

2nd AKIS Coordination Group Meeting – 04.09.2024

Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Backweston Campus, Celbridge, Co. Kildare

Introduction:

Corina Roe, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) opened the meeting

The chair introduced each of the speakers,

Speakers & Presentations:

Cormac McGann (DAFM - CSP Division)- - Review of 1st meeting and outputs of workshop

- Key messages from first meeting were reported. These include four main groups of actions
- Terms of reference for the group were adopted. It was emphasized that this was a living document which will continue to be supplemented and adjusted based on feedback of the AKIS Coordination Group.
- Outputs of the Workshop in 1st meeting of the group were outlined, highlighting the Coordination Group's opinion on the strength, weaknesses and opportunities for the Irish AKIS.

Patrick Barrett (DAFM – Research & Codex Division) Draft Annual Work Programme

- A draft work programme was presented including the following completed activities:
 - AKIS Coordination Group set-up and first workshop
 - Draft mapping of Irish AKIS
- Possible future activities included in the plans were set out, with particular emphasis on:
 - Site visit to enhance networking opportunities for members
 - Inviting guest speakers to speak about AKIS development across the EU
 - Specific actions to enhance the flow and uptake of knowledge and information
- The reporting structure and monitoring and evaluation of the group was outlined.
- The Coordination Group was invited to provide written feedback on the presentation and draft work programme by 30 September 2024.

David Murphy (CAP Network Ireland and ERINN Innovation) – AKIS Mapping and Survey

- The methodology and inputs used to provide a draft map of Irish AKIS actors was presented – feedback from the group on suggestion on levels/organisations to be included and useful steps to go from mapping to pathways invited by follow up email.
- Preliminary results of a survey collaboratively designed by the AKIS Steering Group (DAFM, ACA, Teagasc, CAP Network Ireland) were summarised. Results will inform activities to help ensure a well-functioning Irish AKIS
- Members were encouraged to share survey link with their networks.

Workshop – Developing and Enhancing Flow Paths of Knowledge and Information

- Following a 10-minute networking break, the final hour of the meeting comprised an interactive workshop.
- Attendees were split into four groups, with each group presented with one of the following questions:
 1. How to engage and inform “Hard to Reach Farmers “with current and new knowledge?
 2. How to enhance the flow of knowledge from the Researcher to farm advisors, to farmers?
 3. How to target knowledge transfer information to different agri-food sector end users and audiences?
 4. How to expand the dissemination and exploitation of EIP-AGRI project results?

An overview of the outputs of these workshops is outlined in Annex 1 to this meeting report.

Closing Remarks:

During the final session of the meeting, members of the CAP Network provided a brief summary of workshop outputs from their group to the plenary. Under AOB Mark Gibson (Teagasc) mentioned an upcoming Teagasc/UCD Conference taking place in Teagasc Ashtown on 23rd October, titled “Agricultural Knowledge Exchange in a Changing World.

The Chair gave closing remarks and invited the Coordination Group to provide feedback on the Draft Work Plan and AKIS mapping to CAPStrategicPlan@Agriculture.gov.ie by 30th September 2024.

The next meeting of the AKIS Coordination Group will be held in December 2024, with a specific date TBC.

Annex 1: Overview of outputs from workshop sessions

1.1 How to engage and inform “Hard to Reach Farmers” with current and new knowledge?

‘Hard to reach farmers’ are defined as those who either do not use the public or private advisory services or use a minimum level of the services accessible to them. Published articles such as this example from Jim Kinsella in UCD ([Acknowledging Hard to Reach Farmers: Cases from Ireland¹](#)) provides a better understanding of those farmers who either do not engage with the farm advisory services or else engage at a very low level. This article draws on findings from four studies which identified and examined farmers who were ‘hard to reach’ by farm advisory services in Ireland. These studies collected data through farmer interviews and focus groups with farm advisors. They are augmented by the outputs of a workshop with farm advisors from a number of EU member states which focused on hard-to-reach farmers.

‘Hard to reach farmers’ are defined as those who either do not use the public or private advisory services or use a minimum level of the services accessible to them. The hard-to-reach farmers comprise just over half of all Irish farmers and fall into two distinct groups: those who are elderly, with no successor and no intention to develop their farms; and those who are relatively young and have off-farm work.

