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Facilitating Farmers' Establishment of Farm Partnerships: a Participatory Template

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Facilitating Farmers' Establishment of Farm Partnerships: a Participatory Template

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Áine Macken-Walsh¹ and Ben Roche²

1. Introduction

Farm Partnerships, where two or more partners operate their enterprises jointly, are becoming increasingly popular in Ireland with almost 600 formally registered Milk Production Partnerships in existence. Partnerships are associated with wide-ranging economic and social benefits and are identified by Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) as critically important to the future development of agriculture. As relatively new organisational structures in the Irish context, however, little information has been available to date on Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships or the factors that influence farmers' establishment of partnerships.

This document is informed by the findings of a collaborative project between Teagasc's *Research and Knowledge Transfer* Directorates. The project (2008–2011) explored Irish farmers' experiences of partnerships, focusing specifically on Milk Production Partnerships (MPPs), which are the prevalent type of formalised partnerships currently in operation on Irish farms. The project examined the experiences of two groups of Irish farmers: those who established a MPP; and those who actively considered but, for various reasons, chose not to establish a MPP.

Farmers with diverse circumstances, needs, work preferences, and aspirations have established Farm Partnerships in Ireland. Partnerships, as agreements that can be customised to farmers' different needs, are versatile and flexible. Because of this flexibility and versatility, a detailed planning process is required. Farm Partnerships were found to offer a wide variety of benefits to farmers, but this depended on the quality of the investment made in drawing up a comprehensive partnership agreement.

Drawing from research that examined Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships, this document identifies some critical factors that warrant careful consideration in the partnership planning process.

Benefits of Farm Partnerships are highlighted, as are particularly challenging and contentious factors. A flexible template for a participatory extension process, customised to facilitating the formation of Farm Partnerships in the Irish context, is set out. First, a summary of international and Irish experience of Farm Partnerships is presented.

2. Farm Partnerships: explanation and overview of benefits

A Farm Partnership, put simply, is where two or more farmers join resources and efforts in order to acquire various benefits. The benefits associated with partnerships are diverse, including *economic* benefits, *social* benefits, and *occupational health, well-being and safety* benefits. Various joint farming ventures are prevalent in New Zealand, Canada, Portugal, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, France, and in the UK. The model most closely related to formalised Farm Partnerships in Ireland is the French GAEC³ model.

Why have Farm Partnerships emerged and become prevalent in countries worldwide? Farm Partnerships are acknowledged to provide a solution to a common challenge experienced by farmers. Farmers who do not have the manpower or finances to improve the financial performance of their farms, yet wish to improve the economic viability of their farms, can use a Farm Partnership to *access the manpower and resources* they require. Farm Partnerships, while facilitating farms to increase their scale and manpower, also allows the family farm to remain in *family ownership*. While family farms in partnership operate together as larger entities, they are distinct from industrial-scale corporate farms because they are run by cooperating family farms.

Farm Partnerships can enhance the attractiveness of farming as an occupation. Farmers working together

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can experience less work-related pressures with more time off and enhanced quality of life. Safety on the farm can be improved as a result of having a 'second pair of hands' when required. Younger farmers can enter into farming via a Farm Partnership, allowing them an investment stake in the business they help develop. Farmers establishing a partnership bring together different skills and expertise, which can enhance the overall operation of the farm.

In their study of joint farming arrangements in Cornwall, UK, Turner and Hambly (2005) identify a number of benefits associated with joint farming ventures:

Benefits of Joint Farming Ventures in the UK

- Improved economies of scale
- Promotion of the development of diversification activities
- Increased leisure time
- Easier access for new entrants
- Alternative exit strategies
- More efficient use of fixed costs
- Improved use of farmers' skills and specialisms

Source: Hambly and Turner (2005)

Farm Partnerships are common in Norway, where over 25% of dairy farmers are involved. Joint Farming Ventures were first established in Norway in 1995. Ninety percent of the farmers in joint farming ventures involve two or three farmers, while the remaining 10% involve more than three farmers. A range of benefits similar to the range identified in the UK is associated with partnerships in Norway. A survey conducted by Almas (2011) of farmers' motives to enter into joint farming ventures ranked the motives in order of importance:

Benefits of Joint Farming Ventures in Norway (ranked in order of importance)

1. Flexibility and time off: more leisure time, holidays and better social and family life
2. More security during illness
3. Improved work environment vis-à-vis farm improvements; and having company at work thus reducing isolation
4. Reduced work-load, in the context of demands to undertake off-farm work
5. Improved income
6. Reduced costs
7. Reduced investment risk, reducing psychological stress

Source: Almas (2011)

3. Farm Partnerships in Ireland: Overview

A Teagasc study of Milk Production Partnerships (MPPs) was undertaken between 2008–2012. The study identified the following main types of potential benefits:

Benefits of Milk Production Partnerships: Ireland

- Farm Partnerships were used as a strategy to develop larger farm enterprises/increase scale by managing two previously independent enterprises together
- Farm Partnerships were formed to access increased milk quota
- Farm Partnerships were formed to increase efficiency by consolidating land and facilities and by developing new management strategies and business plans
- Farm Partnerships assisted farmers to share their work-loads to cope with the extra work involved in up-scaling and applying new technologies on the farm
- Farm Partnerships introduced new skills, specialisations and occupational preferences to enhance the operation of the farm
- Farm Partnerships fostered new diversification activities on the farm by bringing in new expertise and business interests
- Farm Partnerships facilitated off farm work
- Farm Partnerships were used to share decision-making power between members of farm families (spouses, heirs, for example)
- Farm Partnerships reduced isolation in farmers' working lives and improved farm safety
- Farm Partnerships facilitated family circumstances and needs where, for example, farmers had childcare responsibilities
- Farm Partnerships allowed farmers time-off to pursue other interests and take holidays, improving their quality of life

Source: Macken-Walsh (2011)

Milk Production Partnerships (MPPs), are the prevalent type of formalised partnerships currently in operation on Irish farms. The first Milk Production Partnership in Ireland was registered in 2002 and the number currently operating is 591 (January 2012 figure). There has been strategic inter-agency collaboration to support the establishment of Farm Partnerships in Ireland, involving primarily Teagasc, DAFM, the Revenue Commissioners and the Law Society. Many obstacles to the establishment of Farm Partnerships have been removed and incentives have been put in place⁴ (see Figure 3). Over comparable time-periods, however, the rate of establishment is slower in Ireland than in some other countries. Over the five years subsequent to the first introduction of Farm Partnerships in Ireland (2002) and in Norway (1995), the rate of Norwegian farmers' establishment of Farm Partnerships was double the counterpart Irish rate.

