



Spatial Analysis of Farmer Health Engagement and Service Delivery (SAFES)

Walsh Scholars Reference Number: 2026017

University: University College Dublin

Funding: Teagasc

Research Institution: Teagasc

Location: Teagasc Ashtown, Dublin 15

Proposed Start Date: September 2026

Project Summary

Irish farmers experience disproportionately high rates of adverse health outcomes, including cardiovascular disease, mental health challenges, and occupational injury. These risks are compounded by geographic isolation, demanding work patterns, and cultural barriers that limit engagement with conventional healthcare services. Improving access to appropriate, culturally competent health support is increasingly recognised as a core dimension of agricultural sustainability, yet evidence-based approaches remain limited.

This PhD will investigate the spatial and cultural determinants of farmer health and healthcare engagement in Ireland, focusing on assessing livestock marts as alternative settings for delivering health services to hard-to-reach farming populations. The research will map geographic patterns in farmer health outcomes and service availability, examine how rurality and cultural norms influence health-seeking behaviour, and evaluate the effectiveness of mart-based interventions relative to traditional healthcare models.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the project will analyse national farmer health datasets ($n > 2,500$) to identify spatial disparities, undertake a national survey comparing farmer experiences with mart-based and conventional services, and conduct interviews with farmers, healthcare providers, mart managers, and agricultural advisors to explore barriers to access and cultural competence. A stakeholder-led Delphi process will develop a consensus-based framework for monitoring farmer health and wellbeing.

Project outputs will include spatial tools to identify priority regions for intervention and practical recommendations to support integration of farmer-focused health services within agricultural advisory and policy frameworks.

Supervision

The successful candidate will be supervised by Dr David Meredith (Teagasc Ashtown), an expert in rural development and spatial analysis with extensive experience in farmer health research, and Professor Catherine Blake (UCD School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science), who leads research on health service delivery and community-based health interventions. Dr Emma Dillon (Teagasc) will provide additional co-supervision, contributing expertise in agricultural economics and farm sustainability.

Research Environment

You will be registered at University College Dublin and based at the Teagasc Ashtown Research Centre, within the Department of Agri-Food Business and Spatial Analysis, for the duration of your studies. The research environment brings together multidisciplinary expertise across rural development, spatial analysis, public health, agricultural economics, and sustainability. You will have access to advanced spatial analysis facilities, extensive farm and advisory networks, and strong links with policymakers, healthcare providers, and agricultural stakeholders at national and international levels.

This project offers unique opportunities for engagement with policymakers and service providers, including the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Health Service Executive, as well as collaboration with farming organisations and healthcare professionals. As a Walsh Scholar, you will be part of a vibrant interdisciplinary research community, with opportunities for collaboration across Teagasc, UCD, and external partners.

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

Applicants should ideally:

- Hold a First or Second Class Honours degree (2.1 or equivalent) or a Master's degree in public health, geography, rural studies, agricultural science, sociology, health services research, or a related discipline
- Demonstrate experience in quantitative and/or qualitative research methods, with strong analytical and data-handling skills
- Show an interest in rural health, agricultural sustainability, or health service delivery
- Possess excellent communication and interpersonal skills for stakeholder engagement
- Be willing to travel for fieldwork and engage with farmers, healthcare providers, and policymakers
- Hold a full, clean driving licence valid in Ireland
- Meet University College Dublin postgraduate entry requirements, including English language requirements where applicable
- Experience with spatial analysis (GIS), survey research, or rural/agricultural contexts would be advantageous but is not essential.

Funding Details

This is a fully funded four-year PhD funded by Teagasc, including:

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

How to Apply

Applicants should complete the [online application form](#) by **5:00pm on Wednesday, 18 March 2026**.

Applications must include a curriculum vitae and a 1–2 page statement of motivation, submitted as part of the online application.

Interviews

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to interview in **early to mid-April 2026**.

Further Information

Informal enquiries are welcome and may be directed to:

Dr David Meredith – david.meredith@teagasc.ie; Prof Catherine Blake: catherine.blake@ucd.ie