Advisory Programme

Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal Advisory Region

Strategic Plan

2015 - 2020



Teagasc

Agriculture and Food Development Authority

Introduction

The counties of Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal are operated and managed as one of the twelve national advisory Regions in the Teagasc organisation.

Teagasc is the state agency with the responsibility for the provision of research, advisory, education and training to the Agri-food industry.

The organisation is client driven and aims to deliver a high quality service at all times. Teagasc operates in partnership with all sectors of Agri-food industry and rural development agencies.

Teagasc Mission Statement

To support science-based innovation in the agri-food sector and wider bioeconomy so as to underpin profitability, competitiveness and sustainability.

Teagasc Goals

1. Improve the competitiveness of agriculture, food and the wider bioeconomy.
2. Support sustainable farming and the environment.
3. Encourage diversification of the rural economy and enhance the quality of life in rural areas.
4. Enhance organisational capability and deliver value for money.

Teagasc Office Locations in the Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal Region

Teagasc, Carrownanty, Ballymote, Co. Sligo
Tel: 071 9183369

Teagasc, Drumboy, Mohill, Co. Leitrim
Tel: 071 9631076

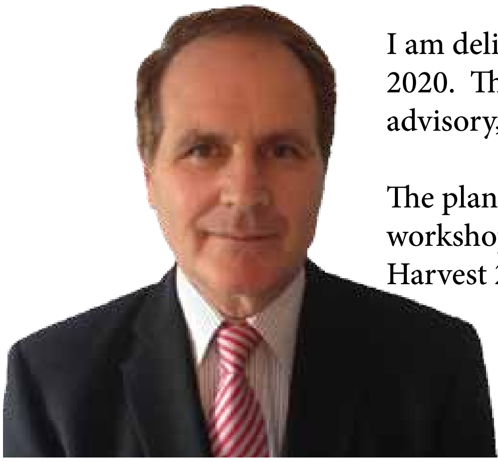
Teagasc, Sligo Road, Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim
Tel: 071 9855107

Teagasc, Cavan Lower, Ballybofey, Co. Donegal
Tel: 074 9131189

Teagasc, Carnamuggagh, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal
Tel: 074 9121555

Teagasc, Public Services Centre, Main Road,
Carndonagh, Co. Donegal
Tel: 074 9373700

Foreword



I am delighted to present the Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal Strategic Plan 2015-2020. This plan has been developed in conjunction with stakeholders, advisory, administrative and management personnel in the region.

The plan is based on the outcome of staff discussions from a number of workshops facilitated by specialists. In view of the targets set out in Food Harvest 2020, stakeholders and staff identified the goals and strategy's necessary to achieve those targets.

The plan will provide guidelines for a disciplined approach to the management of the region in the period 2015-2020.

This plan identifies the Teagasc resources and the main strategic actions required to underpin the critical advisory, education and training programmes in the Region. Crucial to the delivery of those programmes are our partners and stakeholders with whom we run joint programmes and public events.

Ben Wilkinson
Regional Manager, Teagasc, Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal

Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal Regional Strategic Plan – Summary Actions

- ***Dairying:*** Target increase of 30% in milk output and the development of Focus Farms under the Joint Programmes targeting grass utilisation, breeding for milk solids and soil fertility.
- ***Suckler and Beef:*** Focus on profit improvement through best management practice adoption. Assist clients developing calf to beef and contract rearing enterprises. Increase numbers in discussion groups.
- ***Sheep:*** Target 8% increase in lowland ewe numbers and encourage hill flock oweners to produce higher value cross bred breeding stock.
- ***Tillage:*** Focus on profit improvement through best practice adoption. Develop a potato discussion group and a Tillage Focus Farm.
- ***Environment:*** Facilitate clients to join GLAS. Target our group members to complete Carbon Navigators and provide training for clients under the Sustainable Use Directive.
- ***Education:*** Provide Certificate in Agriculture courses at the three training centres to meet the growing requirements.
- ***Health and Safety:*** Ensure a Health and Safety theme runs through all our training courses and events for farmers.
- Teagasc will focus on the use of discussion groups and group events as the basis for delivery of programmes to our clients.
- Public good events will be used to deliver key information to the wider farming community.
- Ensure clients qualify under Basic Payment Scheme and cross compliance.

Farming in the Region

A high proportion of the population in the counties of Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal live in farming communities. The economies of the adjacent towns and villages are highly dependent on local agricultural production. These farming activities create both direct and indirect employment opportunities in the supply of inputs and services, and also in the marketing, distribution and sale of agricultural outputs.

Population

The 2011 CSO census estimated that the total population of the counties of Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal was 258,328 and of this 186,406 (72%) live in rural areas. Table 1 shows Total Population and Rural Population.

Table 1- Total population and rural population

Areas	Total persons	Rural areas
Donegal	161,137	116,836 (72.5%)
Sligo	65,393	41,059 (62.78%)
Leitrim	31,798	28,484 (89.57%)

Source: CSO Census of Agriculture 2011

The Census of Agriculture 2010 estimated that a total of 30,293 people were involved in farm work in the region. This data is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Family and Regular Non-Family Workers on Farms in Region and the State

Areas	Total family workers	Regular non-family workers	Total
Donegal	14,734	769	15,503
Sligo	7,739	397	8,136
Leitrim	6,352	302	6,654
State	255,637	16,379	272,016

Source: CSO Census of Agriculture 2010

Land Area and Use

The agricultural area utilised (AAU), for each of these counties is shown in Table 3. This data show that Donegal, on a percentage basis of the AAU, has approximately twice as much commonage lands and three times the rough grazing area of Sligo and Leitrim. The cereals and other crops listed in the Donegal data are located on farms in the east of Donegal.