Figure 1: Distribution of Milk Production Partnerships (MPPs) in Ireland, January 2012



Figure 2: Milk Production Partnership Register (2002–2012)

Milk Production Partnership Register

Quota Year	No. Registered	No. Deregistered	Active No. on Register	Reason for Deregistration
2002/3	13	0	13	NA
2003/4	188	0	201	NA
2004/5	107	7	301	7 non-compliant ⁵
2005/6	95	3	393	1 death, 1 accident; 1 due to EU/DAFM Schemes ⁶
2006/7	25	13	404	8 retirement of parent; 2 relationship 1 non-compliant, 1 sale of farm; 1 other
2007/8	38	11	431	8 retirement of parent; 1 death; 1 financial; 1 other
2008/9	57	27	462	14 retirement of parent; 4 non-compliant; 4 relationship; 2 sale of farm; 1 death; 1 disease issues; 1 other
2009/10	51	26	487	21 retirement of parent; 2 non-compliant; 1 sold farm; 1 registered company; 1 other
2010/11	47	24	501	15 retirement of parent; 3 non-compliant; 2 death; 1 relationship; 1 sale of quota; 1 personal; 1 registered company
2011/31.01.12	87	5	591	3 retirement of a parent; 2 relationship; 1 death
Cumulative	708	117	591	

4. In his Budget 2012 speech (Dec. 6th, 2012), Ireland's Minister for Finance said, "There is a growing acceptance that greater use of the Farm Partnership model can not only help to increase scale, but can also help to develop the sector's skill set through attracting more new entrants to the sector. To encourage Farm Partnership formation, I am introducing an enhanced 50 per cent stock relief for all registered Farm Partnerships and a 100 per cent stock relief for certain young trained farmers forming such partnerships. Subject to clearance with the European Commission under State Aid rules, these reliefs will be made available until December 2015."

5. Examples of non-compliance with MPP regulations are as follows: the non-renewal of annual certificate of registration; farmers exceeding off-farm income limit; partners disposing of lands; partners emigrating.

6. Farmers involved in Farm Partnerships can be disadvantaged from availing of certain EU schemes currently. For example, farms involved in a Farm Partnership are not eligible for separate payments under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, but one single payment which has an upper threshold of e3,500. Farms involved in a Farm Partnership are treated as one farm with respect to modulation under the Single Farm Payment Scheme, with consequential deductions in payments. Efforts are underway at a policy-making level to address these issues.

Irish Milk Production Partnerships have been relatively successful. Of the 708 Farm Partnerships registered to date, just nine have been deregistered as a result of a relationship problem between the parties. Of the total 117 deregistered Farm Partnerships, 75 were due to the retirement or death of one of the partners.

The figures presented in Figure 2 (page 4) reflect formally registered Milk Production Partnerships, which have written legal agreements (they do not reflect cases where farmers work together informally). These

partnerships have been assisted by a comprehensive approach to preparing detailed written partnership agreements. When Farm Partnerships are formalised with written legal agreements, they offer a regulatory and protective function to the parties involved. Such written legal agreements manage not only the terms of farmers working together, but also include provisions for dissolving the Farm Partnerships. Significant investment is required in the formulation of a workable Farm Partnership agreement, an investment that can enhance the partnership's success.

4. Extension Activity Promoting Farm Partnerships

Teagasc's Dairy Partnership Registration Office and a limited number of private professionals have provided individualised support to farmers establishing Farm Partnerships. The following presents a snapshot of the various types of extension activity undertaken by Teagasc's Dairy Partnership Registration Office in the promotion and development of Farm Partnerships.

Figure 3: Promotion, Extension and Development Activities

- **1991–2007:** Field-trips to France; Canada; Holland and New-Zealand to review best practice in policy approaches to the support and regulation of joint farming ventures and elements suited to the Irish context specifically.
- **1991–2000:** Establishment of key inter-agency and multi-stakeholder strategic alliances to pursue the development of an Irish model.
- **1999:** Establishment of 'Committee for the Establishment of Partnership Farming in Ireland', a multi-stakeholder committee for the establishment of partnership farming that agreed details of a framework for partnerships which was then acted upon by the Department of Agriculture.
- **1999–ongoing:** Co-development of legislation involving the Law Society, Revenue Commissioners and relevant Government Departments and Agencies.
- **2000–2004:** Co-development of two booklets on the taxation of Milk Production Partnerships by the Revenue Commissioners and Teagasc.
- **2002–2004:** Co-development of a Specimen Partnership Agreement by the Law Society, Teagasc, Department of Agriculture, Revenue Commissioners, legal professionals and accountancy professionals.
- **2000–ongoing:** Iterative development of partnership legislation and liaising with DAFM in the introduction of various provisions.
- **2000–ongoing:** Efforts to maintain Farm Partnerships as a priority policy issue (see Figure 4).
- **2008–ongoing:** Facilitation of research on Farm Partnerships – National Rural Network, Teagasc, Deise 1250, University College Dublin (UCD).
- **2011–ongoing:** Support the formation of farmer-led interest groups representing those involved in Farm Partnerships.
- **2000–ongoing:** Promoting and disseminating information in relation to Farm Partnerships to the wider farming community.
- **2002–ongoing:** Formal registration and deregistration of Farm Partnerships.
- **2002–ongoing:** Providing support in the development and revision of Farm Partnership agreements.
- **2011–2012:** Co-development of a research-informed template for a group-based extension process to facilitate the establishment of Farm Partnerships – Farm Partnership Incubation Group.

Furthermore, Teagasc's Dairy Partnership Registration Office has pursued and liaised with key stakeholders in achieving the following legislative provisions to accommodate and support Milk Production Partnerships specifically:

Figure 4: Legislative Provisions

- **2000:** General Legislative basis for Milk Production Partnerships provided by the Department of Agriculture in Milk Quota Regulations.
- **2002:** Further detailed provisions for Milk Production Partnerships provided in Milk Quota Regulations
- **2002–2006:** Special provisions for Farm Partnerships in Department of Agriculture/EU Schemes including REPS and Grant Aid
- **2004:** Publication of 'Partnerships and Farming' specimen agreements
- **2004:** Publication of two booklets on the taxation of Milk Production Partnerships in collaboration with Revenue Commissioners
- **2006:** Amendment of the Finance Act with a provision relating to Capital Gains Tax for Milk Production Partnerships in collaboration with the Department of Finance
- **2008:** Amendment to Finance Act in relation to income averaging for Milk Production Partnerships
- **2008:** Broadening and simplification of the rules for Milk Production Partnerships in Milk Quota Regulations 2009: Introduction of special provisions for Milk Production Partnerships by the Department of Agriculture with the agreement of the European Commission for REPS 4 (2009).
- **2010–2011:** Introduction of special provisions and enhanced payments for Milk Production Partnerships by the Department of Agriculture with the agreement of the European Commission for AEOS 1 (2010); AEOS 2 (2011); the Dairy Efficiency Programme (2010); and the Dairy Equipment Scheme (2011)
- **2012:** Enhancement of Stock Relief for partners in Milk Production Partnerships in the 2012 Finance Bill
- **2008-Ongoing:** Liaising with The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine to address obstacles such as lack of recognition of the status of individual farmer status regarding the application of Modulation under the Single Farm Payment Scheme and the Disadvantaged Payment Scheme

5. Facilitating the Establishment of Farm Partnerships

In order to be successful and workable in 'real life' situations, farmers must take ownership of their Farm Partnership agreements. Farmers can develop agreements to suit their own circumstances, needs, preferences and aspirations. Advisors can facilitate farmers to identify solutions and enhancements that are suitable to their own farms and lives. This is a time-consuming process for both facilitators (Farm Advisors, for example) and farmers, however it is important that a hurried approach is not taken.

