2021 KT Walsh Scholarship (MAIS) Project Summary

1. Project Title and Associated Programme	
KT Programme	Dairy
Project title	Examining dairy farmers decision making process regarding core and no core tasks

2. Project background

Expansion of the national dairy herd has significantly increased labour demand on dairy farms. This is a key challenge to sustainable dairy farm development (Teagasc, People in Dairy Project, 2017). The scale of the challenge is likely to grow given medium term growth projections for the dairy sector (Food Wise 2025). Deming et al. (2018) found that dairy farmers whom were deemed labour efficient worked 45 hours per week on average. However, Hogan et al. (2019) found that from a random sample of 72 dairy farmers that the average hours worked per week was 63 in spring and summer months. There was a large variation in hours worked per week in both studies. This variation may be partly due to management decisions of the individual farmer regarding what tasks need to be completed and how they are completed. While various studies have examined time-use on farms, there is a dearth of information regarding the value farmers place on their time and the optimum use of their time. That said, there are numerous factors influencing an individual's decision-making around tasks to complete e.g. machinery, contractor and labour availability, farm profit, stage of farm development, work life balance, values and attitudes.

3. Project aims and objectives

The overall objective of the project is to develop an understanding of the value dairy farmers place on their time and determine the decision making process around core and non-core tasks. To achieve this, the project aims to establish the key factors of dairy farmer's beliefs and opinions that determine the time they spend on different farm tasks. This will serve to deepen the understanding of the key issues from a farmers and family view point. Subsequent to this, the project aims to develop, through collaboration between Teagasc economists a procedure of how to evaluate the value of time a farmer spends on tasks and which tasks deliver the highest returns. Finally, an analysis tool will be developed to help farmers determine what tasks gives them the best value for their time. As there are

many labour saving practices available and many farmers choose not to practise them, this tool will aid discussion and encourage use of labour saving practices.