



Teagasc Advisory Regional Review

Cork West

Final Report

Author(s): Monica Gorman, Anne-Marie Butler
Eric Collin, Frank O'Mahony

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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 Cork West Advisory Region was undertaken in Clonakilty Agricultural College on October 14th and 15th 2019. 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 Cork West Advisory Region strategy and the Teagasc Statement of Strategy, 2017-2020. The farmer stakeholder panel which the PRP panel met consisted of 6 farmers. One farmer was involved in tillage and pigs, but focused on tillage. A dairy farming couple also attended. One hill sheep farmer was also a Teagasc BETTER farmer. The drystock farmer was involved in beef and increasingly contract heifer rearing. Another farmer was involved in artisan food production, food tourism and agro forestry.

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**):

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

The Cork West Advisory Region in Context

The Cork West region covers a diverse geographic area with fertile lowlands in the east to upland and hill areas to the west and on the peninsulas. In general, land quality is mixed both within farm and across the region. West Cork is known for its long grass growing season where early turnout and late grazing is very achievable on many farms with cattle, sheep and dairy cows.

The region of West Cork more generally has established a strong reputation for artisan food production and diversification with several well established food brands developed in the area such as Glenilen, Gubbeen, Durrus and Milleens cheese. In recent years the development of the "Wild Atlantic Way" has led to increased tourism numbers in the region. This route winds its way along the coast of the region from Kinsale to Ardgroom and presents business opportunities for farmers in the region to diversify into additional sources of income.

There are 6,192 farmers in the region (CSO, 2010). Although renowned for its dairy farming, Cork West has over 3,000 drystock farmers mainly concentrated in the western part of the region leading out onto the Beara, Sheep's Head and Mizen peninsulas. Traditionally tillage farming

was more widespread but is now concentrated mainly in the south-east near Kinsale and in the north-east near Crookstown where the land type is fertile and very suitable for arable farming. Average farm size in the region is 35.2 hectares which is slightly larger than the national average. Almost half the farms in West Cork are larger than 30 hectares compared to 40% nationally. Farms are generally fragmented with a number of land blocks making up the total land farmed.

There are 1,900 dairy farmers supplying manufacturing milk to Carbery and Dairygold. Carbery is a federated co-op owned by the four west cork co-ops Drinagh, Lisavaird, Barryroe and Bandon. Dairygold also has a strong milk supplier base to the north and east of the region.

In terms of a client base, there are 1153 dairy farmers (61% of total) with, 600 farms in derogation and 30 discussion groups. Teagasc is involved in 2 joint dairy programmes with Dairygold in the north of the region and Carbery in the south of the region. There are 1,250 drystock clients (45% of total), 232 sheep clients (43% of total), 40 tillage clients (33% of total), 5 organic clients (8% of total) and 3 goats/buffalo clients (3% of total).

There are currently three advisory offices in Clonakilty, Macroom and Skibbereen to support farmers in the region. In addition to these offices, there are three advisory clinics in Bandon, Adrigole and Kenmare where advisors work from one to two days each week to meet clients by appointment and also hold discussion group meetings. Under the Teagasc office rationalisation programme in 2009, the Dunmanway, Bandon and Bantry offices were closed and the regional headquarters moved from Dunmanway to the advisory offices in Clonakilty Agricultural College.

In 2019, the Advisory Programme was delivered through multiple KT channels including 1,380 farm visits, 5,681 consultations, 52 discussion groups and 371 discussion group meetings, 1,932 SPS/BPS applications, 555 ePMs, 602 derogations, 40 farm walks and 29 meetings/seminars.

The programme is integrated with stakeholders such as Carbery and Dairygold through Joint Programmes. It is also involved in 2 European Innovation Partnership (EIP) projects in designated areas of the region, one focusing on Pearl Mussels and the other on Hen Harriers. The region contains 12 dairy monitor farms, 2 dairy demonstration farms and 1 BETTER beef farm.

The number of staff in the region increased from 21.2 in 2014 to 25.4 FTE staff in 2019. This includes 18.4 advisors, 2 education officers, 4 administrative staff and one regional manager.

