

Future Agricultural Policy Proposals

Background Paper - Knowledge Measures

RDP Knowledge, Innovation and Co-operation Schemes currently delivered by CAFRE

1. Business Development Groups

Business Development Groups (BDGs) provide a training forum for around 3,000 farmers in 160 groups. The scheme uses a group training approach that allows sharing of knowledge with the aim of improving the technical efficiency and profitability of farm businesses.

The Business Development Groups scheme was launched in November 2015 and today there are BDGs for all the main farm enterprises including dairy, beef, sheep, poultry cereals, potatoes and horticulture. In 2020, twenty Environmental Farming BDGs were established.

The programme normally consists of a series of six group training events each year, held on a member's farm and facilitated by a CAFRE Development Adviser. BDG members also have the opportunity to undertake farm performance benchmarking to identify areas in the farm business that have the potential to be improved. CAFRE Advisers provide support to members to prepare business development plans to help improve the technical efficiency and sustainability of their farms. Members also have the opportunity to achieve a Level 3 Certificate in Agricultural Business Development qualification.

Initial evaluation of the BDG Scheme indicates positive impacts for those farm business participating and that the peer learning model of delivery works well and should continue. Some areas identified for consideration include the requirement for all BDG participants to benchmark and the integration of agri-environment into the provision.

2. Farm Family Key Skills

The Farm Family Key Skills (FFKS) scheme provides short, specific training courses aimed at creating awareness and knowledge of topical issues impacting on farm businesses that can help with on-farm business decision making.

Courses delivered aim to provide farm family members with a greater awareness and knowledge of topical issues impacting on farm businesses that can help with on-farm decision making. The courses, which last no longer than 3 hours, and are delivered locally, are tailored to match the needs and availability of people working in particular sectors.

FFKS aims to deliver training in a range of topics to 15,500 people by March 2023, with at least 85% reporting an improvement in knowledge post-training.

The main areas of intervention are:

- Animal Health
- Business Planning
- Health & Safety
- New technologies in ICT

FFKS is not limited to these areas, as a number of environmental sustainability courses dealing with nutrient management and soils have been delivered.

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The training needs are identified through collaboration with a wide range of CAFRE partners and stakeholders. Since the commencement of the scheme over 630 courses have been delivered with around 18,200 trainees taking part. Feedback has been very positive with regard to the quality of learning and on average 98% participants have reported an improvement in awareness/ knowledge.

3. Farm Innovation Visits (FIVs)

FIVs provide farmers with the opportunity to visit farm businesses in other parts of the UK or Europe to learn about new innovations. Each visit has a specific theme and visits are organised and led by a CAFRE Adviser or Technologist. Each visit provides an opportunity for individuals to see at first-hand new innovative technology/systems in practice elsewhere in the EU, and disseminate their findings to peers/NI industry.

The targets for the scheme are 1500 participants undertaking farm innovation visits and by 31st December 2022 and 11,500 peers informed about the opportunities. The Scheme has attracted strong interest and prior to the Covid pandemic 284 farmers had participated on 20 FIVs and 2013 peers informed about opportunities identified.

The Scheme is currently suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. Innovation Technology Evaluation Demonstration Scheme (ITEDS)

The ITED Scheme aims to improve the uptake on farm of innovative technology and recognises that early adopters of innovations and technologies play an important role in convincing their peers to take more innovative approaches to traditional systems. ITEDS is delivered through Technology Demonstration Farms.

Technology Demonstration Farms (TDFs) demonstrate innovative technologies. Visiting farmers to the TDFs will see technologies demonstrated, hear the experience of host farmers and question them about the financial impact of adopting the technologies. 39 TDFs have been appointed to date and include dairy, beef, sheep, pig and arable enterprises and environmental TDFs. Examples of innovation themes demonstrated through TDFs include feed efficiency, mobility improvement, grassland management and fertility.

5. European Innovation Partnerships

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) scheme is jointly funded by DAERA and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). CAFRE is responsible for the delivery of a pilot EIP scheme and will use the pilot to test how well the EIP approach encourages innovation on Northern Ireland's farms.

European Innovation Partnerships are an EU wide initiative with schemes in other parts of the United Kingdom and in many European countries. While there are similarities between EIP schemes in different regions, each region and country has developed schemes to address local needs and priorities. All EIP schemes have a common purpose of encouraging innovation on farms by focusing expertise, learning from others outside of the region and supporting pilot projects. They bring together key players (for example, advisers, researchers and supply chain businesses) to work in partnership with farmers to find solutions to address specific issues or to develop concrete opportunities for the agri-food industry.

In the NI pilot scheme, funding was available in 2 stages. Initial Stage 1 funding, was available to help bring together expertise as Operational Groups to consider how to develop practical solutions to a particular problem or opportunity facing farmers. Stage 2 funding, was then available to enable these Operational Groups to deliver their innovative projects. Farmer members from Operational Groups receiving Stage 2 funding were also eligible to apply for additional funding for capital expenditure relevant to the project.

Following a call for declarations of interest in March 2020, 34 applications were received to establish an Operational Group and develop an innovative project. These applications represented 220 individuals. From the 34 applications received 10 of the Operational Groups received stage 1 funding to establish their group and to develop their project plans. Seven of these Operational Groups received, and accepted, Letters of Offer for Stage 2 funding to deliver projects. These groups have a total of 96 members.

The evaluation of the EIP scheme will be used to inform the development of future innovation schemes.