Table 3 - Area Hectare and Utilisation of Agricultural Land in Each County and the State-2010

	Agricultural area used including Commonage	Commonage	Agricultural area used excluding Commonage	Rough grazing	Grassland (excl. rough grazing)	Cereals	Other crops and fruit
Donegal	14,734	769 (22%)	15,503	77,661 (30.11%)	172,030 (52%)	6,124 (3.5%)	2,026 (1.1%)
Sligo	128,417	12,967 (10.69%)	115,450	12,929 (11.19%)	102,380 (79.7%)	42 (0.04%)	100 (0.09%)
Leitrim	104,927	12,772 (12.17%)	92,155	9,824 (10.66%)	82,272 (78.40%)	3	57 (0.07%)
State	4,991,353	422,415 (8.46%)	4,568,938	437,273 (9.5%)	3,777,734 (75.68%)	273,898 (7.5%)	80,029 (1.6%)

Source: CSO Census of Agriculture 2010

Forestry

Table 4 shows the number of private forest owners and the area of private forestry in the Sligo/Leitrim/ Donegal region.

Table 4 - The Area of Public and Private Forestry and Numbers of Private Forestry Owners

	Private Owners	Area of Private Forestry (Ha)	Area of Public Forestry (Ha)
Donegal	1,200	22,771	36,407
Sligo	700	9,586	12,628
Leitrim	770	13,156	12,599

Source: DAFM 2014

Agricultural Development

Agricultural development in the region has followed the same trend as the rest of the state through the processes of Consolidation, Specialisation and Intensification of farms.

The Consolidation of farms has taken place through smaller farms being subsumed into larger units and overall the number of farms has decreased. In 1991 the national figure of 170,000 farms in the Irish state have now reduced to less than 140,000.

Table 5 shows farms in the region classified by farm size, with a total of 17,308 farms recorded in the 2010 census and the average farm size is 81% of the national average.

Table 5: Number of Farms Classified by Farm Size (AAU) for and State- 2010

	<2	2 - 10	10 - <20	20 - <30	30 - <50	50 - <100	>=100	Total	Average size ha
Donegal	154 (1.66%)	2,290 (24.78%)	2,373 (25.68%)	1,461 (15.81%)	1,780 (19.26%)	964 (10.45%)	218 (2.35%)	9,240	27.90
Sligo	29 (0.65%)	850 (19.34%)	1,314 (29.89%)	869 (19.77%)	899 (20.45%)	375 (8.53%)	59 (1.34%)	4,395	26.30
Leitrim	23 (0.62%)	638 (17.36%)	1,150 (31.30%)	792 (21.56%)	761 (20.71%)	276 (7.5%)	33 (0.89%)	3,673	25.10
State	2,341 (1.67%)	23,133 (16.54%)	33,581 24.01%	24,687 (17.65%)	30,668 (21.91%)	20,755 (14.83%)	4,695 (3.35%	139,860	32.7

Source: CSO Census of Agriculture 2010

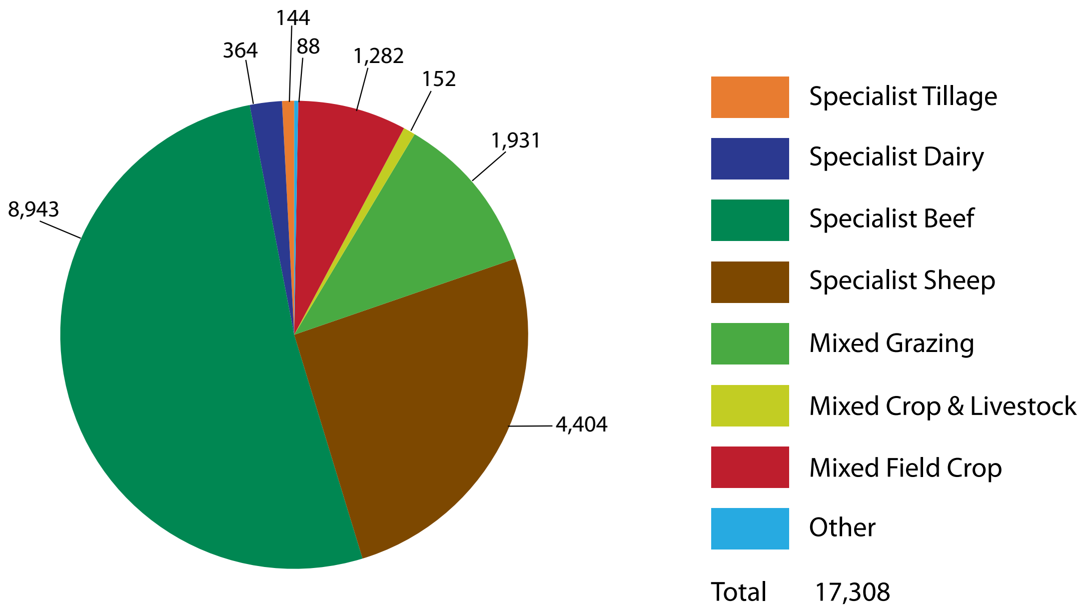
As in the rest of the country farmers in the region have specialised in the farming system in which they are most skilled or to which their farm land in most suited. There are examples of this with regard to dairy farming, which is concentrated in the east of Donegal, the Inishowen region, the coastal farmlands of Sligo and in Leitrim on the drier lands in the south of the county. Table 6 shows farms classified by type of farm.

