MAgrSc Innovation Support Programme 2017-2019

Study title: How can agricultural extension services support Irish dairy farmers using automatic milking systems (AMS)?

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Study Objectives

1. Evaluate the level of extension services used by farmers when adapting and using AMS technology

2. Evaluate the current advisory programme and advisor training in relation to AMS

3. To produce guidelines for the development of extension services for AMS clients

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Study Methodology

- The population being studied are existing AMS farmers (3-4 years) and also new entrant AMS farmers (0-1 year)

- There are approximately 500+ AMS farmers nationwide:
  - Grazing based systems: 70%
  - Confined and Zero-grazing systems: 30%

- Region selected for study: BMW (Border, Midlands and West)

- List of 70 farmers using AMS in this region

- Semi-structured interviews with 20 farmers
  - 30% new entrants
  - 70% grazing vs 30% Confined/Zero-grazing

Study Methodology

- 1 pilot interview: Identify flaws and assess flow

- 6 interviews completed and transcribed:
  - 4 grazing, 1 fully indoor and 1 partially indoor

- 3 more interviews organised for next week

- Literature review commenced

- Focus group with advisors in Autumn

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Findings to Date

- Varied level of interaction between farmers and Teagasc:

  - Some farmers had decision made to install AM unit before seeking an opinion from a Teagasc advisor

  - Farmer M2: "*No (I wouldn't have consulted my advisor) because at the time he would have been saying no to robots*"

- All farmers have identified a lack of knowledge amongst advisors in relation to AM farming

- Farmers would like advisors to have a more in depth knowledge on AM grazing systems and AM technology

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Findings to Date

- Acknowledgement from farmers that their system is in the minority and its hard for Teagasc to provide a service for a limited number of clients

- Farmers interact with each other through a Lely WhatsApp group to share information and ideas

- A "Discussion Group" that is facilitated by Lely takes place 3-4 times a year

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Issues/Problems arising

- Farmers often hesitate to critique the service provided by Teagasc as they have a good relationship with their advisor

Lely Mullingar clients were selected for interviews due to their location in the BMW region

- Lely Mullingar provide the vast majority of AM units in the BMW region. Throughout the interviews it is hard to avoid talking about the service Lely provide, meaning it is often used as a comparison to Teagasc' service

Advisory/Education work (Jan – June 2018)

- 30 BPS applications completed in April and May

- 20 farmers set up on Pasturebase Ireland

- Completion of NMPs, profit monitors and grass measuring

- Participation and presentations in discussion groups

- Assisting supervisor with 5 year expansion plans for clients nationwide

- Contributing to dairy advisor IST on milking infrastructure

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Schedule of Activities (Work Plan)

- *Quarterly schedule of research activities:*
  - June to Sept 2018: Completion & transcription of interviews

  - October to Dec 2018: Continue analysing findings. Run a focus group with advisors in October/November

  - Jan to March 2019: Finish transcribing interviews/focus group and continue analysing data

  - April to June 2019: Finish literature review and write up results

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