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# **Teagasc Advisory Regional Review**

## *Kerry-Limerick*

### **Final Report**

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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 (KT) activities. The programme currently supports almost 140,000 individual farmers with 42,000 farmers contracted to Teagasc for services annually.

This review of the Kerry-Limerick Advisory Region was undertaken in the Castletroy Park Hotel, Limerick on October 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 2018. The Peer Review Panel (PRP) (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 Programme Description and Self-Assessment document, business plans, staff questionnaire, Teagasc Strategic Pathways for the Teagasc Agricultural Advisory Service 2015-2020 document, the Kerry-Limerick Advisory Region strategy and the Teagasc Statement of Strategy, 2017-2020. The farmer stakeholder panel which the PRP panel met consisted of five dairy farmers, (including one with a poultry enterprise), one dual drystock (sheep and cattle) farmer and one suckler cow farmer chosen to reflect clients across the region.

The overall objective of this review is to identify current strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of quality services and the value to customers of the services provided. This evaluation had four main criteria (a more detailed 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 Kerry-Limerick Advisory Region in Context**

The Kerry-Limerick Advisory Region was formed in 2012. Land type in the region is mixed. In mid-Limerick, free draining limestone soils give way to gley soils and areas of blanket peat as the border with County Kerry is approached. Although gley soils predominate in north and mid-Kerry, mountain ranges predominate further south in Kerry. Soil fertility is an important limiting factor in the region with just 12% of farms sampled in 2017 being optimum for soil pH, P and K.

Much of County Kerry is made up of protected lands and coastal waters designated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in accordance with Irish and EU law. This has implications for the type of extension programme that is implemented in County Kerry.

According to the 2011 Census of Population the population of the region is 336,354. Based on the CSO Agricultural Census data of 2010 it is estimated that 14,403 of these, or 4.3% of the population, are active farmers with over 58% of these based in County Kerry.

The vast majority (53%) of farmers in the region are specialist beef farmers (7,423). There are 8,200 cattle herds in the region. There are 77,613 beef cows which is 8% of the national herd. Specialist dairy is the second highest category of farmers (2,965). The region is a major milk

producer with a total of 3,600 dairy suppliers based on co-operative returns. At the end of 2017 the region had a population of 220,572 dairy cows supplying 1.1 billion litres of milk. Specialist sheep farms are the third largest category of farms and the region has 251,308 breeding ewes accounting for 13% of the national flock. Hill sheep farming is a major enterprise in the Dingle and Iveragh Peninsulas of South Kerry. Mixed farming (1,303) and specialist tillage (77) make up the remainder of the farming sector. Tillage farming, confined mostly to pockets in North Kerry and Limerick, accounts for only 0.53% of all farms in the regions.

In terms of a client base, Teagasc has 1,876 drystock clients, 1,968 dairy clients and 449 soils & environment clients in the region. The Regional Advisory Programme is made available to farmers through a network of 5 advisory offices (Newcastle West and Kilmallock (HQ)) in County Limerick and Killarney, Tralee, Listowel in County Kerry. There are also 2 clinics in county Kerry in Caherciveen and Kenmare, Caherciveen clinic is open on Mondays and Fridays and Kenmare clinic is held on Wednesdays. Part-time education courses (Level 5 and Level 6 'Green Cert') are held in the Killarney office. A Distance Education option at both Level 5 and Level 6 with the Salesian Agricultural College Pallaskerry Co. Limerick is also available.

The Regional Advisory Programme is delivered through a multitude of KT channels including 1,517 farm visits, 8,310 consultations, 87 discussion groups, 505 derogation plans, 73 TAMS applications, 3,604 SPS/BPS applications, 142 farm walks, 87 meetings and seminars, and 481 e-profit monitors.

The programme is integrated with stakeholders such as Kerry Agribusiness and Dairygold, BETTER Beef farms; monitor and demonstration farms.

The number of advisory and education staff increased slightly over the period under review from a combined total of 25 in 2015 to 27 in 2017. Administrative staff supporting the programme has remained constant (7) over this period.

## Main report recommendations

### **1. Management and Leadership**

- 1.1 The numbers of staff directly reporting to the Regional Manager should be reviewed, at a National/strategic level, to facilitate more personalised career and development support for all staff and to mitigate the risks of negative impacts on organisational effectiveness and service delivery.
- 1.2 The Post of Responsibility (POR) role should be reviewed in the context of responsibilities for: a client base, the technical leadership of an enterprise, and mentoring of staff.
- 1.3 Develop, implement, regularly review and continuously improve a more structured and formal multi-channel strategy for internal communications and information sharing across the region.
- 1.4 Review and enhance the mentoring programme for new staff across the region and ensure consistent implementation, regular monitoring and continuous improvement.
- 1.5 The Advisory Region's staff survey responses should be discussed at regional level, acted upon, with staff being informed about progress with actions and on what will not be addressed and why.

