

# An Examination of Communities of Practice to determine their potential in enhancing continuous professional development – a case study of Teagasc



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## Background

- Current Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Teagasc delivered through technical in-service training days & CECRA training
- Communities of Practice (CoP) have been forming in recent years – a space for social and peer-to-peer learning
- A Community of Practice is defined as a community that: has voluntary membership and regular interactions, has arisen organically, is about knowledge sharing and management, the member roles or responsibilities are not assigned, based on what is important and current to members

## Objectives

1. To outline the characteristics, structures and processes of effective communities of practice
2. To identify the existence of communities of practice within Teagasc with a particular emphasis on knowledge transfer activities
3. To determine if communities of practice are effective in supporting continuous professional development for Teagasc advisors, specialists and teachers

## Methodology

### Objective 1

Phase 1: Literature review to identify characteristics of CoP and criteria for classifying CoP

### Objective 2

- Phase 2: National audit of Teagasc’s knowledge transfer activities to identify the existence of formal working groups, project teams and communities of practice

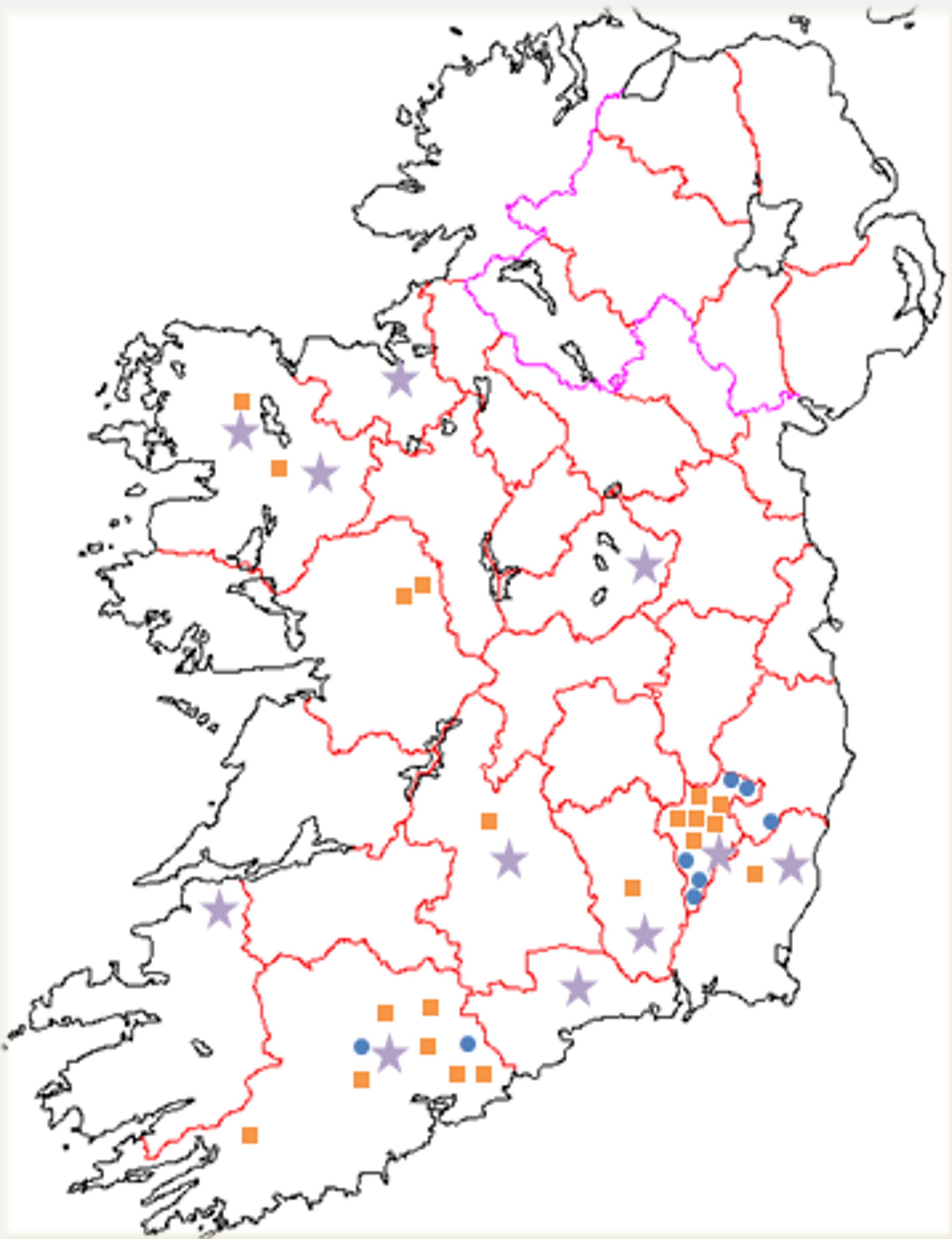
### Objective 3

- Phase 3: One-to-one semi structured interviews with key informants
- Phase 4: Interaction with members of the CoPs
- Phase 5: Case study on another organisation

## Key Findings

### Audit of Teagasc’s knowledge transfer activities (N=105)

- 105 responses from 540 emails sent
- Responses from all advisory regions, Teagasc run colleges and research centres
- 62% of the respondents not a member of either a formal working group, project team or community of practice
- Results from re-categorising groups
  - 20 Project Teams
  - 8 Working Groups
  - 10 Communities of Practice



## Communities of Practice identified in Teagasc

Dairy	Drystock	Education	TAG <sup>1</sup> Meetings
Dairy advisors in Tipperary	Drystock advisors in Kerry/Limerick	Education staff in Mayo	Advisors in the office in Oak Park
Dairy advisors in Westmeath/Offaly/Cavan	Drystock advisors in Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal	Curriculum Development and Standards Unit in Kildalton Ag College	Advisors in an office in the Cork East region
Dairy advisors in Waterford/Kilkenny	Drystock advisors in Carlow/Wicklow/Wexford & Waterford/Kilkenny		1 Technology Adoption Group

## Results

- Six active communities of practice in Teagasc
- Determine the level and method (face-to-face/Lync/blended approach) of interaction of the CoP that is optimal
- Scheduled day/time works best
- No set agenda
- Form organically or with support of management
- Clear and strong benefits with taking part in a CoP
- Outlet to share resources and experiences
- Work along side the current CPD to support professional development

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- Lack of awareness around CoP in Teagasc however the staff involved with CoPs found value in being part of a CoP
- Clear and strong benefits with being a member of a community of practice while acknowledging some of the difficulties of the CoP groups’ practices
- CoP as a platform to allow members to share experiences and resources
- Foster and further enhance the development of the CoPs in Teagasc through the use of new and emerging collaboration tools and technologies
- There is a possible place for a co-ordinator of CoPs in Teagasc - The role would support CoPs to become operational in Teagasc
- CoPs should strongly be considered to be embedded in the CPD programme in Teagasc