Customised planning processes involving the individuals establishing Farm Partnerships are necessary. However, a *group-based extension method* (such as a discussion group or 'extension circle'), addressing a comprehensive range of issues and considerations relevant to partnerships in general, has the potential to serve as an important *preparatory process* for farmers considering Farm Partnerships. Group-based extension processes can facilitate farmers to consider critical issues in preparation for individualised planning supports; and can operate as a forum for learning

about established, workable partnerships. The use of group-based extension processes also responds to a central challenge, which is the need for effective extension approaches that use fewer resources to support larger numbers of farmers.

Group-based extension methods can potentially be very effective. Teagasc has expertise in facilitating discussion groups and has trained hundreds of facilitators.⁷ Effective facilitation is sensitive to the *financial, social and cultural factors motivating farmers*. Research on the broad range of factors that motivates farmers has the capacity to enrich group-based extension methods. The research can provide guiding information so that the group is focused on matters that are important to farmers, thus enhancing the responsiveness of the extension process and its relevance to farmers.

A research project was initiated by Teagasc (2008-2012)⁸ to explore Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships⁹. Eleven case-studies were undertaken to

7. Teagasc has produced a comprehensive Handbook for Facilitation that sets out a methodology for agricultural discussion groups.

8. Teagasc (2008) *The Future of Farm Partnerships in Ireland and Factors Influencing their Operation*, RMIS 5877, (June 2008 – January 2012).

9. Detailed research findings are presented and are forthcoming in articles including Macken-Walsh (2011); and Macken-Walsh & Byrne (Forthcoming).

explore the experiences of farmers who are operating a Milk Production Partnership (MPP); and farmers who actively considered but, for various reasons, did not establish a MPP. The case-studies represented the diversity of Irish farmers who are involved in or are considering Farm Partnerships. An aim of the project was to identify from farmers' perspectives the incentives and disincentives to establishing partnerships and the advantages and disadvantages associated with partnerships. The findings of the project have led to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Irish farmers' establishment of Farm Partnerships. The findings have informed the design and focus of a template for a group-based extension method, which is set out in the following section of this document.

6. Farm Partnership Incubation Group

A group-based extension method to support the establishment of Farm Partnerships has been designed by the authors of this document and is called a *Farm Partnership Incubation Group*. The Farm Partnership Incubation Group is essentially a discussion and action group, constituted of farmers who are candidates for establishing partnerships and who wish to explore the feasibility of establishing partnerships. The core objective of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group is to promote a *farmer-led learning and development process* that will assist farmers to comprehensively consider and prepare for Farm Partnerships in an empowered way.

The Farm Partnership Incubation Group creates a process where participants confront the critical issues determining the success of Farm Partnerships. Participants are facilitated to consider both the potential challenges and the potential benefits associated with Farm Partnerships. Some critical issues, relating for example to compatibility; work-sharing; and relationships between members of farm families, may not be obvious to farmers who have little or no direct experience or knowledge of Farm Partnerships and how they work in practice. Some of the critical issues determining the success of Farm Partnerships are particularly contentious and sensitive, and farmers may be reluctant to address the issues unless prompted to do so. Yet, such issues can either 'make' or 'break' Farm Partnerships, and must be addressed in planning processes. Group-based extension processes can be an effective way of addressing critical issues because the issues are discussed in a collective, non-personalised and generalised way, allowing farmers to more freely discuss the issues as hypothetical issues.

Aside from facilitating farmers to address issues critical to Farm Partnerships' success, the Farm Partnership Incubation Group serves the purpose of channelling to the group appropriate information supports necessary for the formation of Farm Partnerships. Expertise from Teagasc; the Law Society; the Revenue Commissioners; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM); District Veterinary Offices (DVOs); and research expertise is channelled and made accessible to the group. Participatory learning processes are used and interactive learning with existing Farm Partnerships is promoted, involving farm visits and open discussions with farmers and their families. The group can be used as a broader learning mechanism where other types of supports, such as technologies relevant to farm efficiency, will be introduced and discussed.

The Farm Partnership Incubation Group includes a *Participatory Action Research* project, undertaken by researchers. The project examines the process of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group over time, identifying factors influencing participants' (changing) attitudes in relation to partnerships; analysing how the Farm Partnership Incubation Group extension process influences the participants' decisions and success in establishing partnerships; and tracking the progress and experiences of the participants who establish Farm Partnerships.

Objectives of Farm Partnership Incubation Group

- Facilitate the group to take ownership of the process
- Using sociological research findings, prompt participants' learning of the key benefits and challenges experienced by Irish farmers who have established/attempted to establish Farm Partnerships
- Channel information supports critical to participants' establishment of Farm Partnerships in an empowered way and facilitate participants' learning in relation to:
 - Legal expertise
 - Accounting and Taxation expertise
 - Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) policy expertise
 - District Veterinary Offices' (DVOs) expertise
 - Research expertise (economics, sociology, animal production research, for example)
- Facilitate participants' access to examples of existing Farm Partnerships:
 - Facilitate open discussions with farm families working in partnership
 - Farm visits

- Facilitate dedicated sessions involving wider farm family members
- Provide broader learning objectives, incorporating learning relevant to farm management practices and technologies
- Incorporate research to track the process of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group over time, identifying factors influencing participants' (changing) attitudes in relation to partnerships; how the Farm Partnership Incubation Group extension process influences the participants' decisions and success in establishing partnerships; and the progress of the participants who establish Farm Partnerships.

7. Facilitating 'Ownership' and 'Empowerment'

Research conducted on Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships found that partnerships have the capacity to accommodate different circumstances, needs, preferences and aspirations. Partnerships were found to be versatile in accommodating diverse combinations of farmers, for example neighbouring farmers, siblings, or parents and offspring.

Different Relationships between Irish Farmers in Partnership

Farm Partnerships have been established in Ireland by partners who have different relationships:

- Neighbours
- Brothers
- Brothers in law
- Mothers and Sons
- Fathers and Sons
- Fathers and Daughters
- Husbands and Wives

Different Roles of Irish Farmers in Partnership

Farm Partnerships have been established in Ireland by partners who have taken different roles on the farm. Farmers taking different but complementary roles on a farm can lead to greater efficiency:

- Farm owners providing management input only
- Full-time farm operators
- Half-time farmers
- Seasonal farmers
- Farmers pursuing technology adoption on the farm

- Farmers taking responsibility for milking activities
- Farmers taking responsibility for animal husbandry
- Entrepreneurs, adding value to primary product on the farm

Different Circumstances, Needs, Preferences and Aspirations of Irish Farmers in Partnership

Farm Partnerships accommodate farmers' different circumstances, skills and interests.

- **Circumstances:** social, economic and occupational circumstances for example *family or age-related circumstances or the demands of an off-farm job*
- **Needs:** economic, human or physical resource needs for example *a need to increase scale to improve economic viability or a need to have help and human company on the farm*
- **Preferences:** occupational preferences and strategies towards fulfilment for example *a preference to focus on a particular aspect of the farm business or to accommodate an off-farm occupation or social interest*
- **Aspirations:** financial, occupation or social aspirations for example *an aspiration to have a profitable farm enterprise or to have a gradual retirement from the farm to pursue other interests*

The Farm Partnership Incubation Group inevitably includes participants who have diverse circumstances, needs, preferences and aspirations. To manage and accommodate learning in a group of diverse participants, the even input of participants to deciding how the group operates and the issues that are addressed must be facilitated as much as possible. There is no standard method, approach or tool that guarantees successful facilitation¹⁰. The process is dependent not only on the facilitator, but on group dynamics. Facilitation is a highly intuitive process and the facilitator must be continuously attuned to and responsive to the dynamic of the group in terms of the participants' behaviour and the process being played out vis-à-vis the achievement of objectives. There are, however, guidelines that can improve chances of success. Understanding the philosophy of these guidelines and practicing their implementation leads to greater understandings of how to intuitively and successfully facilitate group processes.