Table 6 - Number of Farms Classified by Type of Farm in each County

	Specialist Tillage	Specialist Dairying	Specialist Beef	Specialist Sheep	Mixed Grazing	Mixed Crop & Livestock	Mixed Field Crop	Other	Total
Donegal	141 (1.52%)	180 (1.94%)	3,462 (37.46%)	3,393 (36.72%)	1,163 (12.6%)	140 (1.5%)	704 (7.61%)	57 (0.6%)	9,240
Sligo	2 (0.05%)	141 (3.2%)	2,971 (67.59%)	492 (11.19%)	456 (10.38%)	9 (0.2%)	311 (7%)	13 (0.3%)	4,395
Leitrim	1 (0.03%)	43 (1.17%)	2,510 (68.33%)	519 (14.13%)	312	3	267 (7.1%)	18 (0.5%)	3,673
State	4,795 (3.42%)	15,654 (11.19%)	77,738 (55.58%)	13,555 (9.96%)	14,697 (10.5%)	2,443 (1.74%)	9,635 (6.88%)	1,343 (0.96%)	139,860

Source: CSO Census of Agriculture 2010

Figure 1 - Number of Farms Classified by Type of Farm



The increase in farm-size and specialisation of enterprises along with increased external inputs has facilitated the intensification of agricultural production from each unit of labour and land. Table 7 shows farms in the region classified by economic size using Standard Output which is the value of farm production at the farm gate. The data shows that reaching a Standard Output greater than €15,000 was achieved by 17% of farms in the region in contrast to 38% in the State.

Table 7 - Number of Farms Classified by Economic Size

	0 < €4000	€4000 < €8000	€8000 < €15000	€15000 < €25000	€25000 < €50000	€50000 < €100000	>€100000	Total	Average
Donegal	3,532 (38.22%)	2,289 (24.77%)	1,621 (17.5%)	861 (9.31%)	546 (5.9%)	209 (2.26%)	182 (1.96%)	9,240	€13,655
Sligo	1,380 (11.50%)	1,186 (27%)	979 (22.2%)	450 (10.23%)	251 (5.7%)	104 (2.36%)	45 (1%)	4,395	€11,995
Leitrim	1,381 (37.6%)	1,059 (28.83%)	768 (20.9%)	287 (1.8%)	125 (3.4%)	39 (1.0%)	14 (0.38%)	3,673	€10,480
State	34,714 (24.82%)	25,144 (17.97%)	26,023 (18.6%)	17,570 (12.5%)	15,155 (10.83%)	11,156 (7.97%)	10,098 (7.22%)	139,860	€30,726

Soils, Land Type, Rainfall and Fragmentation

There is a diverse range of lands and soil types within the region. Large areas of west Donegal, the mountain areas in Sligo, north and east Leitrim are characterised by upland and commonage areas. These areas include Special Areas of Conservation, peat bogs and other marginal lands farmed at a low stocking density. The topography of these lands can vary from slightly sloping to steep slopes. On the steep slopes the soil type can vary from shallow lithosols to wet highly organic soils such as blanket peats and podzols. The lower hills have shallow soils which are mainly acidic. These areas are described as "high nature value farmland" and the land use range varies from "very limited" to "extremely limited".

The vast bulk of the remaining lands of Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal, excluding east Donegal and the coastal lands in Sligo, are generally described as "heavy soils" with high clay content. The land use range of these soils is very dependent on the percentage of clay in the soil and the land topography. The land use description for these soils can be described as "limited" particularly in the drumlin areas of Sligo, Leitrim and South Donegal, where the drumlins can have wet soils on the slopes in addition to wet gleys and peat soils between adjacent drumlins.

The location of free draining soils with a land use description of "moderately wide" are found in isolated pockets throughout the region and this description includes a high proportion of Sligo's coastal strip. The topography of these lands is flat to undulating with mainly limestone bedrock, and the soil types include Brown Earths and free draining Grey Brown Podzolics.

The soils in the east tillage Donegal region are mainly Brown Podzolics overlying a flat to undulating topography; these soils have a wide range of uses which can be described as "moderately wide" to "wide".

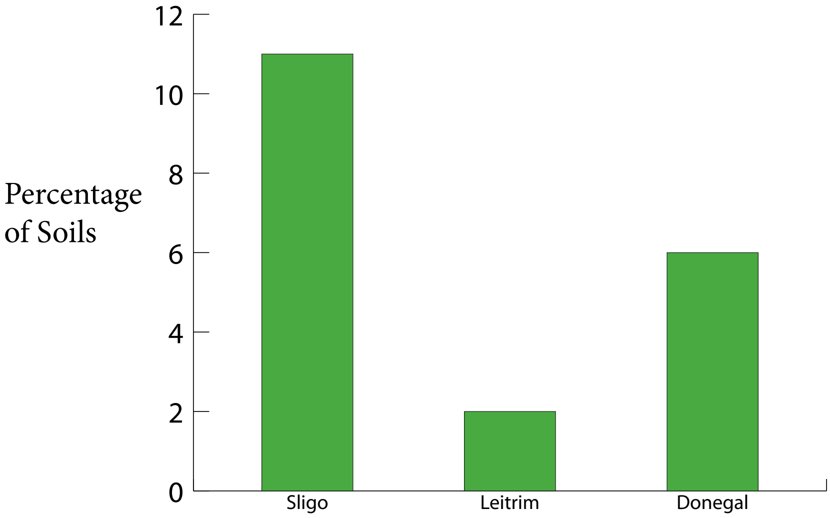
The rainfall amounts in the region can average from 250mm to 500mm higher than the midlands and east of Ireland. The higher rainfall puts additional limits on land use, particularly the heavier soils. Fragmentation of farms puts limits on farm suitability for some enterprises, particularly dairy farming, the average number of parcels per farm in the region is 4.2 and 3.8 for the State.

