

Agroecological Transition, Knowledge and Power in the Irish Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)

Walsh Scholars Reference : 2024294

Research Institution: Teagasc

University: University of Galway

Location: Teagasc, Athenry, Galway

Funding: Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine

Proposed Start Date: September 2026

Project Summary

European dairy farming is facing increasing pressure to become more environmentally sustainable while maintaining viable farming systems and supporting rural livelihoods. In Ireland, achieving this transition will require not only technological innovation, but also effective approaches to knowledge exchange and advisory support within the agricultural sector. Agroecological transition (AT) promotes more sustainable farming practices by integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations. Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) play an important role in shaping how knowledge is created, shared, and applied among farmers, advisors, researchers, industry stakeholders, and policymakers.

Despite growing interest in agroecology and sustainability transitions, there is limited understanding of how advisory and knowledge systems can effectively support agroecological change within Irish dairy farming. Existing advisory structures may be influenced by institutional arrangements, established practices, and power dynamics that affect how knowledge is recognised and implemented. There is a need to better understand how interactions within AKIS influence the development and uptake of agroecological knowledge and practices.

This four-year PhD forms part of the TEDY project and will investigate how Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems can support agroecological transition within the Irish dairy sector. The project will focus on the role of Agroecological Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS) as a link between policy objectives, scientific knowledge, and farm-level practice. Using qualitative and participatory research approaches, including network analysis, narrative engagement, case studies, and participatory co-design, the student will explore how advisory systems can evolve towards more inclusive and collaborative models of knowledge exchange.

The project will contribute to research on agricultural sustainability, governance, innovation systems, and just transitions. The findings will help inform the future development of advisory and knowledge systems aligned with Irish and EU sustainability objectives. The student will gain experience in interdisciplinary and participatory research within a nationally and internationally relevant research area.

Supervision

The project will be jointly supervised by Dr Áine Macken-Walsh at Teagasc and Dr Brian McGrath at the University of Galway. Dr Macken-Walsh has expertise in rural sociology, agricultural knowledge systems, social sustainability, and participatory approaches to agricultural and rural development, with a particular focus on innovation, advisory systems, and socio-cultural dimensions of agricultural change. Dr McGrath brings expertise in rural geography, rural development, governance, and social change, with research interests relating to sustainability, communities, and rural transformation.

The supervisory team combines strengths in rural sociology, governance, agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS), and participatory research approaches, providing a strong interdisciplinary framework to support both the project objectives and the student's research development.

Research Environment

You will be registered at the University of Galway for the duration of your studies and based primarily at Teagasc Athenry. The student will work within a collaborative and interdisciplinary research environment involving researchers across Teagasc and the University of Galway.

The project provides opportunities to engage with research on agricultural sustainability, advisory systems, rural development, and innovation, while benefiting from strong links between research, policy, and practice within the agri-food sector.

Career and Training Opportunities

The Teagasc Walsh Scholars Programme provides a structured four-year training and development framework designed to support both academic excellence and long-term career readiness. Scholars develop advanced scientific and analytical expertise alongside transferable skills in communication, project management, and stakeholder engagement through expert-led training, workshops, and tailored professional development.

Opportunities are provided to present research at national and international conferences, supporting professional networking and active engagement with the wider research community. Dedicated final-year career supports focus on preparing scholars for impactful roles across research, industry, advisory services, and policy, in Ireland and internationally.

Through the Teagasc International Training Awards, scholars may undertake an international research placement of up to 12 weeks aligned with their PhD project. Outstanding achievement may also be recognised through the Walsh Scholars of the Year and Gold Medal Awards.

Candidate Profile and Eligibility

- Hold an undergraduate degree or equivalent in a relevant discipline such as gender studies, sociology, political science, agricultural science, or a related field
- Demonstrate enthusiasm for field-based research and a willingness to spend considerable time conducting fieldwork
- Show motivation to develop analytical and research skills
- Possess good written and verbal communication skills and the ability to work effectively as part of a research team
- Meet postgraduate entry requirements of University of Galway
- Applicants whose first language is not English must meet the postgraduate English language requirements, including a minimum IELTS score of 6.0.

Funding Details

Fully funded 4-year PhD, funded by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine

- €25,000 annual stipend
- University fees covered up to €6,000 per annum

How to Apply

Applicants should submit a CV and covering letter detailing their qualifications and experience to **Áine Macken-Walsh** aine.mackenwalsh@teagasc.ie and **Brian McGrath** brian.mcgrath@universityofgalway.ie quoting "Walsh Scholars PhD Application – Ref 2024294" in the subject line. **Application closing date: 5pm, Friday, 12th June 2026.**

Interviews

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview in **late June 2026**. Online interviews can be accommodated.



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Further Information

Informal queries can be directed to: **Áine Macken-Walsh** aine.mackenwalsh@teagasc.ie **Brian McGrath** brian.mcgrath@universityofgalway.ie

Learn more about the Walsh Scholars Programme at: <https://teagasc.ie/about/research-innovation/the-walsh-scholars-programme/about-the-programme/>