Main Recommendations

1. Management and Leadership

- 1.1 The new Regional Strategy should concentrate on identifying how to support agricultural and non-agricultural income generating activities for existing and the next generation of land owners and farmers in Cork West, building on the unique character of the region. This strategy should serve to build upon & enhance the rich topography of the area rather than reflect/repeat the strategies of other regions.
- 1.2. The process of designing the new Regional Strategy should seek to engage all staff in reflection and dialogue on the educational, advisory and innovation needs of the farm families they serve. The process should encourage creative and collaborative thinking while simultaneously exploring traditional and non-traditional systems of production/enterprises.
- 1.3. The new Regional Manager should continue to be supported as he develops his leadership role in the region. This includes training options, mentoring and senior leadership coaching.
- 1.4. The induction process for new staff should be reviewed to ensure it helps them gain process as well as technical competence as quickly as possible. Consideration should be given to a more formal mentoring process for new recruits and those in new roles.
- 1.5. Clear professional progression pathways should to be available to motivated staff.
- 1.6. More regular short team meetings would benefit the whole team.
- 1.7. 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 Investigate barriers and strategies for maintaining and increasing the number of all farmers, but particularly drystock farmers, in discussion groups.
- 2.2. Motivational and progression pathways should to be available to all staff across all sectors and departments to improve productivity and service delivery.
- 2.3. Investigate reasons for low uptake of ePMs (eProfit Monitors) and pilot different approaches to build farmer confidence in ePMs and other financial budgeting techniques.
- 2.4. Review the benefits (and costs) of the Mental Health First Aid training and plan for further roll out to all advisors.
- 2.5. Ensure that health and safety and mental health issues retain prominence in advisory and education activities.

3. Relevance and Impact

- 3.1 Examine ways in which the Drystock Programme and the Options Programme might be more closely integrated so that drystock advisors can discuss 'whole farm planning' (global strategy farm planning) with their clients
- 3.2. Needs analysis and differentiation of client groups is recommended, especially in the Drystock programme, to better tailor advisory messages and approaches.
- 3.3. Teagasc should explore the idea of 'Transition Advisors' to support family farms with viability challenges and 'out of the box' opportunities for some of them to develop entrepreneurial profitable activity.

- 3.4. The Dairy programme should set ambitious environmental targets especially for improving water quality as failure to successfully address this challenge threatens the continued sustainability and development of this sector. The sector's dependence on derogation was a concern to the PRP.
- 3.5. Find ways for greater input / participation from advisors and farmers in the design, monitoring and evaluation of Research and KT programmes. This could involve greater 'two-way' dialogue between advisory staff and systems researchers (additional to the role of the KT specialists) so that advisory staff has a deeper understanding of key concepts for technology dissemination while researchers are more closely connected to advisor and farmer priorities.
- 3.6. Provide robust media training to staff so that they can communicate effectively and professionally with various media and continue to build and deepen the reputation of Teagasc.

4. Positioning for the Future

- 4.1. Prioritise the development of a more robust SWOT analysis and the new Regional Strategy using both as an opportunity for reflective and creative thinking about how to build the capacity of the farming community of Cork West (on specific comparative advantages such as opportunities ex Wild Atlantic Way) to enhance their farm business resilience in ways that will be sustainable for the next generation.
- 4.2. Ensure that environmental sustainability is mainstreamed within the business plans of each and every advisor with due attention to the number of derogations.
- 4.3. Review current advisory roles within the region with a view to redefining some advisory roles as 'Transition' briefs.
- 4.4. Provide training to help staff recognise, support and develop more resilient farmers and farm systems.
- 4.5. Reflect and build upon the rich topography and unique characteristics of the region as a platform for future development.

1. Quality of Management and Leadership in the Region

Management and Leadership

- The PRP acknowledge the short time that the Regional Manager has been in post and was impressed by his vision for the region and his grasp of the challenges and opportunities the region faces.
- The PRP was impressed by the motivation shown by staff to the evolving needs of their clients and the development of the new Regional Strategy is an opportunity to build on that motivation.
- The PRP had some concerns that while staff in the region are very 'busy' with immediate activities, not enough time is spent in thinking through the long term strategic and future development needs of farming in the region.
- The PRP consider that the new Regional Strategy is an opportunity for the advisory team to reflect and think about the knowledge and innovation support needs of the Region's farmers if a viable livelihood is to be possible for the next generation who want to farm in West Cork.
- The PRP commends the many examples of leadership and initiative evidenced by individual advisors and the administrative support team and the impact this has on motivation and performance of the wider team.
- During discussions with younger staff members, the PRP heard about adequate technical induction and support for new advisors but had some concerns about a lack of a wider induction process, more formalised mentoring and more formalised regular team meetings. With a young staff profile in the region, the importance of these learning spaces is heightened.
- The PRP noted the need for clear professional progression pathways in order to retain and develop the highly motivated staff in the region.
- The PRP recognised that Cork West was the last of the 12 advisory regions to be reviewed and that the Management team here had implemented many of the recommendations from reviews of other regions.
- The results from the staff survey show opportunities around staff involvement in decision making, training and personal development and leading initiatives. 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 PRP noted that the effective building of staff technical and other competencies in the region. The TAG groups were identified as being particularly effective in ensuring that staff fully understands the learning from in-service training and how it can be made useful to clients in the region.
- The PRP was informed that staff finds their PMDS meetings to be an appropriate opportunity for discussing their training needs and competence development.
- In discussions with staff, the PRP noted that the area of business and financial competence was one where advisors did not feel confident and that more targeted as well as basic business and financial training is needed.
- The advisory team includes 2 large groupings - BT Dairy and BT Drystock as well as a smaller Environment grouping, a small Education team and one staff member with a Tillage brief (also covering Cork East). Within the team, some individuals also have Posts of Responsibility that require them to provide technical leadership on key initiatives. The PRP were satisfied that the current structure appears to be working well.