Soil Fertility and Fertility Profile

A grassland soil is said to have a Good Overall Fertility Profile when the combined figures of soil pH >6.2, and P and K levels are at index 3 and 4 respectively. The results of 12,306 soil samples taken in Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal over a seven year period from 2007 to 2013 were analysed. The results indicate that only 11%, 2% and 6% of samples for Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal respectively achieved the Good Overall Fertility Profile, this is shown in Figure 2.

The downward trend in the Soil P Index, the Soil K Index and soil pH> 6.2 for grassland soils in the region over the seven year period is a concern with regard to maintaining efficient and economic production.

Figure 2 - Percentage of Soils at good level of overall fertility



Teagasc Resources in the Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal region

Teagasc Offices and Staff

Teagasc operates out of six offices in the region, five are owned and the Carndonagh office is leased. Table 8 shows the location of the Offices and Staff Numbers.

Table 8 - Teagasc Offices and Staff numbers

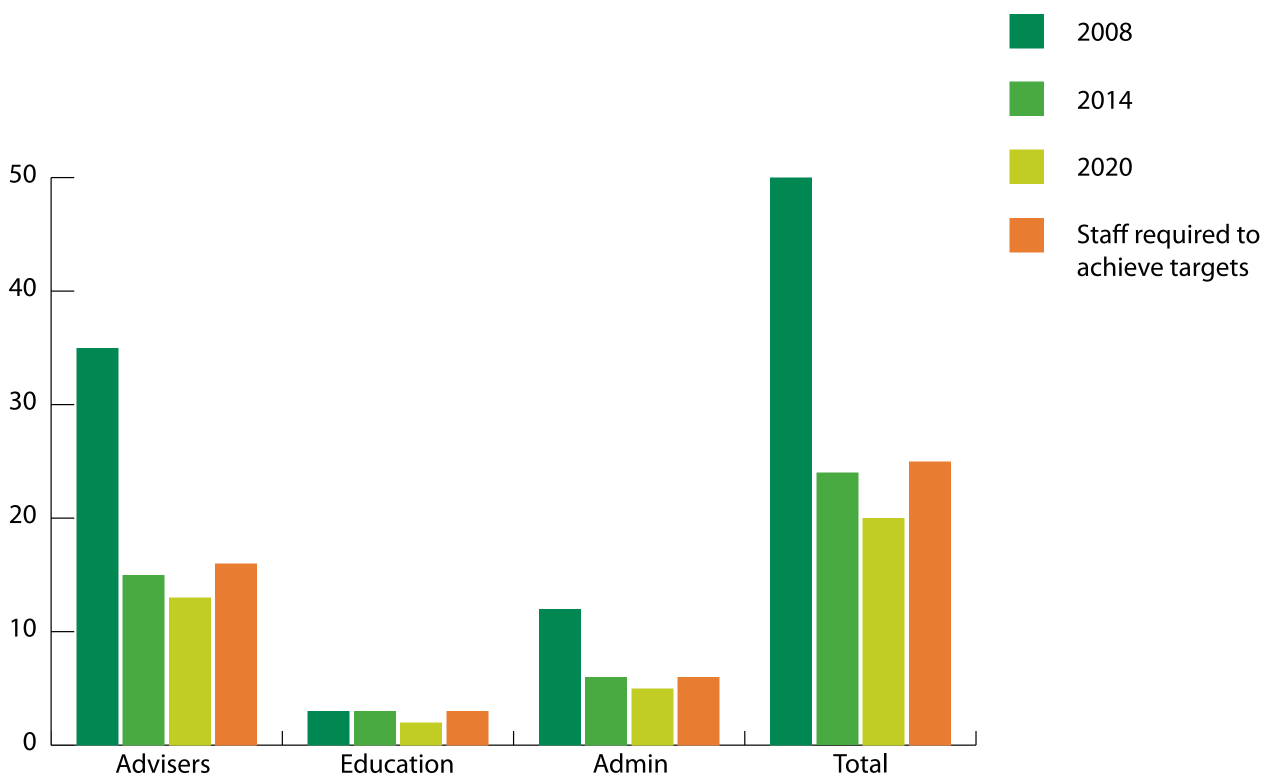
Office	Admin	Drystock	Dairy	Soil & Environment	Tillage	Forestry	Education
Mohill	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymote	1	1	1	2	0	0	1
Manorhamilton	1	2	0	0	0	0	1
Ballybofey	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
Letterkenny	1	3	0	0	0	0	1
Carndonagh	0	1	0	0.5	0.5	0	0
Total	**6**	**10**	**2**	**2.5**	**0.5**	**1**	**3**

Table 9 and Figure 3 shows the reduction in staff numbers from 2008 to 2014 and the predicted staff numbers for 2020 with no recruitment. The numbers required to deliver a programme to achieve 2020 targets are also shown. This shows 16 advisors are required if a meaningful service is to be provided to clients. Teagasc advisor numbers have declined by 57% between 2008 and 2014 and a further 2 retirements will bring this decline to 63%.