The article suggests that advisory agencies can either establish or increase engagement with many of these farmers by reconfiguring how and when they deliver services. This new and increased engagement is regarded as important in achieving the broader goals of sustainable agricultural and rural development in Ireland and has relevance at the wider EU and global levels.

Main Discussion Points

What are the ‘hard to reach farmers’ contexts and needs that should be considered?

Defining ‘Hard to Reach’ farmers

- 2 types of ‘hard to reach’ farmer identified: old and not on internet/social media and younger, not as engaged
- There was debate about whether these farmers are actually ‘hard to reach’ or they are just not interested in the information.
- Issue is not that the farmers are not being reached, they are getting the information. The issue is how they are being communicated with. Perception that farmers are hard to reach when really, they are just not being targeted properly.
- Acknowledged that communication from government and other sources may prove difficult for certain farmers to understand: ‘comprehension difficulty, level of education’ but mostly, the volume of information and admin is overwhelming
- Advisors overwhelmed and can’t help the ‘hard to reach’ farmers
- The discussion went a little off topic here into advisors/payments.

¹ Jim Kinsella, UCD [Acknowledging Hard to Reach Farmers: Cases from Ireland](#)

Reasons why these farmers are considered 'Hard to Reach'

- They don't believe there is 'anything in it for them', they are already in retirement mode
- Comprehension difficulty
- Older farmers aren't going to be thinking about long-term requirements
- Advisor/time capacity
- Significant time lags and an increase in cost
- Risk involved for joining schemes – no guarantee of acceptance despite paying
- Delays in approvals
- Poor communication from DAFM
- Sheer volume of grants and schemes is overwhelming for farmers

Needs of 'Hard to Reach' farmers

- Better communication
- Peer to peer knowledge
- Different levels of formality
- Accessible information using language that isn't full of jargon
- Targeted and tailored communication depending on farmer (video online or letter in the post etc.)
- Co-create with experienced and trusted intermediaries: designing and communicating supports
- Information that is actionable at farm level
- Flow of information should be clear, concise and trustworthy

What are the trusted channels and who are the intermediaries the 'hard to reach farmers may consider engaging with? And What are the appropriate communication methods to engage?

- Advisors
- Co-op stores are trusted in a more informal setting. They have a role to play in farmer communications e.g. Peer to peer or upskill co-op staff
- In media/publications, farmers love reading about other farmers
- Videos must be short and engaging
- Don't abandon traditional post/letters - traditional communication should be available to those who want it

What types of approaches could aid engagement with the 'hard to reach farmers? E.g. participatory approaches, incentivised engagement

- This part of the discussion mainly focused on improvements that could be made, both by DAFM and by leveraging existing structures.
- Utilise informal kt spaces (co-ops, farm organisations, on-farm)
- 2-way flow is needed, the structures are there but we need to learn to work together again
- Events with Co-benefits: go to co-op store for conversations and purchases + special offer if you attend this talk e.g.

- Expanded and more flexible Knowledge Transfer programme - KT groups: every issue a farmer has could be solved by a peer KT group
- Community led is key: success must be at a community/local level before it can be on a larger scale
- Communicate agricultural/farmer successes

1.2 How to enhance the flow of knowledge from the Researcher to Farm Advisors to Farmers?

Transformation in the agri-food sector including land management is critical to achieving aims of mitigating climate change, addressing the biodiversity crisis, and achieving a just transition for land and agriculture in this transformation.

Research and development and the exploitation of knowledge are critical drivers of technical change, productivity growth, profitability and addressing sustainability in the Irish Agri-Food Sector.

Providing advice and collaborative learning opportunities through the Public and Private Farm Advisory Service (FAS) is a key mechanism to deliver behaviour change in the agricultural sector building the exploitation of knowledge².

Main Discussion Points

What combination of KT activities are required to stimulate research and advisor engagement to support farmer learning motivating their decision to access, learn about and apply new knowledge?

