

2022 Masters in Agricultural Innovation Support

Project Summary

1. Project Title and Associated Programme

KT Programme	
Project title	Part time farmers engagement with advisory services and how it can be improved

2. Project background

According to the National Farm Study over 50% of the 140,000 farmers in this country farm on a part-time basis, i.e. either the farmer or spouse works off-farm in order to supplement household income. Most suckler-beef and sheep farmers are part-time. Many part-time farmers are time-poor using evening times, weekend family time or public holidays to catch up on physical farm work and paperwork. Their enterprises are generally low-income businesses and are economically vulnerable or unviable with limited scope to invest. Furthermore, there are challenges in how a part time farmer is defined or categorized, what characteristics does a farmer/farm require to be identified as being a part-time venture?

As we enter a new CAP cycle we will see a reduction in direct (historical area based) payments and increases in environmental schemes, more conditionality measures and results based payments. This will likely see more extensive farming or farming with nature enterprises on many holdings.

Two of the long term goals under the Rural Development Programme are fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas while enhancing the viability and competitiveness of farms and all types of agriculture. With this cohort of farmers in mind the Advisory services are being asked to support innovation and knowledge but are there too many assumptions on what their goals are and how they differ from more commercial farms. Key areas include environmental targets; better work organisation/work life balance; better farm finance advice; and/or farm diversification information. There is a need for review the methods the advisory services employ and the language they use speak to this group

3. Project aims and objectives

The project aims to understand what farmers with secondary off-farm income want from engagement with the advisory services. It will identify barriers to effective and timely knowledge transfer between advisors and part-time farmers. Specific objectives are:

- i) To Identify the targets and goals of farm operators with off farm employment;
- ii) To examine what type of advice do they seek to achieve these targets
- iii) To examine whether and how knowledge transfer tools like the E-profit monitor, Discussion groups; and grass measuring are delivering this advice

iv) What communication and contact methods are appropriate for these clients ;

It is envisaged that this project will devise practical recommendations for the operation of the advisory service.

4. Suggestions for methodology

The study will examine categories of farmers who engage to various levels with the advisory services within a region.

Proposed research methods will be a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Participants will provide key information on their goals relating to farm development through face-to-face interviews, focus groups (qualitative) and farmer surveys (quantitative).

Desktop exercises studying the operation advisory arrangements in other countries will also provide relative information.

5. Expected Impact of the Project

The Teagasc KT service caters for a broad spectrum of clients from highly profitable large or intensive systems to more extensive low margin systems or smallholders often heavily subsidised by off-farm incomes.

This project envisages the involvement of the Rural Development specialists and also all the main enterprise advisors on Tillage, Dry stock and Dairy. Currently there is a knowledge gap on areas such as work organisation on labour scarce farms. This project can provide valuable information and help achieve best practice in innovation support at farm level.