



# Developing an Understanding of Relationships and Methodologies to Encourage Contract Cropping Agreements

Lisa O'Toole<sup>1,2</sup>, Prof. Michael Wallace<sup>2</sup> & Peter Doolan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Teagasc, Portlaoise, Co. Laois; <sup>2</sup>UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4

**Abstract:** Collaborative farm structures such as contract cropping agreements have the potential to increase the social, economic and environmental sustainability of both the livestock and tillage sectors in Ireland. However, contract cropping agreements within Ireland have been subject to little in-depth examination to date. This study addresses this gap by examining the challenges and success factors in the operation of contract cropping relationships between land owners and end users, so as to maximise the potential use of land and fodder resources. This study employs a mixed methods approach, combining farmer surveys, advisor focus group, key informant interviews and farmer interviews. The findings indicate that approximately 9% of farmers in the reference sample are involved in a contract cropping agreement. Factors such as contract attributes, attributes of participating contract cropping parties and external factors such as policy implications, weather events and external agents have an influence on a farmers' decision to enter a contract cropping agreement. The findings point to the potential of contract cropping agreements to improve the sustainability of both the tillage and livestock sectors through the following: providing alternative market opportunities for the tillage sector, improving Ireland's self-sufficiency in animal feed concentrates, addressing the land constraint issues on intensive dairy farms, supporting Origin Green credentials by providing traceable animal feed. This study also advances new information in the area of best practices to build trust among the contracting parties for the successful operation of fodder cropping agreements.