### **2. Productivity and Service Delivery**

- 2.1 KPI's that reflect the true impact of the service delivery on clients require consideration to future-proof the value for money offering of the advisory and educational provision in the region. The self-assessment of a random subset of clients by an Advisor each year, in terms of client impact, may also be worthwhile.
- 2.2 A review of the tools available to Advisors for client relationship management may be beneficial, particularly regarding service delivery and client retention. Consideration should be given to early warning systems for clients with deadlines, and/or alerts in instances where time since previous advisory contact has lapsed to a critical level that could impact negatively on client retention.
- 2.3 Greater emphasis should be given to in-service group facilitation training to enhance skills for KT and Discussion Group delivery.
- 2.4 Regular reviews of the processes for customer relationship management across the full range of programmes should be undertaken to ensure alignment of service delivery with customer needs.
- 2.5 The established culture of colleague support for quality management/control should continue to be an on-going priority and be effectively promoted.

### **3. Relevance and Impact**

- 3.1 The current apparent imbalance between the genuine KT opportunities of group-based work versus the administrative burden of the scheme is undoubtedly having a negative impact on programme delivery. Thus a review of the DAFM-funded KT programmes delivery, regionally and nationally, to inform the improvement of future staff resourcing and service delivery in line with client needs would be beneficial. Efforts to highlight this at Policy level are already underway and it is important that efforts to address this risk are continued.
- 3.2 Further develop collaborative programmes with industry and with education and training providers as a means to continually extend the reach of the KT work of Teagasc in the region.

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 3.3       | Review the strategy for the development of new programmes and services in response to client needs and opportunities arising from regional circumstances and strengths. All proposals for additional services should be critically analysed in terms of potential impact before resources are allocated.  |
| 3.4       | Annual targets for KT programmes across the various channels and activity types (e.g. events, farm walks, etc.) should be critically reviewed each year as part of the business planning process. Scheduling of programmes to maximise collaborations with regional stakeholders, which offers scope for increased positive impact/benefits realisation by Teagasc clients, extension of reach and improvements to resource-use efficiency, is strategically important. |
| <b>4.</b> | <b>Positioning for the Future</b>   |
| 4.1       | Develop, effectively communicate and implement a clear strategy to integrate sustainability, and optimise opportunities for public goods delivery and enhancement of farm business resilience, across the primary production agriculture provision, in line with the unique landscape and conservation value of the region.   |
| 4.2       | Review the policy and processes for ensuring customer insight and quality of service delivery.  |
| 4.3       | Monitor and further embed the success of the pilot initiative to maintain active engagement with post-Green Cert students, and share this best practice model with Teagasc's other Advisory Regions.  |
| 4.4       | Consideration should be given to using the peer review criteria to guide a self-evaluation process (to enable further improvements to the quality assurance and impact of Teagasc's service provision) at Advisor, Regional Manager and Head of Advisory Service levels.  |
| 4.5       | A process to conduct a more thorough SWOT analysis for the region should be put in place, with the objective of establishing a more detailed understanding of farm enterprises and the region's specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Each point included should be more conducive to the development of a clear and actionable goal within future strategy and/or an activity target within the business plan.                                    |

## 1. Quality of Management and Leadership in the Region

### Management and Leadership

- The PRP commends the commitment and positive engagement of all staff and farmers who contributed to the review process.
- The PRP acknowledges the short time that the Regional Manager has been in post and was impressed by her grasp of the challenges and opportunities within the region and her new role.
- The staff survey confirmed that staff were proud to work for the Regional Advisory staff team, but highlighted some opportunities to improve internal communications and the sharing of knowledge and experiences.
- It was also very clear to the PRP that the Regional Manager has earned a high level of respect and support across the Regional Advisory staff team. The PRP was impressed by the positive energy that was apparent during the review, both between the Regional Manager and the team and within the team members that were met during the review. This was clearly expressed in a committed, cohesive and customer-focused team dynamic. The feedback available from the recent staff survey questionnaire indicates that this is generally reflective of the entire region.
- The PRP observed that a very flat management structure is in place in the region. There are a total of 35 staff in the region across Management, Administration and Advisor roles. Six administration staff report to the Regional Staff Officer. However, all of the remaining 26 staff (24 Advisors and 2 Education Officers) report directly to the Regional Manager. There are four staff with “Positions of Responsibility” (POR), which have no responsibility for line management.
- The PRP identify a potential threat to human capital development of the region arising from this flat management structure. There is a risk that the Regional Manager’s capacities for professional and individualised staff management, support and development through the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) may be compromised due to management resource being spread too thinly.
- Risks arising from this include exposure of new and less experienced Advisors to insufficient mentoring and support, the potential demotivation of Advisory staff due to lack of individual contact with their line manager and negative impacts on the delivery and further development of Teagasc’s service provision.
- The commitment of the Regional Manager to being at the coal-face with advisory activities such as events is very apparent. There is also a strong commitment to visit offices as frequently as possible. This is highly valued and important in achieving regular face-to-face contact with the team. However, the PRP observed the potential for Advisors to be out on call rather than in the office during these visits, hence not always allowing for face-to-face contact. The PRP also note the feedback from the staff survey regarding a desire for more structure regarding internal communications, which could complement this good culture of face-to-face contact.
- The commitment of the Regional Manager to be involved and supportive of the advisory activities also creates a risk of leaving insufficient management time allocation to concentrate on more long-term strategic planning for the region.
- The results from the staff survey clearly reflected the outstanding engagement of the regional office team members in terms of constructive ideas for improvements and future developments. 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 about what will not be addressed and why.

