

NICHOLAS MCKENNA: THESIS ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of using LYNC to facilitate discussion groups in the Kilkenny/Waterford Region.

The study acknowledged the importance of discussion groups to Irish beef and dairy farmers. Observation of the four selected discussion groups was carried out to see how the LYNC discussion groups worked and how farmers engaged. A post LYNC discussion group survey was completed with all 58 farmers to understand their feelings and opinions.

A key finding of the study was that dairy farmers showed higher levels of engagement with LYNC discussion groups than beef farmers. They also had a higher attendance rate and had on average more interactions during the discussion group meetings than beef farmers.

Farmers in general in the study ranked the technical aspects of the LYNC discussion groups as being as 'good' as face-face discussion groups which suggest that LYNC was effective in meeting their technical needs. Socially however the majority of farmers felt LYNC was not as good as face-face discussion groups and therefore not as effective as face-face discussion groups. The main weaknesses of LYNC were seen to be the lack of social and practical interaction and the main benefits were keeping contact and saving time.

The study recommends that traditional face-face discussion groups be studied to gain a clearer understanding of the differences between them and LYNC facilitated discussion groups in relation to interaction and contributions possibly using the observational method used in this study.