Table 9 - Trends and predicted numbers of Staff 2008- 2020

	2008	2014	2020	Staff required to achieve 2020 targets
Advisers	35	15	13	16
Education	3	3	2	3
Admin	12	6	5	6
Total	**50**	**24**	**20**	**25**

Figure 3 - Trends and predicted numbers of staff 2008 - 2020



Teagasc Education Centres and Students

There are four education centres located in owned offices and three of these currently run Level 5 and Level 6 courses, the locations and student numbers are shown in Table 10.

Table 10 - Education Centres and Student numbers-2014

Education Centre	Year 1 Students	Year 2 Students
Ballymote	31	40
Manorhamilton	31	-
Letterkenny	28	28
Total	**90**	**68**

Teagasc Clients and Enterprise

The Teagasc advisory programmes are made available to clients from each of the six offices, the services are delivered through mass communications, office and phone consultations, farm visits, discussion group activity, farm walks, seminars, and public events. Client numbers are shown in Table 11.

Table 11 - Teagasc clients by enterprise in the Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal Region

Farming Enterprise	Teagasc Clients	No. of Discussion Groups
Drystock	3,750	52
Dairy	210	8
Tillage	90	2
Total	**4,050**	**62**

Teagasc Partners

- ***Dairy Co-operatives and Co-operatives:*** A joint Teagasc–Aurivo technology transfer programme supports Aurivo suppliers in Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim. A similar joint programme operates between Teagasc and Lakeland Dairies covering Lakeland suppliers Leitrim. The purpose of the programmes is to assist the milk suppliers to be more efficient and financially sustainable in the post quota era. In Donegal Teagasc staff have developed a good working relationship with Inishowen Co-op and numerous joint events are held throughout the year.

- ***Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF):*** Teagasc has established strong links with ICBF in relation to the development of technology programmes in Dairy, Cattle and Sheep enterprises.

- ***Leader Development Companies:*** Over the years Teagasc staff have developed a strong working relationship with Leader Companies in each of the counties Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal.

- ***Irish Farmers Journal(IFJ):*** A joint Teagasc /IFJ programme is operating for a number of years. It is known as the BETTER Beef Programme and has support from AIBP, Dawn Meats, FBD and KEPAK.

- ***The Farming Independent and Irish Country Meats (ICM)***: Teagasc sheep advisors in the region work in collaboration with ICM in the publication of monthly sheep articles known as SHEEP- TECH in the Farming Independent.

- ***Farm Relief Services (FRS):***Teagasc have recently outsourced the completion of GLAS for Teagasc's clients to FRS.

- ***Collaboration with other organisations:*** In the course of a year's work Teagasc in the region will engage with many other bodies on a regular basis. Those organisations are the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Bord Bia, IFA, Macra na Feirme, I.C.M.S.A., Livestock Marts, Meat Processors, Health and Safety Authority, Irish Grassland Association, Animal Health Ireland, A.I., I.F.A.C., Breeding Companies, Local Authorities, Local Community Development Committees, Local Enterprise Office, Local Radio, Local Newspapers, Institutes of Technology, St Angela's College, ETB's, ACA members, Veterinarians, Solicitors, Accountants, Livestock and Forestry Producer groups.

The Future of Farming in the Region

The overall trend for farming in the region is that it will follow the same pattern that has developed since Ireland became an EU member, which is consolidation and enlargement of farms, along with enterprise specialisation and intensification. This continuing change will result in a reduction in the number of holdings and an increase in average farm size. The more intensive full-time farmers within the region will continue to expand while at the same time be more dependent on external inputs and more exposed to competition in worldwide markets. The development, expansion and additional production from these farms will take place under more regulatory control. While the main issue facing less intensive part -time farmers in the region will be sustainability as they will be marginalised by this model of production and will become more dependent on income supports.

The Future of Dairying Farming

The removal of milk quota in 2015 will have an impact on dairy farmers and milk supply in the region. In the short term it is expected that milk supply will increase by 30% +. This increase in supply will mainly come from expansion of existing herds. In the medium to longer term additional milk supply will come from new entrants from specific locations in the region. The new entrants are expected come from the conversion of the larger drystock holdings located on free draining soils and from farms that are presently mainly under tillage. In the long term as more consolidation of farmlands takes place and farm size increases the coastal region of Sligo and east Donegal are the most likely locations to supply additional milk supplies. The dairying industry will be supported by drystock farmers who contract rear dairy heifers.

The main strengths underlying the Irish dairy industry is that production is grass based and the worldwide markets, particularly in Asia and Africa are increasing their demand for dairy produce and in particular powdered milk.

The main risk associated with dairy production outside of the farm-gate is price volatility associated with worldwide markets. The main risks inside the farm-gate are access to land, fragmentation, age profile, the availability of labour, and poor budget control.

