

TEAGASC National Farm Survey Results 2011

Information and Communication Technology Usage on Farms



The 2011 National Farm Survey (NFS) recorded data on 1,050 farms. The full financial results for these farms are available in the National Farm Survey 2011 report, (www.teagasc.ie/publications). This publication presents statistics on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) usage on farms in 2011 and draws comparisons to data collected in previous years.

1. Access to a Personal Computer

The percentage of farm households that have access to personal computers (PC) and that use the PC for farm business purposes is presented in Table 1. The rate of access to a PC in farm households increased from 40 percent in 2004 to 63 percent in 2011. The rate of usage for farm business purposes also increased from 14 percent of all farm households in 2004 to 33 percent of all households in 2011, or over half of those that have access to a PC. In just 50 percent of cases the farm operator uses the PC, in the other cases the spouse and/or children use the PC for farm business purposes.

Table 1: Access to a PC in farm households and use for farm business purposes: 2004-2011

Percentage of all Farm Households	2004	2008	2011
Access to a Personal Computer	40	52	63
Using Personal Computer for Farm Business	14	21	33

In 2011 23 percent of all farm households had an email address for farm business purposes. Of those with an email address, 37 percent checked their email weekly, while 41 percent checked it daily. The majority of those with a PC have internet access through broadband. In total, 53 percent of farm households have broadband internet access. This compares to about 65 percent of households in Ireland in general (Eurostat, 2011).

Table 2: ICT usage by Farmers Ireland and the US

Percentage of all Farm Households	2003/04	2007/08	2011
Using PC for Farm Business : Ireland	14	21	33
Using PC for Farm Business : US	30	35	37

Official statistics are available on the use of ICT for farm business purposes by farm households in the US from the US Department of Agriculture. As shown in Table 2, the use of ICT by farmers in US has remained relatively stable from 2004 to 2011 at about 30 to 35 percent. By contrast, usage in Ireland has increased considerably and the gap in usage between Ireland and US in 2003/2004 has almost completely closed by 2011.



2. What is ICT used for on farms?

For those farm households using a PC, further data was collected on the main use. Table 3 shows the percentage of farms using the PC for various farm business related activities. Internet and communications is the most common use of the PC, with 21 percent of all farm households and 64 percent of those with a PC using the internet for farm business activities. Herd register is the second most common activity with 15 percent of all farms using a PC to conduct their herd register.

Table 3: Main Farming Business Purpose: 2011

Percentage	All Farms	Farms Using a PC
Internet and Communications	21	64
Herd Register	15	47
Submitting forms	10	32
Online Banking	10	32
Purchasing products and services	7	21
Selling products and services	4	12
Farm Accounts	5	14
VAT Returns	1	4

Table 4 shows how the use of PCs in farming business has evolved over the years. The proportion of farms using PCs for internet and communications has increased the most considerably from just 6 percent of all farm households in 2004 to 21 percent in 2011. The proportion of farmers using a PC to complete herd register has more than doubled from 2004 to 2011, while the numbers completing VAT returns has remained more or less unchanged. Interestingly, farm accounts was the most common PC usage in 2004 but the numbers using a PC for this purpose declined from 9,000 farms in 2004 to almost 5,000 farms in 2011.

Table 3: Main Farming Business Purpose: 2004 to 2011

Percentage of all farms	2004	2008	2011
Internet and Communications	6	12	21
Herd Register	7	11	15
Farm Accounts	8	8	5
VAT Returns	1	1	1

3. Who uses ICT in farming?

The percentage of farms in the different farming systems that use ICT for farm business purposes is presented in Table 5. As can be seen ICT usage increased across all farm systems from 2004 to 2011. Dairy farmers have the highest usage rates, increasing from 29 percent in 2004 to almost 60 percent in 2011. Despite the relatively low usage rates by cattle farmers, usage has increased the fastest on cattle rearing farms from 7 percent in 2004 to 28 percent in 2011. The usage rates by farm system mirror the viability of farming in general. National Farm Survey data has shown that dairy and tillage farming have the highest rates of economic viability.

Table 5: ICT usage by farming system: 2011

Percentage of Farm Households	2004	2008	2011
Dairy	29	39	58
Cattle Rearing	7	14	28
Cattle Other	9	14	21
Sheep	10	18	26
Tillage	21	30	48
All	14	21	33

As can be seen ICT usage also varies by farm income category. Usage rates are lower for those in the lower farm income categories, while the majority of farms earning €50,000 or more in 2011 used ICT for farm business purposes. Analysis of the data also reveals that usage rates tend to be higher in farm households where the farmer and/or spouse are employed off the farm at 44 percent in 2011 compared to 21 percent for farm households where neither farmer nor spouse worked off the farm.

Table 6: ICT usage by family farm income (FFI) category: 2011

Percentage of Farm Households	2004	2008	2011
FFI: <€5,000	7	16	20
FFI: €5,000 - €10,000	10	16	19
FFI: €10,000 - €20,000	8	15	24
FFI: €20,000 - €50,000	25	30	42
FFI: €50,000 - €100,000	42	40	67
FFI: >€100,000	85	79	81
All	14	21	33