- Group agreed to reframe the title of the breakout group from “How to enhance the flow of knowledge from the Researcher to Farm Advisors to Farmers?” to “**How to enhance two-way knowledge exchange between researchers, farm advisors and farmers**” recognising that it should not be a linear process.
- Important to **acknowledge and respect farmers** knowledge
- **Demonstrating solutions work in real farm conditions** is effective (applied research) in order to derisk taking up new solutions
- It was felt that **open days** were very effective
- Important for advisors to **appreciate local knowledge and specific farm conditions** to ensure solutions are customised/fit for purpose
- AKIS actors should have a mechanism to influence research funding priorities
- **Participatory approaches to research** were suggested to ensure farmers engage in research design and activity
- **Peer 2 peer learning** was emphasised as a very effective approach
- Important to work at a local level engaging respectfully with farmers and explaining why up taking knowledge will be beneficial to them.

² How Knowledge Transfer Impact Happens at the Farm Level: Insights from Advisers and Farmers in the Irish Agricultural Sector (mdpi.com)

- Need to take national targets and problems, understand the situation in an area and **localise the issues and solutions** (e.g. water quality)

How should the role of the researcher and adviser further evolve to act as e.g., both a source of expertise in delivering organised knowledge and also as a facilitator to draw out tacit knowledge from farmers?

- It was felt by some participants that **EIP projects** are a good example of multi-actor collaborations.
- It is important for actors to **listen to farmers, adapt advice to their needs**. To spend time getting out on farm, engaging with farmers
- Important to value all types of knowledge, the **flow should be two-way**. E.g. farmers could share what the biodiversity used to be like on their farm.
- Currently a lot of **advisors time is taken up by supporting farmers with their admin** related to schemes and programmes which limits their capacity to advise/transfer knowledge.
- **Trust** was raised as an issue highlighting that current advice contradicts past advice and some AKIS organisations may no longer be trusted by farmers. This was acknowledged by participants, but it was suggested that whilst organisations as a whole may not be trusted, farmers may still have a good relationship with specific advisors within those organisations.

What incentives are needed to support researcher-advisor-farmer engagement to enhance knowledge uptake? What are important factors to consider in developing appropriate incentives?

- It was mentioned again that EIPs were a good mechanism
- Many **students studying Agricultural science topics** are from farms and could be a useful channel to bring back knowledge to their farms.
- Need to start with a **business case for any change**. It is important to ensure proposed solutions make sense, farmers want to either save money and/or make more money
- Need to recognise that different **farmers are at different stages of their career** and that may affect their interest and motivation to change.
- Need to understand prior investments in equipment and machinery, need to appreciate lifecycles and **implication of major changes/purchases**.
- **Need to de-risk change**. Need to be able to make change and fail. That is why it is important to go from research > demonstration > on-farm validation > roll out at scale
- There are **3 main drivers for change**; 1) new knowledge, 2) incentives, 3) regulation
- The discussion touched upon communities, the need for care and concern of neighbours in rural settings, mental health challenges facing many farmers, the need to create **opportunities for farmers to meet up and share/learn**.
- One idea was to try and **coordinate efforts at a local level**, have a local coordinator tasked with assimilating knowledge arising from research, filtering and transferring what is relevant to the local farmers.

- Another idea was to **create an open platform** to facilitate engagement and share interests between AKIS actors and farmers. Platform could host podcasts to respond to interests
- Need to **consider incentives for researchers and advisors** to carry out knowledge transfer/technical advice.
- Could **Artificial Intelligence tools** be used to support knowledge transfer activities?
- Could an incentive be a tax break for farmers who implement positive measures
- Could **cross-industry networks** be established and incentivised to coordinate and carry out transfer?
- Need to recognise that **every farmer creates a circle of trust** where they seek advice (family, peers, advisors, accountant etc). Need to recognise where they take advice for on farm decisions.

1.3 How to target knowledge transfer information to different agri-food sector end users and audiences?

The European Union also provides a framework for national and regional agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS). To strengthen national AKIS, CAP 2023-27 required EU Member States to develop their strategic approach to AKIS and to increase collaboration between advisors, researchers and CAP networks³.

Targeting knowledge transfer information to different agri-food end users and audiences requires understanding their unique needs, contexts, and preferences⁴.