The Future of Suckler and Beef Farming

The inclement weather experienced in 2012-2013, the "Fodder Crisis" and lower beef prices put Suckler and Beef farmers under severe pressure. The improvement of prices in recent months would appear to have stabilised suckler cow numbers in the region. There are alternative opportunities for drystock farmers in establishing dairy calf to beef systems and the contract rearing of dairy heifers. The main strength of the cattle farmers is the quality of cattle produced in the region by the use of a high number of A.I. bulls. The main threats to the future of suckler and beef farming are low farm-gate prices, the high costs associated with suckler cow maintenance, calving rate and age profile of farmers. The opening up of additional world markets for beef products is seen as a positive step for the future demand as is the proposed formation of new producer groups to improve selling power.

The Future of Sheep Farming

There are two distinct sheep systems, Mountain/Hill Sheep and Lowland Sheep Production.

It is estimated that there will be an 8% + increase in lowland sheep numbers. The expansion is likely to come from specialised sheep flocks and mixed cattle and sheep farms.

The future predictions for Mountain/Hill Sheep farming are more uncertain, due to lower prices and difficulties in export markets. The introduction of the GLAS for commonage areas will possibly help to stabilise numbers at the present level. The strength of the sheep sector is that it is grass based and expansion can be attained at a lower cost relative to other enterprises.

The development of further processing of lamb carcases by the meat industry has led to the bulk of lamb exported as added value cuts rather than whole carcases. There is also future potential for the Mountain/Hill flocks to produce higher valued cross-bred breeding stock to meet expansion requirements of the Lowland Sheep enterprise. Threats to the sheep industry come from new diseases, the importation of lower priced chilled New Zealand lamb and a per capita reduction in E U consumption lamb.

The Future of Tillage Farming

Tillage farming in the region is located primarily in east Donegal. Historically, Donegal has been associated with seed potato production. The area in Donegal under seed potatoes peaked at 1600 hectares. However due to poor profitability and rejection of crops for diseases such as Blackleg this area has reduced to 295 hectares. The production of ware potatoes in the county has also declined in recent years. The reduced area under ware potatoes is due again to price volatility and low profits. A major challenge for potato producers in Ireland is the declining consumption of potatoes. This decline in consumption is partially due to public misconceptions that potato substitutes such as rice and pasta are healthier options. The industry in order to counteract this misconception, are currently focusing on a number of marketing initiatives highlighting the health benefits of potatoes.

The major cereals crops grown in the region are spring and winter barley, spring and winter oats, winter wheat and a small amount of oilseed rape. At present the major threat to Irish cereal crop production is price volatility and low profitability. The price that Irish cereal growers receive for grain is a world market price, so the price they receive depends on world production levels. This can lead to wide price fluctuations year on year ie: the price of barley in 2012 was €200 per tonne reducing to €135 per tonne in 2014.

In spite of the market pressures, the tillage farmers in the region have much strength ie: grower expertise, land suitability and the local demand from intensive livestock producers.

The Future of Forestry

The area of forestry in the region will continue to increase in size. This increase in forestry plantings will happen for a number of reasons; two thirds of the production is exported, the use of timber as an energy source, the requirement to replant clear felled land, lower farm incomes on marginal land and the availability of forestry grants.

Teagasc Staff Operational Strategic Actions

The Role of Administrative Staff

The overall reduction in Teagasc staff number's and advisory offices has resulted in a dramatic decrease in farm visits. There has been a change of emphasis with regard to the delivery of advisory and training programmes. The advisory programmes are now primarily delivered through one-to-one office consultations, phone calls, group texting, discussion group meetings, farm walks, farm demonstrations, public events, short courses, mass media and newsletters. In comparison to farm visits these knowledge transfer methods require a much higher input from the administrative staff. In addition to this, sections of advisory work are now outsourced to sub-contractors and this involves a substantial increase in input from administrative staff. The ratio of administrative staff to clients is 675 to 1.

Strategic Actions

- Timely planned meetings organised for Administrative and Advisory staff in advance of public events.
- Administrative staff to receive up to-date training in advance of GLAS and the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.
- Regular meetings and conference calls between Regional administrative staff.

The Role of Advisory Staff

The average client numbers per advisor in the region are 275. In order to maintain and service this client base advisory staff will mainly deliver the advisory development programmes through group work. This work is delivered by specific discussion groups, events and meetings. The servicing of clients Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) applications will continue to require one or more one-to-one office consultations.

Strategic Actions

- Participation in workload planning meetings at local and regional level.
- Attend in-service technical training.
- Attend up-skilling and training for Facilitation and Influencing skills.
- Avail of I.T. up-skilling and training.
- Collaboration with Stakeholders

Strategic Actions Common to All Enterprises

Servicing Clients

Teagasc client's will be serviced through texts, phone calls, e-mails, one-to-one office consultations, group meetings, seminars, workshops; farm walks, public events, newsletters and limited farm visits. The main actions will be:

- Organise planning meetings for staff at office level with regard to specific campaigns ie; GLAS, BPS
- Organise planning meetings for staff at local/regional level with regard to public events.
- Organise texting lists for specific enterprises and groups.
- Communicate clearly to clients the role of sub-contractors in the delivery of their advisory contract.

Public Good Will

The capacity of the service to deal with non-clients is limited due to staff resources. The public events that Teagasc hold in the region are open to non-clients and this "Public Good Will" element of the service will continue to function. The main actions will be:

- Further development of the regional Facebook page.
- Advertise public events through mass media.
- Contact past students who are non-clients by text.
- Communicate clearly to non-clients our limited capacity to individually service new clients.
- Develop a uniform referral system in the region for non-clients.