10. There is a vast literature on the methods and approaches (systematic combinations of strategies and concepts) and tools (individual exercises) that can be used for encouraging meaningful participation. See UNFAO Field Tools Database www.fao.org/Participation/ft_find.jsp and online resources at the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication, College of Environmental and Agricultural Sciences, University of Georgia http://www.caes.uga.edu/Publications/pubDetail.cfm?pk_id=7720&pg=dl&ak=Agriculture%20Leadership,%20Education%20and%20Communication

Summary guidelines for facilitation are set out by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (UNFAO) as follows:

How to Facilitate a Meeting

1. Try to keep yourself and your personal opinions as much as possible out of the group process. Aim to be a good observer (keep an eye on the social interactions between participants of the group, as much as on the substance of the group's work). Try to see yourself as a kind of instrument, maintaining a balance between letting the group work on their own and actively assisting them to keep focus, reduce conflict, and maintain equal input among participants.
2. Make sure that there is a comfortable working environment (adequate space and light, appropriate temperature, minimal outside disturbances, necessary equipment readily available, such as a well-prepared agenda, visualization materials, handouts etc.).
3. Try to get prior information on/a comprehensive impression of all participants in order to be able to assess their strengths and weaknesses thus providing optimal support to each of them. (Be aware that you may personally like or dislike various participants and that such should not influence how you support each participant equally).
4. At the beginning of a working session,
 - a. Let people introduce themselves in a way that does not make them uncomfortable (i.e. casually, not having to provide excessive information)
 - b. Introduce, at the group's first meeting, tools on how maintain constructive relationships within the group - how to generate consensus, for example – and encourage participants' comments and suggestions
 - c. Present the goal and timeframe of each meeting and allow time for participants to ask questions in relation to the goal or to modify the goal
 - d. Let the group decide the logistics of the group's work – e.g. time allocation to various topics and choosing to work in subgroups or as a whole group – allowing decisions to be revised as the work of the group progresses
5. Invite the participants to start work according to the agenda – offer proposals on working procedures/ tools to be used, but do not insist or feel offended if the group decides on something else

6. Encourage quieter persons to contribute and amicably try to restrict those who tend to talk too much (not according to your own opinion, but try to catch the mood of the group). Keep an overview and guide the group to adhere to,
 - a. The subject
 - b. Constructive ways of dealing with each other
 - c. The timeframe
(note: a conscious and common decision can be to change any of the above)
7. At the end of the session, give a summary of achievements and pending issues remaining. If necessary, let the participants decide on the next steps and persons responsible to initiate them. If they do wish and if time allows, let participants talk about their perceptions of the process and on how it may be improved on in future meetings of the group.

Source: Adapted from UNFAO Field Tools Database:
http://www.fao.org/Participation/ft_factl.jsp

8. Template for Facilitating the Farm Partnership Incubation Group

Taking a genuinely participatory approach to the Farm Partnership Incubation Group extension process, participants must be facilitated to take ownership and empowered roles in the process. The group process must be flexible to accommodate the issues that members identify as important. It is vital that the group process is flexible to accommodate the pace and direction of how participants' learning process is evolving. Inevitably, however, the Farm Partnership Incubation Group will involve a focus on the various economic, social and legal issues that are directly relevant to Farm Partnerships. The Farm Partnership Incubation Group, therefore, will necessarily involve participants' learning of specific information that facilitates them to successfully establish Farm Partnerships in an empowered way. The following sets out the three key areas of focus the Farm Partnership Incubation Group is likely to have:

1. *Facilitating Farmers' Learning of Technical Information Relevant to Farm Partnerships* (legal, taxation, procedural, financial)
2. *Facilitating Farmers' Learning of Benefits associated with Farm Partnerships and Practical 'Know-how'*
3. *Encouraging Farmers' Discussion of and Mediation through Key Issues that arise in Farm Partnerships in practice*

Templates for facilitating sessions relating to these key areas of focus are set out below. They can be easily adapted to focus on other areas that are of interest to participants.

9. Facilitating Farmers' Learning of Technical Information Relevant to Farm Partnerships

The Farm Partnership Incubation Group will facilitate farmers' learning of technical information relevant to establishing Farm Partnerships. This is information that is directly relevant to how Farm Partnerships operate, which farmers require to contemplate or establish Farm Partnerships in an informed and empowered way. Technical guidelines and information essential for the formation of Farm Partnerships is available on the Teagasc website and is listed in Annex I. While participants in the Farm Partnership Incubation Group may identify additional types of information they require, the following main categories of information sessions are envisaged:

Technical Information Instrumental for Farm Partnership Formation

- i. Legal expertise (*partnership law; components of a partnership agreement; legal relationship between parties' land/resources and the partnership agreement; terms of combination of assets; debt-related issues; partnership duration; terms of partnership termination; arbitration and management of disputes/unforeseen circumstances such as illness*)
- ii. Taxation expertise (*commencement and cessation rules; income averaging; valuation of assets on commencement and cessation; capital allowances; VAT; profit-sharing; Capital Gains Tax; Capital Acquisitions Tax; company taxation; partnership taxation; taxation where partner is acting as a company within a partnership*)
- iii. Regulative expertise from Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to the treatment of Partnerships under various schemes and policies (*REPS; AEOS; Single Farm Payment: Area-Based Payments such as Disadvantaged Areas Scheme; Milk Quota Regulations*)
- iv. Regulative expertise from the District Veterinary Offices (*management of herd numbers and herds in the context of a Farm Partnership*)
- v. Partnership Accounting specific to Farm Partnerships (*Partnership Capital Account; Partnership Current Account; Partnership Balance Sheet*)

Participants' learning in relation to these various areas of expertise requires the input of technical information to the group. As such, various meetings of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group will feature contributions from various 'experts'. However, it is important that farmers' learning is maximised from the experts' contributions. For effective learning, it is not always sufficient for experts to give a talk or lecture to a group of farmers, followed by an unmediated questions and answers session. Lectures and talks can be dull or jargonistic, soliciting a passive response from audience participants. Alternatively, lively and engaged group discussion can spontaneously happen on the occasion of a lecture or talk. This is often dependent on factors such as the presence of an interrogative and vocal person in the audience, or a speaker who is particularly engaging or adept at using 'every day' language in communicating specialist ideas to a non-specialist audience. Such factors may not be naturally present and to manage this reality, it is possible to take actions to mediate enhanced learning opportunities from expert contributions. Tools and techniques must be used to structure and manage experts' contributions so that participants can effectively interrogate the subject matter and learn from it. Such tools and techniques seek to achieve what is most critical to the learning process, which is that participants take ownership of the process and are empowered to interrogate, interpret and thereby use new forms of information.

9.1 'Brainstorming' Preparation Exercise

In advance of an expert's contribution (lecture/talk) to a group, it is important that the group prepares for the contribution. An important preparation exercise is to consider the specific topic of the lecture/talk and to 'brainstorm' what is particularly vital for the group to learn from the lecture/talk. *What exactly do they want to achieve from the lecture/talk? What information can they get from the talk that will be of strategic use to achieving their objectives?* The facilitator can assist the group to identify this information in advance of each expert contribution.