### Technical Leadership

- The presence and tradition of a strong technical programme in the region is very apparent based on feedback from Management, Specialists, Advisors and farmers.
- The region has been particularly proactive in leveraging the potential of Joint Programmes, most notably the Dairy Joint Programme with Kerry Agribusiness. The PRP identify this type of collaboration as being strategically very important and should be broadened as much as possible.
- Other technical activities such as Technology Action Groups (TAG) are also seen as important initiatives to be further developed.
- The panel note the high impact of a range of activities regarding technical leadership such as the Dairy Joint Programmes with Kerry Agribusiness and Dairygold, the European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) and environmental scheme support work, and the innovative collaboration with the Salesian Agricultural College, Pallaskenry. The POR role was instrumental in these initiatives. However, the PRP observe that the role and activities of the POR are inconsistent across enterprises, and more clarity around the activities and responsibilities of the POR role would be beneficial, particularly in light of the challenges posed by the flat line management structure.

### Resources

- The diverse geographical expanse of the region, including the wide range of agricultural activities across the region is challenging. The numbers and locations of the 5 offices, supported by the 2 clinic locations seems well balanced in this regard to balance the needs of cross-regional relevance and accessibility to farmers with the need to retain critical mass at each location. The administration support is also well structured to support this multi-location requirement.
- The PRP heard how the availability of peer-mentoring support for new Advisors had regressed and needed to be reprioritised and enhanced. The latter was linked with outsourcing and staff resourcing pressures. The PRP noted the existence of an induction programme and planned mentoring support for new staff and highlights the importance of the future delivery of this programme.
- Succession planning for Advisor and Education Officer roles was also highlighted as being important.

### Recommendations

- 1.1 The numbers of staff directly reporting to the Regional Manager should be reviewed, at a National/strategic level, to facilitate more personalised career and development support for all staff and to mitigate the risks of negative impacts on organisational effectiveness and service delivery.
- 1.2 The Post of Responsibility (POR) role should be reviewed in the context of responsibilities for: a client base, the technical leadership of an enterprise, and mentoring of staff.
- 1.3 Develop, implement, regularly review and continuously improve a more structured and formal multi-channel strategy for internal communications and information sharing across the region.
- 1.4 Review and enhance the mentoring programme for new staff across the region and ensure consistent implementation, regular monitoring and continuous improvement.
- 1.5 The Advisory Region's staff survey responses should be discussed at regional level, acted upon, with staff being informed about progress with actions and on what will not be addressed and why.

## 2. Productivity and Service Delivery in the Region

### Productivity

- Activity levels in the region are high and well documented, understood and tracked by management. There was concern raised by many contributors over Advisors having a heavy workload, and the threat it poses to quality of service delivery and potential retention of clients in the future due to the impact of competing work pressures on Advisor roles. Comments from farmers interviewed during the review support the observance of heavy workloads, but also acknowledge that access to Advisors/services (including farm visits) has been available when requested by clients, which reflects positively on the commitment and strong focus on clients that prevails across the Regional Advisory staff team.
- On-farm visits for service delivery are restricted in scope for dry stock farms due to the predominance of part-time farming and lack of day-time availability of clients. This is reflected in the trend towards evening meetings for drystock farmer Discussion Groups, with the staff commitment to deliver the latter being commendable.
- Productivity metrics over time within the region are positive; however, the productivity metrics presented had no relative component compared with other regions. The capability of the existing structure to increase client numbers is limited. Existing workload may pose a risk to retention of current clients.
- KT Programme Groups/Discussion Groups have been very effective in reaching and servicing higher client numbers when compared to the previous service delivery model. Farmers spoke very highly of the value of the support received through KT Programme Groups and Discussion Groups, to their farm businesses.
- The administrative burden around schemes and KT programme delivery is placing extra pressure on the delivery of the technical service. Both farmers and Advisors highlight the negative impact of this on the capacity to deliver a development-focused KT service.
- Metrics on impact of the service show positive improvements in the performance within the region (Top 10% and Monitor farm groupings for Dairy, and Monitor farms for beef). Linkage of regional impact to National level KPIs is not always clear and the fine tuning and packaging of messages for local circumstances is necessary and appears to be actively done within the region.

### Service Delivery

- Farmer feedback of the service is very positive and reflects the commitment and capability of the team to service their clients. Noteworthy in the discussion were examples of 'unseen benefits' such as a farmer in a KT programme being contacted by non-Teagasc clients due to awareness through publicising the programme. The example highlights the 'unmeasured reach/impact' of Teagasc's service provision.
- The farmer panel attached high value to their participation in the KT Programme Groups and other Discussion Groups. Advisors highlighted the need for group facilitation skills to be a part of their continuous training and development. The current in-service training agenda appears to be geared more towards technical topics. TAG's for Drystock are currently helping to provide this training need, but further consideration of how this KT skill can be developed amongst Advisors would be beneficial.
- The PRP note limited evidence of measures in place to assure quality of service delivery. Quality control of advisory activities is becoming more stretched by the reduction of staff numbers and colleague support. Traditional dependence on 'cross-checks with advisory colleagues' is becoming more difficult as staff resources have declined.
- The PRP suggest that regular reviews of the processes for customer relationship management across the full range of programmes should be undertaken to ensure alignment of service delivery with customer needs.

- There have been both good and bad experiences with outsourcing and subcontracting, and assessments can be confounded by the risk to the personal relationships between Advisors and clients. However, there is a good awareness of this across the management and staff team, and the PRP note an approach to critically assess the decisions around outsourcing on a case by case basis.

### **Recommendations**

- 2.1 KPI's that reflect the true impact of the service delivery on clients, require consideration to future proof the value for money offering of the advisory and educational provision in the region. The self-assessment of a random subset of clients by an Advisor each year in terms of client impact may also be worthwhile.
- 2.2 A review of the tools available to Advisors for client relationship management may be beneficial, particularly regarding service delivery and client retention. Consideration should be given to early warning systems for clients with deadlines, and/or alerts in instances where time since previous advisory contact has lapsed to a critical level that could impact negatively on client retention.
- 2.3 Greater emphasis should be given to in-service group facilitation training to enhance skills for KT and Discussion Group delivery.
- 2.4 Regular reviews of the processes for customer relationship management across the full range of programmes should be undertaken to ensure alignment of service delivery with customer needs.
- 2.5 The established culture of colleague support for quality management/control should continue to be an on-going priority and be effectively promoted.

### 3. Relevance and Impact in the Region

#### Programme relevance

- The PRP note the high strategic importance placed on a number of development priorities including new entrants and dairy expansion. The focus and impact of the Kerry Agribusiness Joint Programme has also delivered strong outcomes and helped steer the technical programme of the region. The POR contribution to the Joint Programme has been particularly effective in this regard.
- Linkage of regional impact to National level KPIs is not always clear and the PRP note from Advisors that the true impact of services on the ground may not be fully reflected in National level KPIs. The fine tuning and packaging of messages for local circumstances is necessary and appears to be actively and successfully applied within the region.
- There is potential to leverage the positive experience with Joint Programmes into a wider scope/audience. This is particularly important for the Beef and Sheep sectors which are visibly under more pressure to develop programmes that can improve farm profitability and sustainability.
- There are several opportunities in the region for a more diverse range of farm-related enterprises that could be supported by Teagasc services. Examples included poultry, rural tourism, and food businesses. The PRP note these opportunities but urge caution that decisions to support Teagasc being more involved should be strongly underpinned by a strategic plan around delivering impact for these enterprises. The linkage between the region and the potential support available elsewhere within Teagasc for delivering a strong service around diversification opportunities was not apparent during this review.

#### Knowledge Transfer

- The service has come very well through a period of reduced staff resources and development of the KT delivery model via groups. The feedback from farmers supports this very strongly.
- Beef Advisor morale is lower, when compared to that within other sectors, and is in need of strong support to keep the development agenda to the fore for drystock clients.
- The PRP heard about concerns relating to the current policy for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) funded KT programme management and delivery, which requires Advisors to undertake substantial desk-based work, notably during June/July which poses a risk of negative impacts on KT event delivery and on clients.
- The PRP noted a strong client-orientation among the Advisors in general, but differentiation of client groups according to respective needs (for example in relation to new entrants or gender) was less visible.
- There was some concern (from farmers) about too many events and the duration of events, which need to be more targeted. There is some indication of market saturation with events, highlighting the importance of maintaining the dynamic in terms of topics and approaches to sustain a high level of interest in attendance and impact at events.
- The innovative approach to delivery of education courses through the leveraging of the collaboration with the Salesian Agricultural College, Pallaskenry is very commendable.

#### Reputation

- Teagasc's reputation is good but downstream issues in terms of workload, environmental issues etc. could pose a risk to future service delivery and reputation.
- Farmer feedback suggests that the reputation of Teagasc is held in good stead across the geography and enterprises within the region. Internal Teagasc feedback also

indicates that the region performs well in terms of reputation and service delivery relative to Teagasc's other regions. This is supported by reports of strong attendance at events held within the region as an indicator of the capacity of the Advisors to generate interest in events.

**Recommendations:**

- 3.1 The current apparent imbalance between the genuine KT opportunities of group-based work versus the administrative burden of the scheme is undoubtedly having a negative impact on programme delivery. Thus a review of the DAFM-funded KT programme delivery, regionally and nationally, to inform the improvement of future staff resourcing and service delivery in line with client needs would be beneficial. Efforts to highlight this at Policy level are already underway, and it is important that efforts to address this risk are continued.
- 3.2 Further develop collaborative programmes with industry and with education and training providers as a means to continually extend the reach of the KT work of Teagasc in the region.
- 3.3 Review the strategy for the development of new programmes and services in response to client needs and opportunities arising from regional circumstances and strengths. All proposals for additional services should be critically analysed in terms of potential impact before resources are allocated.
- 3.4 Annual targets for KT programmes across the various channels and activity types (e.g. events, farm walks, etc.) should be critically reviewed each year as part of the business planning process. Scheduling of programmes to maximise collaborations with regional stakeholders, which offers scope for increased positive impact/benefits realisation by Teagasc clients, extension of reach and improvements to resource-use efficiency, is strategically important.

#### 4. Positioning of the Region for the Future

##### Robustness and Sustainability

- The PRP identified that there is work to be done to close the gap between the future demands for improving the sustainability credentials of farming systems across the Advisory Region with the on-going development work that has been based more on productivity and profitability. Advisors dealing with main stream agriculture do not appear to have a fully clear understanding and strategy around how best to integrate sustainability into their activities despite having a good awareness and acknowledgement of the importance of doing so. The PRP observe that this is an issue for the wider Teagasc strategy and programmes, and not confined solely to this region.
- The emergence of the Agricultural Sustainability Support Advisory Programme (ASSAP) service poses an opportunity regarding the improvement of the environmental impact of farming in the region. However, the PRP observe a high risk that this resource will be seen as adequately covering the overall farm sustainability agenda, resulting in a lack of inclusivity of the sustainability issue in the mainstream programmes. The issue of farm sustainability needs to be more 'normalised'/better integrated in the everyday work of all Advisors, rather than being 'departmentalised' as the responsibility of a relatively small number of Advisors.
- The PRP did not clearly see the link between the Business Plan and the National Strategy, and the Business Plan itself did not clearly set out priorities for the year ahead as clear actionable targets rather than high level enterprise objectives.
- The PRP was impressed by the collaboration around the two Joint Programmes with Kerry Agribusiness and Dairygold. However, with regard to the overall aim, there is lack of clarity amongst the team on the extent to which rural development topics/issues can be addressed – e.g. sustainability strategy and alternative enterprises.
- The PRP was not clear that there was adequate evidence of quality assurance for advisory programmes being applied within and between regions. Dependence in the past on peer-support to fulfil this is at risk of failing due to staff numbers having declined.
- While the capacities seem to be robust for the dairy focused service provision they seem to be less so for the drystock focused service provision. Here a certain range of options emerged and a strategic discussion with a mid- to long-term perspective should be led. In particular, farm sustainability in its comprehensive sense is not explicitly addressed across the programmes and services. In the drystock sector, where farm profitability solely from livestock production is difficult to achieve, a combination of further income measures will often be a promising pathway. Advisors need to be able to cope with a wide range of development options in order to effectively respond to farmers' questions and interests in pursuing these options.
- The PRP noted as highly positive the initiative underway for enterprise Advisors to follow-up with recent graduates of education courses in order to increase the awareness of the Teagasc services amongst this cohort of young farmers and potential future clients.
- Future succession planning was highlighted during the review and noted by the PRP. There are a number of retirements imminent within the region's staff team in the coming years, which will place additional pressure on maintaining service continuity, and on the peer-support models currently in place.

##### SWOT Analysis

- The PRP observed that the SWOT analysis conducted for the region, and reported in the self-assessment document, is addressing very high level issues, but needs to be more inclusive of many more detailed points that are specific to the enterprises of the region. In particular, the SWOT analysis presented is considered to be of limited value as a starting point to develop either long-term strategic goals for the region, or specific actionable objectives within an annual business plan.

**Recommendations**

- 4.1 Develop, effectively communicate and implement a clear strategy to integrate sustainability, and optimise opportunities for public goods delivery and enhancement of farm business resilience, across the main stream production agriculture provision, in line with the unique landscape and conservation value of the region.
- 4.2 Review the policy and processes for ensuring customer insight and quality of service delivery.
- 4.3 Monitor and further embed the success of the pilot initiative to maintain active engagement with post-Green Cert students, and share this best practice model with Teagasc's other Advisory Regions.
- 4.4 Consideration should be given to using the peer review criteria to guide a self-evaluation process (to enable further improvements to the quality assurance and impact of Teagasc's service provision) at Advisor, Regional Manager and Head of Advisory Service levels.
- 4.5 A process to conduct a more thorough SWOT analysis for the region should be put in place, with the objective of establishing a more detailed understanding of farm enterprises and the region's specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Each point included should be more conducive to the development of a clear and actionable goal within future strategy and/or an activity target within the business plan.

## **Conclusion**

Kerry-Limerick is a relatively large region with mixed land types where the majority of farmers are specialist beef producers. The region is, however, also a major milk producer and its sheep enterprise account for 13% of the national flock. Much of County Kerry has land and coastal water designated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in accordance with Irish and EU law. This provides both challenges and opportunities for the type of extension programme that is implemented in County Kerry.

The PRP makes 19 recommendations across a variety of issues. Key issues around *Management and Leadership* include the implications of the flat management structure for staff support, career development and strategic planning; the need to review the POR role in the context of responsibilities; the requirement for a more structured and formal multi-channel strategy for internal communication; the need to review and enhance the mentoring programme for new staff; discuss and act upon the staff responses to the peer review survey.

Focusing on *Productivity and Service Delivery*; the identification of KPI's that reflect the true impact of the service on clients; a review of tools available to Advisors for client relationship management, including early warning systems for clients; a call for greater emphasis on group facilitation training for Advisors; regular review of processes for customer relationship management; continued prioritisation of the established culture of colleague support, were identified by the PRP.

Turning to *Relevance and Impact*, reviewing the delivery of the DAFM-funded KT Programme; further development of collaborative programmes with industry, education and training providers; review the strategy for the development of new programmes and services in response to client needs and regional circumstances; critically review each year as part of the business planning process annual targets for KT programmes across various channels and activity type, were highlighted by the PRP.

In terms of *Positioning for the Future*, a strategy to integrate sustainability and optimise opportunities for public goods delivery and enhancement of farm business resilience; review the policy and processes for customer insight and quality of service delivery; further embed the pilot initiative to maintain active engagement with post Green Cert students; consider using the peer review criteria to guide a self-evaluation process at Advisor, Regional Manager and Head of Advisory Service levels; conduct a more thorough SWOT analysis of the region in order to assist business planning and future strategy, were identified by the PRP.

The PRP hope the review can inform Teagasc's Regional Strategy and provide valuable feedback for the Regional Manager and staff, Head of Advisory Service and Director of KT to focus their efforts on the further development of Teagasc's Advisory Programme.

Sincere thanks to all involved for their openness, enthusiasm, and willingness to engage with the panel.

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## **Review of Kerry-Limerick Advisory Region 2018**

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### **Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations**

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Date: 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019

Submit to: Dr. Tom Kelly, Director of Knowledge Transfer; Dermot McCarthy, Head of Advisory Service.

This action plan outlines the recommendations from the report on the *Kerry-Limerick Advisory Region 2018 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                                | Date     |
|-----|---|--|---------------------------------------|----------|
| 1.1 | The numbers of staff directly reporting to the Regional Manager should be reviewed, at a National/strategic level, to facilitate more personalised career and development support for all staff and to mitigate the risks of negative impacts on organisational effectiveness and service delivery. | Issue for Senior Management  | Tom Kelly                             | Dec 2019 |
| 1.2 | The Post of Responsibility (POR) role should be reviewed in the context of responsibilities for: a client base, the technical leadership of an enterprise, and mentoring of staff.  | Agree with comment, POR role to be included as Objective 1 in the PMDS. Roles clearly identified and measurable.<br>Responsibilities to be relevant to programmes and business unit's objectives. New POR's will have defined roles. | Majella Moloney/Dermot McCarthy       | On-going |
| 1.3 | Develop, implement, regularly review and continuously improve a more structured and formal multi-channel strategy for internal communications and information sharing across the region.  | Monthly Mgt meetings with POR's<br>Quarterly enterprise meetings<br>Monthly Office meetings include Admin<br>Quarterly Admin meeting   | Majella Moloney/POR's                 | On-going |
| 1.4 | Review and enhance the mentoring programme for new staff across the region and ensure consistent implementation, regular monitoring and continuous improvement.   | POR responsible for mentoring staff<br>TAG meeting for new advisors to be implemented by enterprise (Lync calls/ face to face meetings supported by Lead advisors)   | Majella Moloney/POR's/<br>Specialists | On-going |
| 1.5 | The Advisory Region's staff survey responses should be discussed at regional level, acted upon, with staff being informed about progress with actions and on what will not be addressed and why.  | Staff meetings to address response. Workshops will be conducted to addresses these to form solutions.  | Majella Moloney / POR's               | On-going |

## 2. Recommendations for Productivity and Service Delivery

| No. | Recommendation  | Actions to be taken   | Person                                    | Date          |
|-----|---|---|---|---------------|
| 2.1 | KPI's that reflect the true impact of the service delivery on clients require consideration to future-proof the value for money offering of the advisory and educational provision in the region. The self-assessment of a random subset of clients by an Advisor each year, in terms of client impact, may also be worthwhile.   | Liaise with the Evaluation unit to develop Client survey which would reflect this and random survey clients. Education student's survey is available and should be tailored for the regional delivery method.                                   | Majella Moloney /Advisors/Education staff | November 2019 |
| 2.2 | A review of the tools available to Advisors for client relationship management may be beneficial, particularly regarding service delivery and client retention. Consideration should be given to early warning systems for clients with deadlines, and/or alerts in instances where time since previous advisory contact has lapsed to a critical level that could impact negatively on client retention. | Admin/ DMS system of recording, Registers will be set up to capture data on schemes. CIMS reports to be generated to monitor clients activity and retention.  | Majella Moloney/Staff officer             |               |
| 2.3 | Greater emphasis should be given to in-service group facilitation training to enhance skills for KT and Discussion Group delivery.  | Specialist (internal/ external) support in facilitation training/ problem solving methods and teaching methodologies. Workshops on Groups sustainability will held to identify solutions to maintain groups. CECRA programme target staff (80%) | Majella Moloney/Specialists               | On-going      |
| 2.4 | Regular reviews of the processes for customer relationship management across the full range of programmes should be undertaken to ensure alignment of service delivery with customer needs.   | Stakeholder meetings in all enterprises and programmes will be used to guide the Strategic plan and Business plan.  | Majella Moloney/POR's/ Specialists        | On- going     |
| 2.5 | The established culture of colleague support for quality management/control should continue to be an on-going priority and be effectively promoted.   | Continue to Support this. POR's to take lead role in QA.  | Majella Moloney/All staff                 | On- going     |

**3. Recommendations for Relevance and Impact**

| No. | Recommendation   | Actions to be taken  | Responsible                                   | Completion                                  |
|-----|--|--|---|---|
| 3.1 | The current apparent imbalance between the genuine KT opportunities of group-based work versus the administrative burden of the scheme is undoubtedly having a negative impact on programme delivery. Thus a review of the DAFM-funded KT programmes delivery, regionally and nationally, to inform the improvement of future staff resourcing and service delivery in line with client needs would be beneficial. Efforts to highlight this at Policy level are already underway and it is important that efforts to address this risk are continued. | Feedback from advisory staff will be obtained and channelled appropriately to the DAFM.  | Heads of programmes /Dermot McCarthy          | July 2019                                   |
| 3.2 | Further develop collaborative programmes with industry and with education and training providers as a means to continually extend the reach of the KT work of Teagasc in the region.   | Further Stakeholders consultations to create linkages and synergies with Milk Processors/Marts and other industries. Connect Ed to support this  | Majella Moloney/ Connect Ed                   | On-going                                    |
| 3.3 | Review the strategy for the development of new programmes and services in response to client needs and opportunities arising from regional circumstances and strengths. All proposals for additional services should be critically analysed in terms of potential impact before resources are allocated.   | Agree with statement, Issue for Senior Management<br>Discussions will take place with staff on new schemes /service prior to implementation.   | Tom Kelly/<br>Dermot McCarthy/Majella Moloney | On-going                                    |
| 3.4 | Annual targets for KT programmes across the various channels and activity types (e.g. events, farm walks, etc.) should be critically reviewed each year as part of the business planning process. Scheduling of programmes to maximise collaborations with regional stakeholders, which offers scope for increased positive impact/benefits realisation by Teagasc clients, extension of reach and improvements to resource-use efficiency, is strategically important.  | Attendance registers to be taken at each event. Exit survey to be conducted @ 3 events/ farm walks. Doodle poll or call back to be used to survey the client. All in line with GDPR. Internal critical review of 3 events/ Farm walk will take place annually. | Majella Moloney                               | On- going before Business planning meeting. |