Basic Payment Scheme

The Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) is a major part of the region's workload for six months from March to November. The scheme is administered for clients by staff at each of the six office locations. The main actions will be:

- Organisation of information meetings for clients at local offices.
- Continue to take a leadership role in the campaign by encouraging clients to seek timely assistance.

Land Transfer and Succession

Table 12 shows a breakdown of the number of holdings relative to different age groupings. The data shows that the number of farmers under the age of 44 years who own their farms is 25% or less, whereas for farmers over 65 years of age, 27% and greater retain farm ownership. The main actions will be:

- Land Transfer Workshops at different locations within the region on annual basis.
- Promotion of farm partnerships and share farming.
- The use of Teagasc Farm Management Specialists for complex queries..

Table 12: Number of Family Farms Classified by Age

Age	<35	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	>=65	Total
Donegal	756 (8.2%)	1,571 (17%)	1,899 (20.6%)	2,334 (25.31%)	2,662 (28.87%)	9,222
Sligo	228 (5.19%)	668 (15.21%)	1,052 (23.96%)	1,221 (27.81%)	1,222 (27.83%)	4,391
Leitrim	226 (6.16%)	554 (15.09%)	937 (25.52%)	903 (24.6%)	1,051 (28.63%)	3,671
State	**8,683 (6.2%)**	**24,562 (17.60%)**	**34,614 (24.8%)**	**35,058 (25.12%)**	**36,639 (26.25%)**	**139,556**

Farm Diversification

In co-operation with Teagasc's Rural Economy Research Directorate the advisory services deliver the Farm Diversification programme. This programme is implemented by staff mainly through the Options Programme which is delivered in collaboration with local development agencies. The programme is available to clients and non-clients. The 2010 Census of Agriculture estimated that 6.5% of the farmers in the region had a non-agricultural activity on their farms. The main actions will be:

- The holding at least one Options Course annually in the Region.
- Collaboration with the development agencies with regard to sourcing attendees.
- Collaboration with development agencies and stakeholders regarding course content.
- The organising of Tourism Courses generated by the Options Programme.
- Designated contact advisors in region to deal with Organic Farming enquiries.
- Facilitation of Organic Farming courses in Teagasc offices.

Soil Fertility

There are major deficits in phosphate, potassium and lime on a high percentage of farms.
The main actions will be:

- Highlight soil fertility issues at all Farm walks and open days in the Region.
- Include soil fertility as a regular topic at Dairy, Beef, Sheep and Tillage discussion groups meetings.
- Implement a local advertising campaign in late autumn/ winter promoting the benefits of soil sampling.
- Focus on Good Overall Fertility profile for conservation lands.

Land Drainage and Improvement

There are many drainage problems that affect all land based activities, land improvement actions are mainly concentrated on grass based systems. The main strategic action will be:

- Organisation of annual Land Drainage and Re-Seeding demonstrations.

Environmental

Environmental issues are relevant to all enterprises, whether it is increased regulatory control through Cross Compliance and CAP 2015 regulation, through managing Carbon Foot-Print, dealing with invasive species or complying with environmental schemes. The main strategic actions will be:

- To use the Teagasc Cross Compliance workbook at discussion group meetings.
- In conjunction with BPS meetings for clients highlight the changes in the SMRs in the 2015 Basic Payment Scheme.
- The organisation of GLAS information workshops for Teagasc clients.
- Collaboration with GLAS sub-contractors.
- Promotion of Carbon Navigators through discussion groups.
- Support of training for Sustainable Use Directive (SUD).

Health and Safety

The increase in fatalities and serious injuries due to farm accidents is a cause for great concern. Teagasc in this region will develop closer ties with the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). The main actions will be:

- The development of specific Farm Health and Safety Boards for the region.
- Include a Farm Health and Safety message at all Walks and Events.
- Public Good: organise health and safety courses at Teagasc offices.
- Public Good: organise joint on- farm events with the Health and Safety Authority.
- Display of Health and Safety Boards in Teagasc office reception areas.

Education

The Certificate in Agriculture is a broad based course which encourages personal development along with technical competence. The agricultural education provided to young farmers underpins the development of all enterprises throughout the region. On completion of the courses the graduates are ideally placed to further develop their expertise through contacts with Teagasc's advisory service.

There are three Education centres presently active in the Region, which accommodate five courses with a total attendance of 158 students. The three Education Officers who organise the courses are supported by the advisory staff in the delivery of lectures and skills training, and by the clerical staff with regard to course administration. The main actions will be:

- Hold pre-course planning meetings with local staff.
- Organise and deliver courses in the region to meet demands.
- Encourage students to engage with the advisory services subsequent to graduation.

Quality Assurance Schemes

The Beef and Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme, the Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme and Assurance Schemes for eggs, poultry, pig meat, potatoes and Horticultural produce are Bord Bia led schemes for both processors and producers. The objective of the schemes is to provide the consumer with quality assured produce identified by a quality mark. The Advisory services are well placed to give advice to clients on a range of issues relating to quality assurance of produce because most of the issues involved are covered by Cross Compliance regulation. The main actions will be:

- Encourage farmers to sign up for the schemes through discussion group meetings and public events.
- Highlight the critical issues involved at farm walks.
- Encourage participants in the Certificate in Farming to participate in the schemes.