- The PRP had some concerns about continued motivation of drystock advisors in the current climate of poor cattle prices and a very uncertain outlook for the sector. It considered how the role of the advisor might evolve and develop over the next few years in light of current challenges and opportunities and encourages the Cork West team to discuss and contribute to shaping if, and how advisory roles need to change.

Resources

- The PRP met with dairy, tillage and livestock specialists who act as the channel of technical advice from the various research centres to the advisory regions. Their support was also discussed with the advisors. While the PRP noted that the relationships and mutual respect was very strong between the specialists and the advisors, they had concerns about the manner in which in-service training is delivered i.e. the transfer of a large amount of technical information with insufficient time to digest and understand the information so as to be able to use it with farmers. The TAG is a response to this but the PRP recommends a reconsideration of the mode of technical in-service training.
- The PRP had concerns about the appropriateness of the technical support to the drystock advisors. It is largely based on improving grass management and breeding and the PRP learned that only about one quarter of drystock clients have an appetite for this type of advice.
- In contrast, the Options Programme appears to be under resourced. The PRP felt that consideration should be given to augmenting the specialist advice on whole farm planning and family farm income assessment so that drystock advisors, in particular, could offer a more holistic advisory service to their clients.
- The PRP noted the usefulness of different Teagasc tools and reports for advisors. Some advisors did recommend that report outputs from ePMs need to be more user friendly.

Recommendations

- 1.1 The new Regional Strategy should concentrate on identifying how to support agricultural and non-agricultural income generating activities for existing and the next generation of land owners and farmers in Cork West, building on the unique character of the region. This strategy should serve to build upon & enhance the rich topography of the area rather than reflect/repeat the strategies of other regions.
- 1.2 The process of designing the new Regional Strategy should seek to engage all staff in reflection and dialogue on the educational, advisory and innovation needs of the farm families they serve. The process should encourage creative and collaborative thinking while simultaneously exploring traditional and non-traditional systems of production/enterprises.
- 1.3 The new Regional Manager should continue to be supported as he develops his leadership role in the region. This includes training options, mentoring and senior leadership coaching.
- 1.4 The induction process for new staff should be reviewed to ensure it helps them gain process as well as technical competence as quickly as possible. Consideration should be given to a more formal mentoring process for new recruits and those in new roles.
- 1.5 Clear professional progression pathways should be available to motivated staff.
- 1.6 More regular short team meetings would benefit the whole team.
- 1.7 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

- The PRP noted the performance of the Region against different key performance indicators. It recognised that with a lot of newly recruited advisors in the region, it will take time for everyone to reach 'full productivity'.
- The PRP were impressed by the level of activity and events undertaken by staff in the region.
- The PRP noted the static number of discussion groups over the period 2016-2018, the relatively low proportion of Teagasc clients in discussion groups and the lack of focus to increase this number. This may warrant further investigation to understand the barriers to discussion group membership.
- The PRP was concerned about the possible drop off in discussion group membership in the drystock sector post KT Programme.
- eProfit monitors increased year on year until the end of the KT Programme. Bringing the numbers up again is a challenge and is an area requiring further reflection on why farmers were not convinced of the benefit of the ePM from their KT group experience.
- The PRP felt that KPIs, such as the number of ePMs, are useful but need to be used as 'indicators' spotlighting issues that need to be understood better rather than as a blunt instrument for praise or censure.

Quality of Service Delivery

- In general, farmer panel feedback was that the service from Teagasc was good. The discussion group model was identified as a particularly useful knowledge transfer method.
- While many farmers in the region do use the service of technical advisors from input suppliers, the farmer panel explained that many such farmers will often check with Teagasc about the veracity of such advice as Teagasc is recognised as providing independent expertise.
- The PRP noted the level of preparation that advisors put into their discussion groups such as TAG meetings to ensure they were fully comfortable with technical information to be provided.
- The PRP were pleased to hear about a range of social media delivery channels being used for knowledge transfer.
- The PRP commends the Regional Manager for instigating mental health training among some advisors - it shows concern and care for Teagasc staff and clients.
- The PRP noted examples of proactivity in service delivery and events right across the region. The Alumni programme for recent graduates from education courses was one such example.
- The PRP noted that neither in the self-assessment document nor in the panel discussions much emphasis was given to farm health & safety and it was unclear to the panel whether this topic has now become mainstream in an advisors work or whether there was less emphasis than in previous years.
- The PRP would like Teagasc to ensure that health & safety and mental health issues retain their prominence in advisory and educational activities.

Recommendations

- 2.1 Investigate barriers and strategies for maintaining and increasing the number of all farmers, but particularly drystock farmers, in discussion groups.
- 2.2 Investigate reasons for low uptake of profit monitors and pilot different approaches to build farmer confidence in ePM.
- 2.3 Review the benefits (and costs) of the Mental Health First Aid training and plan for further roll out to all advisors.
- 2.4 Ensure that health and safety and mental health issues retain prominence in advisory and education activities.

3. Relevance and Impact in the Region

Programme relevance

- The PRP noted that the dairy programme was working well and staff recognised issues such as human welfare, animal welfare and environmental limits as the challenges the industry faces.
- The joint programmes with Dairygold and Carbery cooperatives were considered an important element in the overall dairy advisory programme.
- The Teagasc advisory programme is based on a classical model that supports single farm enterprise systems e.g. spring milk dairy production. It is important to ensure that farmers who seek to follow alternative dairy systems are fully supported as the PRP were aware of some evidence and concerned that this is not happening.
- The PRP noted the limitations of the drystock farming system and that the drystock advisory programme is very much focused on increasing output rather than on optimising family farm income. Drystock advisors indicated the majority of their clients have a low level of interest in the current KT messages on improving technical and production efficiencies. The PRP believes there needs to be a rethinking of the programme for the drystock sector focusing on whole farm planning and integrating drystock advisors into the Options Programme so that agricultural-related diversification is considered e.g. growing forage for digesters, contract rearing, etc.
- The Options programme is currently a small component of the Cork West Advisory Programme with only one Options course run annually. The PRP would suggest a strengthening of the Options programme (and integration with the Drystock and Education programmes) with more focus on resilience, entrepreneurship and transition and with strong links to the wider rural development network of the region.
- Teagasc should explore the idea of 'transition advisors' to support family farms with viability challenges and 'out of the box' opportunities for some of them to develop entrepreneurial / profitable activity
- Rethinking about the drystock advisory programme could include enabling farmers to gain a greater understanding of the beef supply chain and the needs of the market as well as linkages and opportunities for establishing producer groups, dairy to beef groups or other initiatives.
- The Tillage programme is small, but the PRP noted its innovativeness and responsiveness to challenges and opportunities.
- The Catchments programme and the ASSAP programme are commended as very positive responses to the environmental challenges in the area and the PRP recommend that they be given every support possible to ensure that the Region avoids problems

- particularly with water quality. With a high number of farmers in derogations, the risks are very high so real and meaningful collaboration is needed with the dairy advisory programme to ensure that environmental requirements are complied with.
- The Education programme includes the provision of the part-time Green Cert course and a number of short courses for farmers. The PRP noted positively that all advisors contribute to the education courses. The PRP is concerned that there isn't adequate attention to entrepreneurship within the Green Cert programme.
 - The PRP noted that the Advisory Programme in Cork West delivers a particularly valuable social function for some sections of the farming population but this function, although important, is not recorded or valorised in KPIs.
 - The PRP noted that dissemination of new knowledge from research is very much top-down with little opportunity for input from advisors. The space and approach for supporting bottom-up innovation including research based on farmers' requirements needs to be considered. A clear understanding of anaerobic digestion was used as an example of guidance dairy farmers wanted but with little support coming from research.

Knowledge Transfer

- In terms of knowledge transfer, the PRP noted that farmer clients, especially in the dairy sector, benefit hugely from their engagement. The farmer panel were particularly appreciative of accessing the latest research from Moorepark.
- The influence of previous advisors was evident from the farmer panel with all giving examples of how their farm business had benefitted from their learning through the advisory programme.
- The PRP has concerns about the extent of KT / learning that beef farmers got from the KT groups. If they are not persuaded to continue in discussion groups, questions need to be asked about either the content, perceived value (financial and technical) or the process of that programme.
- The PRP noted that the approach to knowledge transfer and innovation is a typical top-down linear approach and recommends that a more participatory, bottom-up model might be adopted to enhance engagement in creative problem solving and longer term strategic thinking for the drystock sector in particular. The PRP recognises that a shift to more participatory approaches would require training and on-going support for advisors.