#### 4. Recommendations for Positioning for the Future

| No. | Recommendation   | Actions to be taken  | Responsible                               | Completion       |
|-----|--|--|---|------------------|
| 4.1 | Develop, effectively communicate and implement a clear strategy to integrate sustainability, and optimise opportunities for public goods delivery and enhancement of farm business resilience, across the primary production agriculture provision, in line with the unique landscape and conservation value of the region.  | +Strategic Advisory plan 2025 and regional Strategic plan will include these key sustainability elements for the region.<br>+Ensure that all Monitor farms will adapt best practises to comply with GHG's and other environmental factors.<br>+Support will be provided to work with the Sustainability Advisors as part of the ASSAP programme. | Paul Maher/<br>Majella<br>Moloney         | On-going         |
| 4.2 | Review the policy and processes for ensuring customer insight and quality of service delivery.   | Stakeholders Consultations/ exit surveys<br>Strategic Advisory plan 2025 and regional Strategic plan will include these key sustainability elements for the region.  | Majella<br>Moloney                        | On- going        |
| 4.3 | Monitor and further embed the success of the pilot initiative to maintain active engagement with post-Green Cert students, and share this best practice model with Teagasc's other Advisory Regions.   | Alumni to continue and strengthen, current crop of students in agricultural colleges will be targeted, Events will be organised for Alumni and advisor will target a number of farm visits throughout the year. Young farmer's discussion groups to be formed.   | Education<br>staff/<br>advisors           | On-going         |
| 4.4 | Consideration should be given to using the peer review criteria to guide a self-evaluation process (to enable further improvements to the quality assurance and impact of Teagasc's service provision) at Advisor, Regional Manager and Head of Advisory Service levels.   | + Peer review and self-evaluation to be used by staff each year to update business plan/<br>regional Strategic plan<br>+ Staff survey will be taken each year with more focus on programmes delivery and KPI's measurable.   | Evaluation<br>unit                        | November<br>2019 |
| 4.5 | A process to conduct a more thorough SWOT analysis for the region should be put in place, with the objective of establishing a more detailed understanding of farm enterprises and the region's specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Each point included should be more conducive to the development of a clear and actionable goal within future strategy and/or an activity target within the business plan. | Comprehensive SWOT developed to capture this and used as part of the stakeholder's consultations and regional business planning.   | Majella<br>Moloney/<br>Dermot<br>McCarthy | November<br>2019 |

**Appendix 2: Advisory Regional Review Panel**

| Function / Role   | Name   |
|---|--|
| Chair   | Dr Eric Long, Head of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise's (CAFRE) Knowledge Advisory Service within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Northern Ireland. Previous roles include Principal of Enniskillen College of Agriculture, management of organisational improvement programmes within DAERA and private sector agricultural consultancy in England.   |
| KT Professional with Advisory and/or Education background | Andrea Knierim is a Professor at Hohenheim University and heads the chair of Rural Sociology at the Institute of Social Sciences in Agriculture. She has a PhD in agricultural extension and education from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research interests focus on agricultural knowledge and innovation systems, voluntary change and learning processes in agriculture and rural development and on inter- and transdisciplinary research approaches. |
| Farmer stakeholder  | Tom Feeney, farmer. Member of a local co-op's Regional and Advisory Committees for ten years, before progressing to join the Board and served a two year term as Vice-Chairman. Also a Director on the Board of a local Credit Union. Life Motto: getting the work life balance right.   |
| Industry representative                                   | Dr Stan Lalor is the Head of the Speciality Division of Grassland AGRO, an Irish-based wholesaler of fertiliser and other agri-inputs. Stan has been working in the private sector since 2014, having previously worked in both the Advisory and Research Directorates of Teagasc.   |
| Independent Teagasc Representative & Secretariat          | Dr Kevin Heanue Teagasc's Evaluation Officer, leads the development of an evaluation culture in Teagasc through the cyclical evaluation of its research programmes, extension activities and once-off evaluations of organisational activities and functions. He provides a secretariat to the Peer Review Panel.  |

### **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.