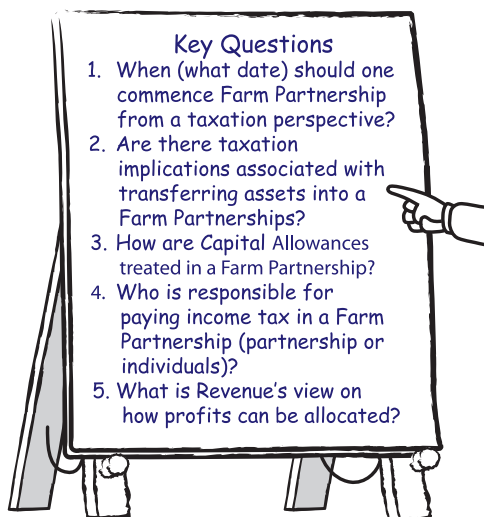
'Brainstorming' is a technique that when used strategically with a specific purpose, can be effective in generating participant-centred information. An example with reference to the Farm Partnership Incubation Group could be a brainstorming session in preparation for a lecture/talk on one area of technical expertise, such as *Taxation*. Facilitators can prompt the group to identify information by asking strategic questions, such as:

- What are the main tax issues that you want to know more about?
- What particular concerns do you have in relation to tax?

- What kinds of questions would you like to have answered by our invited expert?

Following a 'brainstorm' of what participants need to know about Taxation and Farm Partnerships, a discussion could potentially lead to organising the information into two main categories:

- Key topics of interest for supply to the upcoming expert contributor, who will be asked to incorporate a focus on them in their lecture/talk.
- Key questions for the expert in relation to taxation



9.2 Audience Reaction Team

Techniques can be used to manage the effectiveness of the lecture/talk itself in order to avoid relying on spontaneous lively discussion and interaction with the speaker, which may not happen. The 'Audience Reaction Team' is one such technique. It involves asking a small number (2-4) participants to come forward (or nominating participants) to form a 'panel' that sits at the front of the audience alongside the expert for the duration of the expert's lecture/talk.

The purpose of the panel is to interact with the expert to prompt his/her discussion/elaboration of key topics/questions of interest to the group (identified through the preparatory 'brainstorming' exercise). The Audience Reaction Team operates by the panel interrupting the expert if s/he says something that is difficult to understand, or when greater information/emphasis is sought on a topic of particular interest to the group. The technique enhances the group's learning from the expert's contribution, by improving clarity of communication and the focus of the contribution in terms of its relevance to the group.

Audience Reaction Team

The audience reaction team is a group of three to four members of the audience who react to a speaker or other resource person. They may interrupt the speaker to seek immediate clarification of parts that are not clear and otherwise assist the speaker in meeting the needs of a specific audience.

The audience reaction team may be used

1. To aid communication when the subject matter is likely to be difficult to understand.
2. To provide feedback from audience to speaker, and to get the views of the audience represented when the audience is large.

Some advantages

1. It makes possible the effective use of a speaker who otherwise might not effectively communicate with the audience.
2. By being formally represented on the program, interest may be stimulated among audience members.
3. It is fairly easy to organize.

Some limitations

1. A speaker may object to the implication that he or she may be a poor communicator or to the interruptions during the presentation. Adequate planning and preparation is required to avoid this.
2. The role of the majority of the audience is passive.
3. Some members of the team may over-participate while others may be too timid to do the job asked of them.

Physical requirements

1. Adequate seating so every member of the audience may see and hear the speakers in comfort.
2. A stage or a slightly raised platform large enough for the speakers, chairman and members of the reaction team.

Procedure

1. The chairperson or moderator introduces the topic and describes the technique that is to be used, including an explanation of how the reaction team functions and some reasons for using it.
2. The chairperson or moderator introduces the speaker to the audience with brief remarks about that person's position, experience and special qualifications for this particular appearance.
3. The team reacts at appropriate times.

Source: Fuhrman and Rohs (2011)

10. Facilitating Farmers' Learning of Benefits associated with Farm Partnerships and Practical 'Know-How' to Achieve Benefits

Farmers interested in learning more about farm partnerships and the types of benefits they offer can learn from the experiences of other Irish farmers who have already established Farm Partnerships. Farm Partnerships are versatile and can respond to farmers' different circumstances, needs, preferences and aspirations. Research on Irish farmers' experiences found that Farm Partnerships could give rise to different types of benefits and advantages (see page 3).

Techniques and exercises that involve farmers' contact with other farmers who have established Farm Partnerships are particularly effective in facilitating learning about the potential benefits of farm partnerships. Two examples of ways in which participants of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group can be effectively facilitated to learn from farmers who have established Farm Partnerships are the *Interview Technique* and *Farm Visits*.

10.1 Interview Technique

The Interview Technique is an effective tool for farmers to learn from other farmers' experiences. It provides an alternative to farmers giving formal presentations or talks to the Farm Partnership Incubation Group on one hand and to loose, unstructured discussions on the other. A strategic approach can be taken to highlight the *diversity of benefits* associated with Farm Partnerships. It is necessary to highlight the diversity of benefits identified by research on Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships because they are relevant in different ways to members of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group who have different circumstances, needs, preferences and aspirations.

The *Interview Technique* is instrumental for such a strategic approach and involves the facilitator interviewing farmers who are selected because of the diversity of benefits they have experienced and the associated diversity of their circumstances, needs, preferences and aspirations¹¹. Members of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group are the audience of this 'live' interview. The facilitator asks questions that prompt the farmers being interviewed to elaborate important contextual information in relation to various challenges they were experiencing and the way in which solutions were found through a Farm Partnership. The key benefits of Farm Partnerships are highlighted in this way, providing a focused introduction to an open discussion and questions from the audience¹².

Interview Technique

The interview is a presentation in which one or more resource people (i.e. farmers with experience of Farm Partnerships) respond to questioning by one or more interviewers.

The interview may be used...

1. To explore a specific topic in depth where a more formal presentation is not desired by either resource expert or audience

Some advantages

1. The presentation is less formal than a speech or lecture
2. The audience is represented by the interviewer, which saves time and can be an efficient way of targeting key topics of interest
3. There is some assurance that the discussion will follow the interests of the members of the audience, as the interviewer asks questions that directly reflect the interests and objectives of the group
4. Many resource people shy away from formal presentation and may not be willing to invest the required preparation time. The Interview Technique delegates some responsibility to the interviewer and provides a more relaxed method for the resource person to impart their knowledge and experiences
5. For the audience, listening to an interview can be far more engaging than listening to a formal presentation. Enhanced learning is possible in this context.

11. Such information is available from the Teagasc's Dairy Partnerships Registration Office.

12. The Interview Technique is distinct from interviews that are designed and conducted for research purposes. The questions used in the Interview Technique are designed to illustrate and highlight contextual factors and benefits that were identified through in-depth research on Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships. The questions are thus 'biased' towards illustrating and highlighting these particular contextual factors and benefits in order to facilitate farmers' learning of these particular factors and benefits.

