

Farm apprenticeships: a new approach to agricultural education

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Summary

- Teagasc will be introducing two new apprenticeship programmes in September 2023; the Farm Technician Apprenticeship and the Farm Manager Apprenticeship.
- The current Advanced Certificate in Dairy Herd Management and new apprenticeship programmes will support the next generation of dairy farmers in the development of their skills and technical knowledge.

Introduction

As the dairy industry navigates through current and future sustainability challenges, the need for skilled people to work on farms is more essential than ever before. The Irish dairy industry is reliant on skilled farmers who have the ability to cope with such changes as well as managing financials, people and day-to-day farm tasks. Subject to QQI validation and legislation approval, and in addition to existing courses, Teagasc will introduce two new apprenticeship programmes in September 2023 for people interested in pursuing a career in agriculture. Both programmes are inclusive of all agricultural sectors (including dairy, pigs, poultry, drystock and tillage).

Advanced Certificate in Dairy Herd Management

The current Level 6 programme will continue to provide graduates with the knowledge and technical skills required to operate dairy herds. Following one year in agricultural college, students typically spend a further 16 weeks in college and 16 weeks of practical learning placement with a host farmer in Ireland or abroad. Course content is a combination of technical and farm business planning modules. Successful completion of the Level 6 programme will see individuals join the dairy industry as a skilled operative or go on to complete the Farm Manager Apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship learning experience

The main component of both apprenticeship programmes is two years of work-based learning employment, where apprentices are based on one specialist farm in Ireland, in their sector of choice. Apprenticeship employers must be screened and approved by both Teagasc and SOLAS. During these two years, there are approximately 10 weeks of course days per year where apprentices further develop a broad range of skills in technical farming and farm business planning. Course days will be delivered at the coordinating Teagasc College, industry locations, and online. It will incorporate both formal (lectures) and informal (discussion groups and skills practicals) training, delivered by an integrated team of highly specialised Teagasc staff, including researchers, college teachers and specialists. Guest lecturers will also be invited, such as key industry stakeholders and successful commercial farmers.

Farm Technician Apprenticeship

The Higher Certificate Level 6 Farm Technician Apprenticeship provides individuals with the knowledge and technical skills required to operate within farming systems. Individuals who successfully complete the Farm Technician Apprenticeship will be skilled in compliance with industry standards and regulatory measures. Learners will be equipped

with skills to manage the daily operations (e.g. animal and grassland management) as well as recording and administrative activities, farm planning and business performance evaluation. Progression from the Level 6 programme includes the Teagasc Farm Manager Apprenticeship.

Farm Manager Apprenticeship

The Ordinary Bachelor Level 7 Farm Manager Apprenticeship will be the gold standard for farm management and farm ownership training in Ireland. The programme aims to equip trainee farmers with management skills to successfully run farm enterprises. Successful completion of this course will see individuals take responsibility for all farming activities including work organisation, income and expenditure, strategic planning, compliance, safety, health and welfare management, and human resource management.

Joining Apprenticeship Programmes

Entry requirements for the Farm Technician Apprenticeship will be published once approved. For entry into the Farm Manager Apprenticeship, individuals must have a Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Agriculture or have completed the Farm Technician Apprenticeship. An individual may then apply for employment on an approved employer's farm. Following this, both employer and apprentice will approach Teagasc to express interest in part-taking in the apprenticeship programme. The employer will pay a salary of at least minimum wage to the apprentice for the duration of the apprenticeship programme.

Conclusion

The next generation of farm owners and managers should avail of every accessible training opportunity in order to acquire knowledge, skills and experience to secure the long-term future of their dairy business. Experience with excellent farmers reinforces learning experiences and offers a network of people and mentors that can make a significant positive contribution throughout a future farmers' career.

