

# Teagasc Signpost Advisory Programme

**George Ramsbottom**  
Teagasc Oak Park

The Teagasc Signpost Advisory Programme has been established to help you to develop and implement a tailored Signpost Climate Action Plan for your farm. The programme is free of charge and available to all farmers, whether Teagasc clients or not.

We have recruited 21 additional advisors to lead the delivery of the programme.

They will offer a range of advisory activities, including:

- Signpost workshops focused on actions to reduce your carbon footprint.
- Support in interpreting your farm's greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint.
- One-to-one climate action advice from a Teagasc advisor.
- A farm specific action plan.

## Four steps to improving your farm's sustainability performance

Teagasc recommends a range of "good farming practices" that will enable you to reduce gaseous emissions, protect and improve water quality, restore and enhance biodiversity, while enhancing farm profitability.

It is important that each individual understands their farm's sustainability metrics (or numbers), what contributes to those numbers, and the opportunities to improve them over time.

### 1. Know your farm's sustainability numbers

The starting point for anyone on the journey to becoming more sustainable is to establish your farm's numbers or current performance.

Over the coming years, as climate and the environment comes evermore to the forefront, you will undoubtedly become familiar with a range of new numbers including greenhouse gas emissions, ammonia emissions, nutrient balance and nutrient use efficiency.

These numbers will be available to you through the new AgNav programme.



The Signpost Advisory Programme was launched by Teagasc in the Wicklow/Carlow/Wexford Advisory Region, on 22 June, at the Orchard Centre in Tinahely, Co Wicklow. From left: Eoin Woulfe, Signpost advisor, George Ramsbottom, Signpost Advisory Programme manager, Teagasc; Councillor Andrea Dalton, Carlow Co Council; Ger Shortle, Teagasc regional manager, Wicklow/Carlow/Wexford; Professor Frank O'Mara, Teagasc director; John Pringle, Signpost beef farmer; Colm Doran, Signpost advisor, Teagasc; Shay Ryan, Signpost dairy farmer; and Kay O'Connell, Teagasc advisor.

### 2. Identify opportunities to improve your farm's sustainability numbers

There are many opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, capture carbon and reduce nutrient losses on every farm. The potential depends on the type of farming and your current practices.

Because the solution for each farm will be different, our advisors are on hand to help you to implement technologies and practices that can lead to improved sustainability. These include:

- Use of protected urea.
- Application of lime to correct soil pH.
- Correction of soil P and K deficiencies.
- Use of LESS slurry equipment.
- Timing of slurry application.
- Reduced fertiliser N application rates.
- Better grassland management/ use of PastureBase.
- Incorporation of clover.
- Provision of adequate slurry storage
- Improved herd health.
- Breeding better/ more efficient animals (EBI/DBI).
- Earlier age at slaughter.
- Optimum replacement rate.

### 3. Implement your chosen actions

Teagasc recommends that you identify, and then implement the priority actions on your farm.

The initial focus should be on those actions which are most suited to your farm and which can have the greatest impact.

For intensive grassland farms, switching to protected urea as your source of nitrogen fertiliser can have the greatest impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

### 4. Keep records, monitor and review

Recordkeeping is essential to inform future decision-making, and to allow for the calculation of farm sustainability metrics over time.

### How to get involved?

You can sign up to avail of our services at [www.teagasc.ie/signpostsignup](http://www.teagasc.ie/signpostsignup) or by talking to your local Teagasc Advisor. See also the article by Jonathan Herron about AgNav on pages 28-29.

## CECRA visitors

A group of 20 young advisors recently travelled to Teagasc Oak Park, Carlow, as part of the European Forum for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services (EUFRAS) Training and Mentorship Programme.

The group consisted of 20 advisors from Slovenia, Austria, Ukraine, Latvia, North Macedonia and Ireland.

Also pictured are Teagasc staff George Ramsbottom, Rachel Clancy, Michelle Lavelle and Glindys Virginia Luciano from Young Professionals for Agricultural Rural Development (YPARD).

This training and mentorship programme is the first in partnership with EUFRAS and collaborating partners Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry (CAFS) in Slovenia, and YPARD).

The goal of this programme is not only to up-skill 20 young advisors from across Europe, but to ensure a support system through the establishment of a European-wide network of young advisory experts.

The benefits of the programme include the opportunity to practise hard and soft skills that equip advisors with the tools to have an effective and rewarding career in extension and advisory services. Additionally, participants will have the chance to complete the

Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas (CECRA).

The participants have built a strong network between colleagues from the various countries, and they have learned first-hand that the challenges faced in agriculture are not unique to their individual countries, but are faced throughout Europe.

A programme such as EUFRAS, helps participants to understand these challenges and to develop the skills to find solutions.

During their time in Teagasc Oak Park, the participants completed two CECRA modules: Module 7 | Shaping Advisory Processes and Module 9 | Facilitation and Discussion Group Management. The group visited two farms and carried out a technical farm visit.

The EUFRAS programme is a great opportunity for young advisors to develop their professional network and learn new skills. Teagasc staff in Ireland are also building their 'soft skills' by participating in CECRA. To earn the CECRA certificate Irish advisors, Teagasc or independent, will complete learning modules and also make a short visit to another European advisory organisation.



Young EUFRAS advisors.

## ADVERTORIAL



## Weighing up stocks

Maeve Regan,  
Head of Ruminant Nutrition, Agritech

**It's vitally important that the next generation of milking cows don't fall between two stools in the quieter part of the year. Now that calving is a distant memory, and the breeding season behind us, the focus should be on the class of 2025 to ensure replacement heifer target weights are achieved over the next number of months.**

Hitting target weights at certain milestones is crucial to ensure replacement heifers are on course to achieve the main goal of being 60% of their mature weight when bred at 15 months. Ideally at this point, 2023 born calves will have adjusted to a grass-based diet without set-backs and the transition period has gone smoothly.

For many the decision will have been made to remove supplementary concentrates from the diet and allow calves to maximise intakes of grass. As we move to the latter end of the grazing season, it will be important to assess weight gain from grass and reassess where these heifers are regarding target weight.

Weighing scales are by far one of the most underutilised management tools on farm. Timing of weighing can also be beneficial. By weighing in the weeks pre-housing, compared to weighing at the point of housing, allows farmers to identify heifers that are behind target. The best advice is to group accordingly and make alternative plans for those heifers under target weights.

The threshold figure for 2023 spring born weanling heifers is approximately 200kg in mid-September (33% of an assumed mature weight of 600kg). Heifers that are lighter than this should be separated and given priority access to the highest quality grass and re-introduce concentrates depending on their weight relative to the herds target.

1-2kg of concentrate/head/day should be sufficient. Research shows that youngstock at grass in summer can achieve weight gain of 0.85kg/day on grass only. While in the autumn where 1kg of concentrate plus high-quality grass is offered, average daily gain of 1 kg/head/day can be achieved.

**For further advice, contact your local Agritech Sales Advisor or visit [www.agritech.ie](http://www.agritech.ie)**



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