Reputation

- The PRP noted that the Teagasc advisory programme was well regarded by farmers in the area although there has been considerable competition from private advisors in recent years. The Regional Manager is rebuilding any drop off in confidence that may have happened when advisory numbers were depleted during the embargo on public service recruitment. However the Teagasc advisors need to be mindful that although their costs to the farmers are subsidised they should be still ensuring they deliver "value for money".
- The reputation of Teagasc in the region is enhanced by regular engagement with local radio, social media and in the local print press.
- There appears to be a strong network of relationships developed with different actors in the Region.
- With 600 farmers in derogation there is a huge risk to Teagasc reputation if derogation is revoked. Teagasc may be (unfairly) accused of advising their clients to go into it and blamed for the consequences if farmers can no longer avail of it.

Recommendations:

- 3.1 Examine ways in which the Drystock Programme and the Options Programme might be more closely integrated so that drystock advisors can discuss 'whole farm planning' (global strategy farm planning) with their clients
- 3.2. Needs analysis and differentiation of client groups is recommended, especially in the Drystock programme, to better tailor advisory messages and approaches.
- 3.3. Teagasc should explore the idea of 'Transition Advisors' to support family farms with viability challenges and 'out of the box' opportunities for some of them to develop entrepreneurial profitable activity.
- 3.4. The Dairy programme should set ambitious environmental targets especially for improving water quality as failure to successfully address this challenge threatens the continued sustainability and development of this sector. The sector's dependence on derogation was a concern to the PRP.
- 3.5. Find ways for greater input/participation from advisors and farmers in the design, monitoring and evaluation of Research and KT programmes. This could involve greater 'two-way' dialogue between advisory staff and systems researchers (additional to the role of the KT specialists) so that advisory staff has a deeper understanding of key concepts for technology dissemination while researchers are more closely connected to advisor and farmer priorities. Advisory staff should benefit from greater access to system researchers when learning the key concepts of technological dissemination.
- 3.6. Provide robust media training to staff so that they can communicate effectively and professionally with various media and continue to build and deepen the reputation of Teagasc.

4. Positioning of the Region for the Future

Robustness and Sustainability

- The PRP noted that Cork West has experienced a lot of retirements as well as recruitment of a high number of young advisors over the last few years. This provides a strong platform for the future programme as these young advisors are highly motivated to establish their advisory reputations in the area and they are learning quickly from the more experienced cohort. The strong team spirit and leadership in the Region should continue to support this.
- The PRP commend the vision of the future positioning of the region particularly from a rural agri-tourism, food, collaboration, succession, partnership perspective. The PRP heard during the review process of the absence of broad based rural development advisers who were previously based in the organisation and who will be needed if the vision is to be fulfilled.
- The PRP noted the increasing recognition of the urgency to address the environmental sustainability challenges of farming systems particularly water quality issues and greenhouse gas emissions. However, there are concerns that 'sustainability' is still not mainstream in the dairy, drystock and tillage advisory programmes nor seen as the responsibility of all advisors.
- The PRP noted the Alumni Programme whereby advisors follow up with recent graduates of education courses. This will provide a strong platform for stronger engagement with this cohort of farmers as future clients.
- Quality assurance is currently based on the Teagasc Customer Charter ensuring timely responses to calls and emails as well as feedback sheets from education courses and a national customer satisfaction survey. Complaint mechanisms appear to be robust.

- Value for money and the return on investment in public extension services is likely to receive increasing critical attention. Therefore, it is important at regional advisory level to engage the whole team in evaluating the cost/benefit dimensions of the different programmes and initiatives recognising the public good and social benefits as well as the economic.

SWOT Analysis

- The self-assessment SWOT analysis conducted in advance of the review included a mix of high level and minor issues relating to the region itself and to the advisory programme. The PRP suggest that the region may require a greater level of facilitation and technical support in developing a SWOT analysis that provides a solid basis for the new Regional Strategy.

Recommendations

- 4.1 Prioritise the development of a more robust SWOT analysis and the new Regional Strategy using both as an opportunity for reflective and creative thinking about how to build the capacity of the farming community of Cork West (on specific comparative advantages such as opportunities ex Wild Atlantic Way) to enhance their farm business resilience in ways that will be sustainable for the next generation.
- 4.2. Ensure that environmental sustainability is mainstreamed within the business plans of each and every advisor with due attention to the number of derogations.
- 4.3. Review current advisory roles within the region with a view to redefining some advisory roles as 'Transition' briefs.
- 4.4. Provide training to help staff recognise, support and develop more resilient farmers and farm systems.
- 4.5. Reflect and build upon the rich topography and unique characteristics of the region as a platform for future development.

Conclusion

The Cork West region covers a diverse geographic area with land quality mixed both within farm and across the region. With a long grass growing season, the region has a particularly strong dairy tradition. The region has also established a reputation for artisan food production. The recent designation of the 'Wild Atlantic Way' through the region presents opportunities for farmers to diversify into additional sources of income. These features provide both challenges and opportunities for the type of Advisory Programme that is implemented in Cork West.

The PRP makes 23 recommendations across a variety of issues. Key issues around *Management and Leadership* include that the new Regional Strategy should reflect the unique challenges and opportunities of the region, that the design of the new Regional Strategy should engage all regional staff in a creative and collaborative process, the need to continue supporting the new Regional Manager, a review of the induction process for new staff, clarity around professional progression pathway for motivated staff, more regular team meetings and discussing and acting upon the staff responses to the peer review survey.

Focusing on *Productivity and Service Delivery*; investigating how to maintain existing and increase new farmers into discussion groups; investigate reasons for low uptake of ePMs; review and roll out, if appropriate, Mental First Aid training to all advisors; ensure that H&S and Mental Health issues retain prominence in advisory and education activities were identified by the PRP.

Turning to *Relevance and Impact*; examining ways to more closely integrate the Drystock and Options Programmes to facilitate a 'whole farm planning' approach with clients, needs analysis and differentiation of clients groups especially in the Drystock Programme so as to better tailor advice, exploring the idea of 'Transition Advisors' to support family farms with viability challenges, the need for the Dairy Programme to set ambitious environmental targets and to reduce the sectors dependence on derogation, gain greater input from advisors and farmers in the design, monitoring and evaluation of Research and KT programme, providing robust media communication to staff were highlighted by the PRP.

In terms of *Positioning for the Future*, prioritising the development of a more robust SWOT analysis and the new Regional Strategy, ensuring that environmental sustainability is mainstreamed with the business plans of each advisor, redefining some advisory roles as 'Transition Advisors', providing training to help staff recognise, support and develop more resilient farmers and farm systems, building on the rich topography and unique characteristics of the region as a platform for future development were identified by the PRP.

The PRP hope the review can inform the 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.

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

Appendix 1: Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations

Review of Cork West Advisory Region 2019

Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations

Date: 24th January 2020

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 *Cork West Advisory Region 2019 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	The new Regional Strategy should concentrate on identifying how to support agricultural and non-agricultural income generating activities for existing and the next generation of land owners and farmers in Cork West, building on the unique character of the region. This strategy should serve to build upon & enhance the rich topography of the area rather than reflect/repeat the strategies of other regions.	The new strategy will focus on maximising the contribution of the farm assets to household income including the promotion of alternative income sources from the farm. Agri-tourism, Contract Heifer Rearing, Artisan Food Production, Options Pilot Option Discussion Group in 2020.	Regional manager and all staff. Seamus Lordan	December 2021
1.2	The process of designing the new Regional Strategy should seek to engage all staff in reflection and dialogue on the educational, advisory and innovation needs of the farm families they serve. The process should encourage creative and collaborative thinking while simultaneously exploring traditional and non-traditional systems of production/enterprises.	A key part of our new strategy from 2020-2022 will be to focus on Sustainability and on the KPI's (Financial, Breeding, Grassland Management) of profitable farming. All staff will be briefed on alternative income sources and will segregate and identify clients who have a need for additional income and an interest in developing an additional business on the farm to address the income challenge.	All Staff, led by Regional Manager	On-going 2020-2022
1.3	The new Regional Manager should continue to be supported as he develops his leadership role in the region. This includes training options, mentoring and senior leadership coaching.	Training will be completed using the PMDS process to set out training needs.	Head of Advisory/Regional Manager	2020-2022
1.4	The induction process for new staff should be reviewed to ensure it helps them gain process as well as technical competence as quickly as possible. Consideration should be given to a more formal mentoring process for new recruits and	The new modular IST programme will help to induct new advisors technically along with regular TAG meetings with POR's and peers more locally. Regional Manager to go through induction asap after start date. APD to be completed by all new advisors by the end of	Heads of Programme, Specialists, Regional Manager, POR's, Peers.	December 2021