Some limitations

1. The role of the audience is basically passive
2. The effectiveness of the technique is reliant on interviewer being strategic in terms of achieving the objectives of the audience and his/her adeptness at managing a lively, interesting and relevant interview

Physical requirements

1. Adequate seating so every member of the audience may see and hear the speakers in comfort
2. Use of a platform/ microphone where necessary

Procedure

1. The interviewer and resource person discuss the overall topic and agree on the general line of questioning
2. The interviewer asks the resource person questions designed to explore various aspects of the topic and improvises questions as the interview progresses
3. Open discussion and questions from the audience may be used at the end of the interview.

Source: Adapted from Fuhrman and Rohs (2011)

Interview Topic 1: Efficiency, Productivity and Financial Benefits

Farm Partnerships offer opportunities to upscale and access quota, while avoiding the need to purchase land. A common characteristic of Irish farmers who established Farm Partnerships was that they had a strong intention to develop their farms as profitable businesses. Farm Partnerships are attractive to farmers who want to expand their businesses. On that basis it's arguable that most of the farmers establishing Farm Partnerships are predisposed towards and motivated by efficiency and productivity on their farms. However, the Farm Partnership planning process, as essentially involving strategic business planning and resource-sharing agreements, can be a valuable learning process for farmers who have not heretofore been focused on farm efficiency and productivity, leading to a more business-like approach to farming once the Farm Partnership has been established. The Farm Partnership Incubation Group can strategically be used as a broader learning mechanism, focusing on business planning and contemporary farm technologies and management practices. Advisors facilitating the Farm Partnership planning process should ideally be specialists in the range of management practices and technologies available to farmers.

Questions:

- Q. What were the financial factors that led you to consider a Farm Partnership?
- Q. What were your ambitions for the farm?
- Q. In what ways did the Farm Partnership offer you solutions and promise for the future?

Interview Topic 2: A 'second or third pair of hands'

Offering solutions to problems associated with the 'one-man-farm', Farm Partnerships can in a versatile way bring extra labour input to the farm. The availability of an additional second or third 'pair of hands' can accommodate a range of on-farm business developments and off-farm personal/social interests.

Farmers working long days can have little time to invest in business planning, learning and education, implementation of new farm management techniques, or adoption of new technologies. This inevitably creates challenges to achieving best-practice and efficiency on their farms, which in turn creates additional problems and demands on farmers' time. Where farmers would ideally wish to increase the scale of their enterprise, they may not have the time to resource such an expansion.

In the context of farm spouses working off-farm and farm offspring pursuing alternative education and career opportunities, many farmers work alone. Farmers can experience loneliness and isolation in their daily work. Farmers operating their enterprises alone often work long days and weekends, while also feeling pressurised to contribute to household work and rearing of children particularly when their spouses also work long hours off-farm and need help. Farmers can feel that their work is 'never done' and have little or no opportunity to take holidays or pursue other interests off the farm. Poor quality of life is associated with poor work-life balance. Relationship problems can emerge in such situations. In the context of a small farm enterprise that demands a high work-input with little financial return, quality of life issues can become critical.

Questions:

- Q. When you were working in a 'one man' operation, did you have enough time to do everything you wanted to?
- Q. Were there particular activities you felt you should have been spending more time on (e.g. business planning/learning of new technologies)?
- Q. Did not having help hinder the development of your farm in any way?
- Q. What are the benefits of having help/an 'extra pair of hands' on the farm?
- Q. Has your work-life balance improved?

- Q. What kind of things do you do now that you couldn't do before the Farm Partnership?
- Q. Do you think that you have a better quality of life?

Interview Topic 3: Enhancing Skills and Expertise on the Farm

Farm Partnerships can result in increased efficiency (where two or more skill-sets are combined) as well as an increase in the scale of farm enterprises (where two or more farms are combined). Farmers can have different aptitudes and skill-sets. Differences in aptitudes and skill sets can make farmers compatible, not incompatible, as they can pursue parallel interests on the farm. Some farmers may be inclined towards activities such as milking and foddering, while others may be adept at learning about and implementing new technologies and farm management practices. A variety of different skills are required for the operation of an efficient farm enterprise.

Aside from aptitudes and skills in primary production, Farm Partnerships can also accommodate aptitudes and skills instrumental to adding value to the primary product in entrepreneurship, processing, and service-related activities. Farm tourism or the development of niche food products can be developed on the farm by introducing new aptitudes and skills. The offspring of farm families are highly educated and many have professional qualifications in areas such as e-commerce and marketing. Farm Partnerships can represent a new business opportunity for farm families who want to develop their farms in an alternative way, involving sons or daughters as business partners.

Questions:

- Q. Do you and your Farm Partner have different types of skills and interests?
- Q. Does your Farm Partner have a skill that would have been lacking on the farm before the Partnership? Do you think you bring any particular skill on the farm?
- Q. Do you find that you can pursue the types of tasks/jobs you like doing on the farm?
- Q. How do you think the farm has benefited from having more skills on the farm?

Interview Topic 4: Younger Farmers

Farm Partnerships between established farm operators and relatively inexperienced, younger farmers can give rise to several benefits for both parties. Such partnerships are typically established by an established farm operator and a son/daughter who is a future heir, or a by an established farm operator and a relative/neighbour who may be a future heir/buyer of the farm.

Younger farmers have higher agricultural education attainment and can be highly skilled in contemporary technologies and farm management practices. Rather than waiting to be future heirs into middle age, younger farmers can want earlier on in life some degree of autonomy and decision-making power on the farm to implement their skills. Without a formalised role on the farm, younger farmers may be less incentivised to contribute to their maximum potential. Their opportunities to implement their ideas may be hindered if they don't have decision-making power and an investment stake in the business. Future heirs who are at a stage in the life cycle where they are starting families of their own, often want some ownership and security of tenure in the business to which they are investing their commitment, time and expertise. Farm Partnerships can represent for them a stage towards farm inheritance, where they are legal partners in the operation of the farm enterprise. For young farmers who have no access to land, a Farm Partnership with a well-established farmer who is not related by kin can offer an attractive alternative to purchasing or leasing land.

Farm Partnerships are often desirable for younger farmers as a means of gradual entry to farming. Younger farmers may not have the resources or wish to make a major financial investment in purchasing or modernising a farm. Younger farmers whose farming experience originated in family farming, can also have a deep commitment and sensitivity to the tradition of their family's farm. They can be acutely aware of the 'heirloom' nature of the farm and can aspire to the continuance of the farm through future generations. It should not be assumed that younger farmers want sole authority of the farm. Younger farmers can have a deep respect for the farming knowledge and tradition that has been passed on to them and can want to continue on in the family style of farming with the involvement of their parents and/or siblings. Farm Partnerships can facilitate younger farmers' greater decision-making power on the farm and discretion to implement new ideas, while working collaboratively with their forebears (parents or a more established farmer). It is imperative that the Farm Partnership planning process seeks to devise an agreement that is socially and financially acceptable to the farmers involved.

Questions: (posed to younger farmer)

- Q. Why did you want to establish a Farm Partnership?
- Q. What was your vision (your hopes and ambitions) for your future career in farming?
- Q. How has it made farming different for you?
- Q. Have you made any changes to the farm since you became involved in the Partnership?
- Q. Do you think you have better quality of life since you became involved in the Farm Partnership?