In the agri-food sector, end users can range from smallholder farmers to large agri-businesses, policymakers, researchers, and consumers.

Each of these groups has different levels of expertise, information needs, and preferred communication channels.

Main Discussion Points

Identify different agri-food end users and audiences

- Once end-users are identified, need to consider how these end-users and audiences can be specifically targeted to apply the knowledge they have received
- This group focused in depth on one main end-user: Farmers
- Many different types of needs among various farmers depending on multiple factors

Picking specific examples (e.g., farmers, agri-businesses) outline the information needs of each type of selected end-user and audience.

- Farmers are a selected audience for this exercise, however the discussion acknowledged that there are many different types of farmers with different information needs:

³ [Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union | OECD](#) - OECD (2023), *Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union*, OECD Agriculture and Food Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/32810cf6-en>

⁴ [Knowledge Translation in Agriculture: A Literature Review \(jhu.edu\)](#)

- **Farmers sectors:** Farmers in different sectors have different needs and priorities of information: Some less-well served sectors in funding and expertise (e.g. Horticulture) may have a greater appetite for information. Well-served sectors, such as dairy or sheep, may be more saturated with information which can result in the farmers being harder to reach for implementing the knowledge. Sectors may also vary in the level of engagement in policy and level of inspection/compliance with policy which can impact their acceptance of knowledge.
- **Farmer Age Groups:** Needs differ greatly between young/ageing farmers as can type and preferred source of knowledge. Many young farmers are part-time and are not dependent on farming for income. This may mean that they could be less likely to consider knowledge unless they have a vested interest in the thematic area, or on the other hand it could mean they have more time to engage with knowledge as part-time farmers.
- **Level of farming intensity:** intensive vs. extensive, in vs. out of nitrates derogation
- **Geography/Land type:** Dairy, which is profitable, constrained to certain land-type. Sheep farming on lowland vs. hill farming have very different needs despite same livestock.
- **Legislative requirements:** If payments depend on more legislative requirements, they are likely to engage with knowledge to receive payments. Regardless of what type of farmer they are or what their factors are, all farmers need policy information and targeted support.
- **Profitable Agribusiness:** Better amount of services, expertise and knowledge available to profitable sectors (e.g. dairy) and agribusiness, compared to other sectors which are not currently as profitable (horticulture)
- **Part-time vs. full time:** Full-time farmers are more reliant on farm income, which can lead to being keener to receive information as those reliant on farm income have to stay between the lines of compliance to get their income. However full-time farmers have also less free time to properly consume knowledge or learn new innovations, which can be an issue. Part-time farmers may have more capacity to engage with knowledge.
- **Type of messaging:** Economic, social, environmental, new innovation. Also to consider where different farmers access information: Advisors vs. government vs. social media.

What type of tailoring of content including format and style of information is needed to target knowledge transfer information for the specific examples selected?

- **For all:** All need access to policy related to the business and / or farm which includes targets and supports.
- **Schemes:** While information is supplied through various channels about schemes, responses can be slow. DAFM feel getting participants in schemes to sign up can be a challenge, with farmers often not knowing what they are signing up to. Messaging needs to be tailored to increase engagement in schemes. This highlights the role of advisors in supporting farmers, but also the need for plain messaging from DAFM.
- **Message simplification:** Need for more simple, plain messaging to increase responses to scheme opportunities. For example, instead of “Under regulation XYZ” should keep message simple to help farmers themselves engage with scheme information. Plain

messaging is also required in other areas of information such as when sharing about new innovations, best practices and developments.

- **Informed advisors:** What advisors themselves are comfortable with often reflects what their farmers do on the ground. Important to ensure well-informed advisors and invest in advisor support and training to keep up to date and comfortable with knowledge and information e.g. in relation to schemes, payment requirements, best practices, environmental protection.
- **Method of information delivery:** Still a strong preference for 1 to 1 information among farmers, especially if they don't have an advisor, where they can engage in person. Ploughing is an example of this as are clinics on schemes or tailored information. Need to efficiently use information hubs and clinics.
- **Sharing FAQ's or other simplified, straightforward information:** Farmers often don't read T&C of scheme. Suggested ideas included creating a FAQ or a brief on "Top 10 points" on a certain topic, or "What not to do" in a scheme to increase understanding of required actions for payments.
- **Knowledge Exchange:** Two-way information exchange between actors is important, not just top-down.
- **Building trust:** DAFM is often not seen as an independent source of information. Sometimes the same message is better accepted through other media. DAFM and media to work together to disseminate and build trust in information.