	those in new roles.	2021		
1.5	Clear professional progression pathways should be available to motivated staff.	Provide opportunities for staff to develop professionally. Advisors to show initiative in their role and in seeking opportunities to develop. Regional Manager to provide support and mentoring to staff to help improve their professional profile. Delegation of responsibility for public events and maximise training opportunities	Advisor, IST Support staff, Regional Manager	On-going 2020-2022
1.6	More regular short team meetings would benefit the whole team.	POR's to organise and facilitate monthly TAG meetings in dairy, beef, sheep and rural development.	POR's, Regional Manager	Implement by June 2020. Review after 12 months
1.7	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 Survey Workshop will form part of all staff meeting in 2020. Included will be outputs from the 2019 Regional Stakeholders meeting	Regional Manager	December 2020

2. Recommendations for Productivity and Service Delivery

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
2.1	Investigate barriers and strategies for maintaining and increasing the number of all farmers, but particularly drystock farmers, in discussion groups.	Survey all group members in 2020. Each Advisor to set out annual group schedule. Farmer members encouraged to invite another farmer (non-group members) to each meeting. Group Meetings to be hosted in the evening on drystock farms. Flexible charge for drystock groups to encourage participation and no charge to new entrants for first 12 months. Target to be set per advisor to recruit new members to groups. 5 % additional new entrants	Regional Manager, Drystock POR.	December 2021.
2.2	Motivational and progression pathways should to be available to all staff across all sectors and departments to improve productivity and service delivery.	See 1.5		
2.3	Investigate reasons for low uptake of ePMs (eProfit Monitors) and pilot different approaches to build farmer confidence in ePMs and other financial budgeting techniques.	Each enterprise team to formulate an ePM strategy. All staff to view the Webinar on how to complete profit monitors.	Advisors, POR's	January to June, Review in July 2020
2.4	Review the benefits (and costs) of the Mental Health First Aid training and plan for further roll out to all advisors.	Investigate feasibility of a bespoke Mental Health first aid training course for all staff in the region in collaboration with West Cork Development Partnership	Regional Manager	June 2020
2.5	Ensure that health and safety and mental health issues retain prominence in advisory and education activities.	Create a set of Health and Safety information boards to be used at all public events. These boards will developed under advice from Teagasc H&S specialists and feature along the route between stops.	POR, Trained Advisors, WCDP, Regional Manager	June 2020

3. Recommendations for Relevance and Impact

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person Responsible	Date for Completion
3.1	Examine ways in which the Drystock Programme and the Options Programme might be more closely integrated so that drystock advisors can discuss 'whole farm planning' (global strategy farm planning) with their clients.	Integrate the Options programme to local monthly Drystock TAG meetings. Develop a list of successful case studies. Set target of priming 5 clients per advisor per year to take part in Options course and follow-up discussion group format	POR, Regional Manager	April 2020
3.2	Needs analysis and differentiation of client groups is recommended, especially in the Drystock programme, to better tailor advisory messages and approaches.	Each advisor to carry out an analysis of client list to facilitate more targeted approach to programmes. Agree categorisation by September and implement by October 3-4 categories	Drystock advisory team	Review in November 2020
3.3	Teagasc should explore the idea of 'Transition Advisors' to support family farms with viability challenges and 'out of the box' opportunities for some of them to develop entrepreneurial profitable activity.	Pilot 1 drystock in the region to up skill in this area.	SMG, Head of Advisory, REDP	Pilot by Dec 2020, Implement by June 2021
3.4	The Dairy programme should set ambitious environmental targets especially for improving water quality as failure to successfully address this challenge threatens the continued sustainability and development of this sector. The sector's dependence on derogation was a concern to the PRP.	Sustainability measures to be core in advisory work. MACC elements to be highlighted promoted and supported on all monitor farms in the region MACC curve to be a topic for all discussion groups in 2020. Up skill advisors by June 2020. Non-group members by 2022. Signpost Farms implemented by December 2021.	Dairy Advisory Team, Specialists, POR	January - December 2020 December 2022 December 2021