Interview Topic 5: Older Farmers

Farming represents not only a career but is very much tied to personal identity. It can be a difficult and traumatic experience for farmers to exit farming completely in making way for the next generation to take over the farm. This is for a range of reasons relating to identity, occupational fulfilment, and financial security. Farm Partnerships potentially represent an easier succession strategy for farmers who wish to maintain an interest and decision-making role on the farm, yet want to include prior to their retirement the interests and decision-making roles of future farm heirs or a younger relative/farmer. The involvement of a future heir or younger farmer can lead to an enhancement of the farm's performance, by introducing new perspectives and skills to the operation of the farm. As partners, older farmers can reap the benefits of the farm's enhancement.

Questions: (posed to older farmer)

- Q. Why did you want to establish a Farm Partnership?
- Q. Has the work you do on the farm changed?
- Q. How do you find working with your farm partner, sharing your knowledge?
- Q. Do you think you have better quality of life since you became involved in the Farm Partnership?

Interview Topic 6: Women Farmers

Family farms in Ireland and in many countries worldwide are traditionally patriarchal. This means that men have traditionally held ownership of and greater control over farms. However, as society changes and as women are gaining greater control and ownership status in other parts of society, the patterns and traditions of succession in agriculture have also been changing. It is becoming more recognised within Irish farm families that women farmers are potential heirs to the farm (even in the presence of alternative male heirs).

In particular, women have shown leadership in taking responsibility for farm accounts, computer-based farm management technologies, and farm diversification. Furthermore, studies have pointed to women's role in improving animal welfare on farms and in determining the use of novel technologies on farms. Farm Partnerships can represent an opportunity for farm enterprises to be enhanced by the skills of women farmers. Without a formalised role on the farm, women leave farming (and sometimes rural areas) to pursue alternative careers and for those who remain in farming, they may be less incentivised to contribute to their maximum potential without an ownership stake in the business. There is potential for Farm Partnerships to offer formal mechanisms for farm men and women to work together. Benefits such

as enhanced pension entitlements can be accrued from Farm Partnerships involving spouses.

Questions: (posed to female farmer)

- Q. What was/is your vision (hopes and aspirations) for your farming career?
- Q. What were your motivations for establishing a Farm Partnership and how the Farm Partnership came about?
- Q. How has the Farm Partnership achieved your objectives?
- Q. Is there any particular skill you feel that you bring to the farm?
- Q. Do you think you have better quality of life since you became involved in the Farm Partnership?
- Q. What are the main benefits of having women in farming, in your view?

10.2 Farm Visit

For farmers who are potential candidates for establishing partnerships, it is important to visit a farm where a Farm Partnership is in operation to see first hand how benefits can be achieved. It is important that wider members of the farm families contemplating farm partnerships (spouses, offspring, parents) also attend such farm visits. There are several unique learning advantages associated with farm visits, which are used frequently in the context of Teagasc's extension activities. Farm visits are informal learning events, where farmers are outside in the fresh air during the day interacting with each other. Farms are farmers' natural territory and they often feel more comfortable outside on a farm than in a class-room, for example. Farm visits are social events, with a sense of occasion. Farmers can be curious and good-humoured about the prospect of visiting another farm and they can enjoy farm visits as a positive social experience. Farmers sense of well-being and enthusiasm during a farm walk can result in a positive disposition towards learning, in comparison for example, to an evening or night-time discussion group where farmers are in a confined space and can feel tired after a long day at work.

Seeing first-hand how other farmers manage their farms and how they have implemented new ideas is a powerful learning experience. Farmers can identify with their peers on whose farms they see new ideas being implemented. They have an opportunity to see the new idea working in practice, in the context of a real-life farm. They have the opportunity to see first-hand the benefits and challenges of the idea and they can speak to the host farmer, in their own common language, to learn about aspects that interest them particularly. On farm visits, farmers have "A-ha!" moments, where they figure out a puzzle of how something works; and "No Way!" moments when

they see something that they know will not work on their farm Schmidt (2011)¹³. Both are powerful learning experiences. However, prior to farm visits, preparatory exercises should be conducted to maximise the learning benefits from the farm visits. What do members of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group want to learn from their upcoming farm visit? Exercises similar to the 'Brainstorming' exercise (described above in section 8.1) are helpful in this regard.

The approach of the facilitator is crucial for optimising the *experiential*¹⁴ learning benefits from farm visits. All opportunities for focusing the learning on the host farm family and how they 'do things' should be taken. The facilitator, further to the outcomes of the preparatory exercises undertaken by the Farm Partnership Incubation Group in advance of the farm visit, should brief the host farm family on what the group is particularly interested in. The host family are likely to have additional suggestions and insights to identifying crucial information for farmers contemplating Farm Partnerships. The facilitator, with the host family, should plan the visit in advance, actively going through the various stages of the farm visit in a practice run, while emphasising that there is a need on the day of to respond to the group's dynamics allowing for a sense of spontaneity. The main objective of the practice-run is to strategise how the farm family can in different ways remain centre stage in demonstrating and discussing aspects of their farm's operation, while also attempting to incorporate the key areas of interest identified by Farm Partnership Incubation Group. The facilitator can actively facilitate the plan formulated during the practice-run to come to fruition on the day of the actual farm visit.

Farmers who are interested in Farm Partnerships can have through a farm visit an opportunity to see first-hand many of the management; regulative; legal; and inter-personal aspects of how Farm Partnerships work in practice. Some aspects are visually apparent, such as consolidated farm facilities. A farm walk can demonstrate how the consolidation of two or more holdings has been managed to work efficiently, with the strategic use of different areas of land for grazing, growing fodder and milking facilities, for example. Visual observation of changes to grazing paddocks, extended roadways, and water supplies, can give an insight to farmers of how management

practices in place on the joined farm enterprises may work. A visit to the Farm Partnership office, where all records are kept relating to the farm business, can illustrate best practice in relation to managing a Farm Partnership which advises that records should be kept in an independent location rather than in the private dwelling house of one farmer partner.

11. Encouraging Farmers' Discussion of and Mediation through Key Issues that arise in Farm Partnerships in practice

Research that examined Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships identified some critical factors that warrant careful consideration in the partnership planning process. Participants in the Farm Partnership Incubation Group, particularly in later stages of the group's work, are likely to be at a stage where they can identify issues that they envisage will require careful attention in their own establishment of a Farm Partnership. However, research on Irish farmers' 'real-life' experiences of Farm Partnerships can be used as prompts to encourage participants' learning of some potentially contentious issues that they otherwise may not consider and prepare for. Generating discussion around examples of other farmers' experiences, participants in the Farm Partnership Incubation Group can be supported to plan for and identify solutions to potential difficulties. Many of the potential difficulties, once identified and dealt with, can be avoided. Other difficulties may not be easily resolved and farmers experiencing such difficulties may consider not entering into a Farm Partnership. To achieve farmers' learning of the critical factors that warrant attention in the Farm Partnership planning process, the Farm Partnership Incubation Group will use two main tools: Prompt Cards and Scripts/Stories. These particular tools are chosen because they facilitate farmers' discussion of potentially contentious issues in a speculative way, with reference to the facilitators' prompts and other farmers' experiences. Farmers, therefore, are not required to discuss possibly contentious issues with reference to their own personal circumstances in the group setting.

