paid professional work experience based on high performing dairy farms in Ireland, with an opportunity to complete a placement abroad. During this time there is approximately 20 days course work, where students further develop a broad range of skills in technical farming as well as developing

a greater understanding of business and financial skills and people management. Course days are typically delivered at the Teagasc, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre at Moorepark and Teagasc, Kildalton Agricultural College. Course days incorporate both formal (lectures) and informal (discussion groups) training, delivered by an integrated team of highly specialised Teagasc staff including Moorepark researchers, college teachers and dairy specialists. Guest lectures are invited from key industry stakeholders and highly successful commercial dairy farmers. Students who successfully complete the PDDFM have the skills and competencies to successfully manage large scale dairy farms to a high level.

Applicants to the PDDFM programme must possess a Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Agriculture or an equivalent agricultural award.

Continuous training opportunities

Due to the considerable change that is occurring within the Irish dairy sector, farmers must respond through continuous learning in order to meet new skills and knowledge requirements. Teagasc offer a wide range of both formal and informal training opportunities to meet future needs to improve the environmental, social and economic sustainability of dairy farms. Such training opportunities include discussion groups, short training courses workshops, information days and conferences.

Conclusions

Agricultural education is linked to greater farm profitability and therefore, farmers should avail of all learning opportunities that can further progress their farming career.