What are considered appropriate communication channels for the specific examples selected?

- **Diversity:** Communication channels diversification needed to hit such a wide cohort with different needs e.g. text, publication, online, in-person.
- **Delivery:** Online communication channels convenient, but some won't be able to access this (age / broadband etc.). Important to offer both in-person and online where appropriate.
- **Effective communication:** Use of existing channels e.g. the text message service. Only 150 characters but can include links to more information.
- **Media leveraging:** How can media be better leveraged? Flow of information not disrupted. Improved AKIS between media actors and knowledge sources/end-users?
- **Knowledge sharing:** Not just top-down transfer but two-way knowledge sharing to understand both technicalities and on-the-ground motivations, "why" not just "how". Important to DAFM to understand implications of knowledge on the ground.
- **Tiered Activity:** Online – In-person – Information Sessions. A tiered format can work together to give a focused knowledge transfer and exchange. An example is the TAMS knowledge exchange/information activities held where DAFM and industry could engage information together and apply this.
- **Survey results:** Using results of CAP Network Survey to see preferred / most-trusted communication channels for different farmers.

1.4 How to expand the dissemination and exploitation of EIP-AGRI project results?

The European Commission (EC) has laid solid foundations for improving the dialogue and collaboration between farmers, foresters, advisors, researchers and other relevant actors in agriculture and forestry innovation and rural development.

This was initiated through the launch of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) in 2012 and strengthened through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) pre- 2020 particularly through the opportunity to develop EIP-AGRI projects and again in strategic plans post- 2020.

EU evaluation⁵ has found that the EIP's premise of incentivising innovative farming practices to foster a competitive and sustainable agriculture and forestry sector is seen as valid and important. Innovation actors, especially farmers and forest managers, had emphasised a need for projects linking research and practice. In this respect the EIP-Agri model is found to be a flexible tool that is addressing this in a way that can be adapted to divergent circumstances and policy contexts. Farmers are more likely to become involved in the innovation process under the EIP as compared with other funding streams for innovation in the agricultural sector

Main Discussion Points

1. *How can EIP-Agri projects effectiveness be further increased or multiplied?*

- Space for Additionality within projects, initiatives that can bring focus and coherence to agri-environmental efforts and additionality by way of funding to farmers.
- Bottom-up approach, the tenant on which a successful EIP is developed, must be adhered to at all times. Promote and maximise farmer input at all stages of the EIP process, from the initial expression of interest, the application, reporting, representation at events. This would both highlight the bottom-up approach and farmer involvement.
- Develop a national network of EIPS for cross project collaboration, networking and solution sharing. This could also include a national collaboration on promoting EIP AGRI outputs / results
- The narrow prescription of the theme-based calls could potentially limit project innovation – By being too prescriptive the call can eliminate many potential innovations; participants would like to see an open style environmental call.
- Post EIP assistance – what next for the OG, once the project ends is there a future for the OG. Develop a pathway EIP AGRI to Horizon/Life/Erasmus/DAFM/SFI/EPA
- Bespoke innovations / measures to be identified from 2014 – 2020 EIPS for dissemination and potentially integrating in the ACRES system
- Reduce the complexity and quantity of DAFM schemes to simplify application process and administration.
- Use knowledge from past EIPs to assist / guide the creation of new OGs. Opportunity for 'train the trainer' approach.