Engagement with Stakeholders

The stakeholders for the region are recorded in the annual regional Business Plan. The main actions will be:

- A staff and Stakeholder meeting, to discuss end of year review and development of new Business Plan.
- A staff and stakeholder meeting to present annual Business Plan.

Main Strategic Actions:

- Target 30% increase in milk output.
- Support of the Teagasc -Aurivo Joint Programme.
- Support of the Teagasc-Lakeland Joint Programme.
- The promotion and use of Dairy Discussion groups.
- The use of Focus Farm data from the two Focus Farms at discussion groups and farm walks, concentrating on grass utilisation and milk solids production per hectare.
- Dedicated one to one time for individual clients, particularly with regards to financial planning.
- Collaboration with drystock advisors for farm events on Soil fertility, Re-seeding and Drainage.
- Promotion and Collaboration with dry stock advisors with regard to contract rearing dairy heifers.
- Implement a support programme for all new entrants to dairying through Cash-Flow and Farm Planning.
- Public Good: invite non-discussion group members and non-clients to public events and demonstrations.

Strategic Actions for Suckler Cows and Beef

Main Strategic Actions:

- Increase cattle profitability through best practice adoption.
- Assist clients with development of new calf to beef and contract heifer rearing enterprises. Identify suitable Beef farms for contract rearing of dairy heifers.
- Programmes will focus on stabilising suckler cow numbers.
- Increase the existing number of discussion groups under the RDP scheme.
- Maximise the use of BETTER beef farm's data from the four BETTER beef farms in the region for discussion group meetings and public events.
- Focus on suckler cow breeding, in particular the calving interval and the percentage cows calving in the February –March period, with targets of 383 days and 50% + respectively.
- Encourage farmer participation in beef producer groups.
- Identify suitable Beef farms for contract rearing of dairy heifers.
- Collaborate with veterinary profession in the organisation of on farm workshops.
- Organise calf rearing workshops with AHI.
- Organise Drainage, Soil Fertility and Re-seeding events.
- Public Good; invitation of all drystock farmers to seminars and farm walks.

Strategic Actions for Sheep

Main Strategic Actions:

- Target an 8% increase in lowland sheep output
- Encourage hill flock owners to produce higher value cross bred breeding stock
- The main efficiency focus to improve profit will be on improving the numbers weaned per ewe joined for lowland ewes to 1.8.
- Increase the number of discussion groups under the RDP scheme.
- Maximise the use of BETTER Sheep farm's data from the three BETTER sheep farms in the region.
- Collaborate with the veterinary profession in the organisation of farm workshops.
- Highlight lamb performance at grass and the economics of store lambs at discussion groups and public events.
- Organise Drainage, Soil Fertility and re-seeding events.
- Public Good; invitation of all sheep farmers to seminars and farm walks.

Strategic Actions for Tillage

Main Strategic Actions:

- Focus on profit improvement through best practice adoption.
- Develop a Potato Discussion Group with a focus on disease control.
- Develop a Focus Farm in the region to use for discussion group activity. This will enable the participating farmers to view the same crops throughout the growing season.
- The preparation of a detailed fertiliser plan for the Focus Farm for use at farm walks.
- Develop a Potato Discussion Group with a focus on disease control.
- Continue with publishing the Donegal Tillage Update newsletter.
- Continue with the Donegal spring and autumn seminars.
- Increase Discussion Group activity.
- Support ware potato marketing campaign.
- Support for Sustainable Use Directive courses.
- Public Good: organise two cereal crop walks open to all growers in the region.

Main Strategic Actions:

- Support forestry producer groups with existing forestry owners.
- Promotion of forestry producer groups with new forestry owners.
- Continue with educational programme at regional offices regarding Forest Management.
- Organise one-to-one clinics at Teagasc Regional offices.
- Highlight the sequestration benefits of trees.
- Promotion of Technology transfer groups.
- Public Good: organise public meetings throughout region to explain new Forestry Development Programme 2014-2020.

Main Research Requirements Specific to Region

Dairy Research

The main areas of research necessary for the development and sustainability of the Dairy industry are grassland and breeding. Grassland research should focus on the best practice for maximising the utilization of quality grass on heavier clay soils under grazing and conservation. The breeding research should focus on increasing milk solids per hectare in order to improve farm gate price.

Suckler and Beef Research

The main areas for research are targeted at improving profitability in the Suckler and Beef sector are breeding and grassland. The breeding should focus on developments in breeds and breeding to meet factory specifications by researching faster maturing beef cattle. The grassland research should focus on productive grass varieties which require lower levels of fertiliser inputs and are more suited to sustainable drystock stocking rates.

Sheep Research

The main areas for research should be grassland and productivity. The utilisation of grassland by finishing lambs under creep and paddock grazing. Consideration should also be given to deficiency of trace elements in grazed grass and the effects on lamb performance. The productivity research should focus on best practice breeding management and performance from various types of cross-bred ewes.

Tillage Research

There is research needed to examine the growing of seed potatoes in Donegal with particular emphasis on suitable varieties and suitable rotations

Forestry Research

Further research is needed in thinning of conifers, broadleaf management, seed quality of Birch and Alder, Ash dieback and Agro-forestry systems suited to Irish conditions.

General Research

There is need for research into low cost drainage and land improvement systems across all enterprises.

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Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal Advisory Region

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Teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority