

# 2024 Masters in Agricultural Innovation Support

## Project Summary

### 1. Project Title and Associated Programme

**Project title**

An evaluation of the selection and adoption of environmentally friendly farming practices by farmer participants in the Teagasc Signpost Advisory Programme

### 2. Project background

Ireland has committed to achieving a reduction of 25% in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for the agriculture sector relative to 2018 levels by 2030. The Signpost Advisory Programme (SAP) commenced in June 2023. It is a free, targeted advisory programme available to all farmers and builds on the Signpost Demonstration Farm network by providing enhanced advisory and training support to farmers to commit to, select and implement climate and sustainability actions that will be appropriate and impactful on their farms. The overall aim of the programme is to empower farm families to adopt existing and new technologies and production systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions while maintaining farm profitability.

Twenty-one climate advisors were recruited to the SAP. Their role is to help farmers accelerate the adoption of current practices known to reduce GHG emissions and to promote the adoption of new technologies as they emerge. There is an ambitious target for the Programme to work with 50,000 farmers between now and 2030. Climate Advisors develop a Sustainability Plan with farmer participants that details the actions the farmers can adopt to reduce their gaseous emissions. The adoption of such actions is supported by Climate and other Advisors and is critical to the success of the Programme.

### 3. Project aims and objectives

The primary aim of the project is to develop an approach to evaluating the implementation of Sustainability Plans by farmers who have engaged with the SAP.

A second aim of the project is to identify factors associated with the adoption and non-adoption of climate smart technologies and practices.

Overall objectives:

1. To design and trial an evaluation approach to assessing farmers' implementation of their Sustainability Plans and the supports to help that implementation, that could be used across the Signpost Advisory Programme as it is rolled out.

2. To identify, from a cohort of Signpost Advisory Programme participants, the key actions selected in the Sustainability Plans, actions not selected and the reasons why.
3. To determine the characteristics of the completed and not completed actions from the Sustainability Plan, and gain an insight into why some actions not completed.
4. To understand the role of Climate Change and/or other advisors in supporting the implementation of on farm actions from the Sustainability Plans.
5. To assess farmers' climate action awareness and understanding of the role of farm practices in tackling climate issues.

#### 4. Suggestions for methodology

Key elements of the mixed methodology for the project are:

1. Create a profile of the Sustainability Plans developed in a specific Advisory Region, e.g. actions identified, client/non-client, farming system etc
2. Design, pilot and implement a survey to be circulated to the farmers in this region who have developed a Sustainability Plan to confirm the particular actions chosen, whether implemented or not and why/why not.
3. Conduct sense making workshop(s) with a selection of SAP participants to gain a better understanding of their 'pathway' journeys to implementing their Sustainability Plans.
4. Carry out learning workshop(s) with a selection of Climate Advisors, other Advisors and stakeholders based on the findings of the survey and farmer focus groups to explore if there additional ways that SAP participants can be supported in the implementation of their Sustainability Plans.
5. Conduct focus groups with a selection of SAP participants to assess their climate action awareness and understanding of the role of farm practices in tackling climate issues.
6. Establish a framework for evaluation of the implementation of Sustainability Plans in other Advisory Regions.

#### 5. Expected impact of the project

Achieving the targets set for gaseous emission reduction is a key objective of Teagasc's Climate Action Strategy. This study supports that strategy by identifying the factors contributing to the successful adoption of technologies and practices of the Sustainability Plan Teagasc KT Programme objectives in identifying or barriers preventing their adoption.

The findings of the study will help advisors and specialists in the development of improved Sustainability Plans through improved awareness of 1) the features of technologies/actions in farmers' Sustainability Plans that make them more easily adopted/more challenging to adopt, 2) farmers' "pathway" journeys to implementing their Sustainability Plans, and 3) the supports and advice needed to help farmers implement their Sustainability Plans.

## 6. Other relevant information

This project will provide a critical input into the ongoing wider 'real-time' evaluation of the Signpost Advisory Programme that seeks to gain evidence on the effectiveness of the programme as it is rolled out. The project also complements other similar research being carried out on the broader Signpost Programme.

This project will contribute to the evolving 'tool kit' of specific evaluation frameworks, tools and approaches being used to help, understand and strengthen Teagasc's contribution to change in the agricultural sector through better understanding of how its advisory activities work.