⁵ [Evaluation study of the implementation of the eip-agri](#)

- How can EIP learnings/outputs inform new programming/schemes.
- How do we measure success of EIPs? Metrics, social output, applying again, EIP leading to HE?
- The **Flexibility** of the EIP programme must be maintained, it is an effective instrument that can address Agri related issues rapidly, at a local level with good ROI.
- Maintain reporting and application requirements at a level as not to dissuade inexperienced OGs in applying, see also CAP Network Ireland application assistance.
- Encourage existing OGs to apply again in future EIP AGRI calls

2. *What type of actors are needed to aid the multiplication and/or replication of projects in different places?*

- Private sector / industry, but engagement cannot be forced, it will happen if there is a need or is required
- What happens to IP in this scenario
- Training (skills development) for people involved in the project/participant farmers – dual benefit as helps in project operation but can potentially provide opportunities for participant farmers after project
- OG identifies relevant EIP call and innovative solution
 - EIP Project completed, and results uploaded, 3 options were presented.
 - 1. OG join a consortium for a new project building on work of EIP (Horizon/Life/Erasmus/DAFM/SFI/EPA). Actors needed here are NCP, project partners, Enterprise Ireland, application writing assistance and funding agencies
 - 2. OG apply for next relevant EIP call with new innovative solution. Actors include original OG, participant farmers and DAFM
 - 3. OG disseminate and promote results of original EIP, and this informs future policy / programming e.g. Hen Harrier – ACRES. Actors include DAFM.
- Proposed Mandatory elements for future EIPs
 - Research
 - Policy recommendations
 - Training

3. *How can Operational Groups be supported in transition to new projects, following the completion of their EIP?*

- Advice on data, where stored, who owns it and what happens to it after project is completed. Also, advice on hosting project outcomes on EU Farmbook site as projects were often too small to have their own website.
- Database of OGs, with skills and experience available to promote future roles in projects ((Horizon/Life/Erasmus/DAFM/SFI/EPA).
- Provide training to OG, create a network, introduce to NCP for Horizon Europe, host networking event with relevant university research groups and RPO's and the OGs
- Connect OGs with Enterprise Ireland funding assistance / travel assistance grants.

	Name of Organisation	Attended
Departments	DRCD	Dympna Harney
	NPWS	Brian Reidy
Agencies	Teagasc Knowledge Transfer	Mark Gibson
	Teagasc Knowledge Transfer	Stan Lalor
Farm Bodies and Representative groups	Ag Tech Ireland	Catherine Lascurettes
	Agricultural Consultants Association	Hugh Farrell
	CAP Network Ireland	Roisin Fitzgerald
	CAP Network Ireland	James Claffey
	CAP Network Ireland	Sarah Glascott
	CAP Network Ireland	John Murphy
	CAP Network Ireland	David Murphy
	Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association	Hugh Farrell
	Irish Cooperative Organisation Society	Darragh Walshe
	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association	Ronan Geoghegan
	Irish Farmers Association	Shane Whelan
	Irish Grain Growers Association	Clive Carter
	Irish Local Development Network	Philip O'Donnell
	Irish Organic Association	Stephen Meredith
	Macra	Maria Snell
	National Organic Training Skillnet	Kevin Fagan
Environmental NGOs	Environmental Pillar	Charles Stanley Smith
	Natural Capital Ireland	Noreen Byrne
Education and Research Institutions	ATU Donegal	Michael Gill
	MTU	David Barry
	SETU	John Geraghty
	UCD	Prof Monica Gorman
	University of Galway	Prof Maura Farrell
	<u>Dawn Meats</u>	Gill Higgins
Media	Irish Farmers Journal	Darren Carty
	Agriland	Cormac Farrelly
DAFM	Biodiversity,Nature and Land Use	Tom Medlycott
	CAP Strategic Plan	Cormac Mc Gann
	CAP Strategic Plan	Edel Meenan
	CAP Strategic Plan	Sean O'Reilly
	CAP Strategic Plan	Corina Roe
	Direct Payments (Beef Schemes&Land Policy)	Antoinette Conroy
	Direct Payments (Beef Schemes & Land Policy)	David Buckley
	Feedingstuffs, Fertilisers, Grain & Poultry	Finbarr O' Regan
	Organics & Market Supports	Laura Nolan
	Nitrates, Biodiversity & Engineering	Ted Massey
	Research & Codex	Patrick Barrett
	Research & Codex	Matthew Halpin
	Vet (Animal Health & Welfare)	Alan Johnson