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person Responsible	Date for Completion
3.5	Find ways for greater input / participation from advisors and farmers in the design, monitoring and evaluation of Research and KT programmes. This could involve greater 'two-way' dialogue between advisory staff and systems researchers (additional to the role of the KT specialists) so that advisory staff has a deeper understanding of key concepts for technology dissemination while researchers are more closely connected to advisor and farmer priorities. Advisory staff should benefit from greater access to system researchers when learning the key concepts of technological dissemination.	<p>2 advisors to sit on national Teagasc dairy stakeholders group. Dairy POR to invite researchers to local TAG meetings. Paul Maher to liaise with researchers, specialists and advisors. Manager/Advisors to attend annual meeting on new dairy research projects. Advisors to develop working relationships with researchers through regular contact and events. Teagasc need to develop KPI's in relation to Work/life Balance and the impact of dairy production systems on lifestyle, health and well-being of the farm operator and their staff.</p> <p>Teagasc to develop a broader range of KPI's for alternative dairy production systems so that the organisation appeals to a broader range of dairy farmers with variations of the low cost grass based system. e.g. the role of zero grazing as a system. high input/high output dairy systems</p>	<p>Head of Dairy KT Dairy POR Dairy Advisors, Paul Maher</p> <p>Head of Dairy KT, Dairy Researchers Dairy Researchers, Dairy Specialists</p>	On-going 2020-2022
3.6	Provide robust media training to staff so that they can communicate effectively and professionally with various media and continue to build and deepen the reputation of Teagasc.	All staff to complete the relevant CECRA training modules and media training.	Mark Gibson, Kay O'Connell, Mark Moore	2020-2022

4. Recommendations for Positioning for the Future

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Responsible	Completion
4.1	Prioritise the development of a more robust SWOT analysis and the new Regional Strategy using both as an opportunity for reflective and creative thinking about how to build the capacity of the farming community of Cork West (on specific comparative advantages such as opportunities ex Wild Atlantic Way) to enhance their farm business resilience in ways that will be sustainable for the next generation.	Revise the SWOT analysis for the region in line with PEER Review Recommendations Survey	Regional Manager in consultation with staff.	June 2020
4.2	Ensure that environmental sustainability is mainstreamed within the business plans of each and every advisor with due attention to the number of derogations.	Developed during the completion of PMDS and reviews during the year. Focus by featuring in the monitor farm programme.	Regional Manager	June 2020
4.3	Review current advisory roles within the region with a view to redefining some advisory roles as 'Transition' briefs.	The appointment of a new rural enterprise specialist must be a priority to support transition advisors in this role. Restructure the drystock geographic areas to facilitate 1 advisor to specialise in alternative enterprises.	SMG Regional Manager in consultation with advisors	June 2021 June 2020
4.4	Provide training to help staff recognise, support and develop more resilient farmers and farm systems.	Teagasc needs to develop a more focused training module on the development of alternative income sources. All staff are encouraged via PMDS to identify training needs and participate in the New Modular Training Programme and CECRA training. Set up network of signpost farms in the region.	REDP, Specialist Teams	2020-2022

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person Responsible	Date for Completion
4.5	Reflect and build upon the rich topography and unique characteristics of the region as a platform for future development.	Develop a cache of short videos of local case studies in the region that have developed enterprises to take advantage of the landscape to provide additional farm based income. These cases will used as part of our options course and in general advice to farm families in the region.	Advisory Team, Declan McArdle.	December 2021

Appendix 2: Advisory Regional Review Panel

Function / Role	Name
Chair	Dr Monica Gorman is a lecturer in agricultural extension and innovation in UCD's School of Agriculture and Food Science. She has developed and coordinates postgraduate Masters' programmes for agricultural science graduates who want to work in farm advisory and agricultural education roles. She has previously worked with a range of international development organisations including Oxfam, IUCN, Self Help Africa, Irish Aid and Concern.
KT Professional with Advisory and/or Education background	Eric Collin is advisory services director in Chamber of Agriculture France. He was particularly involved in study on the transition management on farm process and he is leading global strategy advisory programme for advisors.
Farmer stakeholder	Frank O' Mahony is a dairy farmer from Monkstown, just outside Cork city. He is a former National Chairman of Macra Na Feirme, former member of the Teagasc Authority and is currently a member of the Dairygold Co-operative Society Regional member committee
Industry stakeholder	Dr. Anne-Marie Butler From a tillage farm in Kilkenny, Anne Marie holds a Degree & PhD in Agriculture from UCD. Her PhD focused on the Design & Evaluation of Optimal Dairy Systems in association with Teagasc Moorepark. Anne Marie is Senior Agricultural Manager with Ulster Bank with a key focus on business development across Ireland. She has completed a number of Financial Diplomas since she joined Ulster Bank in 2008. Anne Marie has recently worked with the Irish Institute of Bankers on the development of a new agricultural training course for employees across the Irish financial services industry (Professional Diploma in SME Credit – SME Agri credit assessment & financing).
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.