Prompt Cards can be used to effectively prompt discussion and thinking within the Farm Partnership Incubation Group as follows¹⁵:

13. <http://newfarmerproject.wordpress.com/2011/06/29/learning-from-other-farmers-summer-workshops-farm-tours-pasture-walks/>

14. Experiential learning means that the learning comes from personally experiencing something, visually or practically.

15. The idea of using Prompt Cards in the context of the Teagasc Options Programme was suggested by Mary Lyons (Teagasc) to Teagasc's Open Innovation Programme, 2009

Prompt Cards

- The prompt cards are laminated card printed with prompt words (examples illustrated below).
- They are colour-coded to assist facilitators' effective use:
 - Red: financial and business planning issues
 - Yellow: material assets, facilities
 - Green: quality of life, fulfilment, interests, and safety issues
 - Purple: human roles, person centred
 - Blue: time-related issues
- They are laid on a table and participants are each asked to choose an equal number of cards or alternatively, the facilitator distributes an equal number of cards to each participant.
- The participants break into groups of five or six participants per group.
- They are given an introduction to the potentially contentious topic by the facilitator.
- They are asked to collectively discuss the topic, and to show to other members of the group prompt cards they consider relevant to the topic (each prompt card may be relevant to several topics, depending on the view of the participant holding the card)
- Prompted by the cards, each group notes a list of possibly contentious issues relevant to the topic on a flip chart, if they are comfortable writing on a flip chart (they may opt not to take written notes)
- Feedback is given by a nominated representative from each group, followed by facilitated discussion

Stories and Scripts as Learning Tools

To facilitate farmers' learning of possibly contentious issues associated with Farm Partnerships, other farmers' *narratives* or *stories* can be a powerful learning tool. Farmers' stories about their personal experiences of farm partnerships can be very interesting and relevant to other farmers. As distinct from other formats, the use of story to communicate information 'draws in' and thoroughly engages the listener. Once they have been told, stories are then repeated by farmers in the presence of other farmers, generating and sharing new knowledge and wisdom (see Byrne and O'Mahony, 2011). Farmers' 'scripts', described as a *common expressions, common lines of argument, catch-phrases or parables* (Vanclay and Eenticott, 2011) contain important messages or lessons and, similar to stories, are identifiable by and convincing to fellow farmers and powerfully communicative as a result. For the purposes of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group, 'real' stories and scripts generated from research undertaken on Irish farmer's actual experiences of Farm Partnerships can be used¹⁶. They will not all depict contentious issues in a negative way, but alternative perspectives taking a positive view will also be presented, highlighting associated opportunities and possible solutions. The stories and scripts can be presented to farmers in text form, and read aloud by the facilitator or a volunteer from within the group. The group can then be facilitated to discuss the story or script, sharing their views and interpretations of the circumstances of the farmer in the story. Participating farmers

may have related stories to tell and may give an indication of their own scripts in relation to the topic being discussed¹⁷.

The Prompt Card and Stories/Scripts tools will be used to explore three main areas where there is potential for contentious issues to arise: ownership; family farming; and compatibility.

11.1 Ownership

Research on Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships has indicated that the farmers involved tended to be very knowledgeable of legal issues relating to land ownership. Farmers understood that Farm Partnerships could be ended at any time, facilitated by the provisions of the legal agreement underpinning their Farm Partnerships. Reflecting a context where farmers generally have very good knowledge of legal issues in relation to farmland, the farmers interviewed did not have fears in relation to Farm Partnerships infringing on their ownership rights¹⁸. Farmers who have no experience of Farm Partnerships, however, may possibly have some fears in relation to Farm Partnerships and ownership issues and such fears must be addressed in the context of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group. Of relevance in this regard will be farmers' learning of technical information in relation to Farm Partnerships (Section, 8 above)

The research indicated, however, that factors relating to the *use* and *control* of the operation of the farm (as distinct from *ownership* issues) are centrally implicated in Farm Partnerships. Farm Partnership agreements seek

16. Farmers' verbatim stories cannot be published in lengthy versions due to confidentiality issues. The stories are adapted or combined to protect the identity of the farmers.

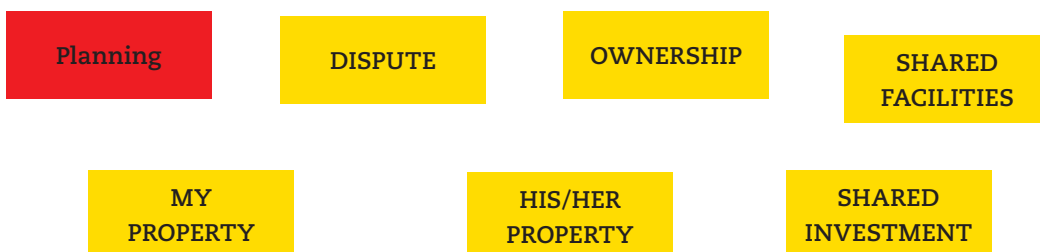
17. Collecting the stories of farmers participating in the Farm Partnership Incubation Groups is an important part of Participatory Action Research to observe the progress of participants. See a discussion of the use of this method in Dart (1999).

18. This contradicts the anecdotal logic that on the basis of land ownership being an emotive issue in the farming community, Farm Partnerships may be feared or avoided. This study found that farmers were very knowledgeable about legal issues relevant to the ownership of land. However, losing one's own Herd Number as a result of entering into a Farm Partnership was a problematic issue for some farmers. Farmers wanted to retain their own Herd Number, as it was an indication of their independence and the Number had often been in use by their family for some time. The same was true of REPS payments and Single Farm Payments. Farmers wanted to retain their own individual payments and this is an issue that has been dealt with by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine (DAFM) in liaison with Teagasc.

to manage and develop such use and control-related matters, which can be emotive issues in the context of family farms. Issues relating to investment in fixed assets arise in the context of Farm Partnerships. If an investment in the form of a fixed asset such as a farm building is co-financed by a Farm Partnership, in the

event of the dissolution of the Farm Partnership, the farmer on whose land the building stands must buy the other farmer out. This example highlights the need for partners to have a clear understanding with agreed written provisions prior to making such investment so as to avoid potential disputes.

Prompt Cards Addressing Ownership



Scripts Addressing Ownership

Ownership of Land

"I wasn't worried about my own farm – I know the partnership wasn't going to interfere with my ownership of it. I could leave the partnership in the morning. That was all decided when we were setting it up. That's a good thing because it's not like a marriage! You can get out any time and there's no need for a divorce! Both of us are getting benefits out of it, though, and we do our best to put the business first"

"She thought... that one of the young lads has his eye on the farm"

Loss of Control and Autonomy

"...my father was a bit worried about me going into partnership with He was worried... he thought it was kind of me giving away some of the farm. He got over it though... he thinks it's a good thing because he sees the farm coming along all the while"

Loss of Family Herd Number

"I took the wife's herd number and sure they were all giving out. It's something giving up the number, I suppose. But, why not my herd number? It has to be one of us"

11.2 Farm Partnerships: involving farm families

In the case of family farms, which are typical in Ireland, the Farm Partnership planning process must be understood not simply as involving individual farmers, but farm families. Various members of the extended farm family often exercise influence on decisions that are made in relation to the farm. Often the nature of wider family members' involvement reflects from whom the farm was inherited in the past, or to whom it is bequeathed in the future. Wider family members' work-input on the farm can result in them feeling that they have a 'say' in matters relating to the farm. Farm Partnerships often continue to depend on the work-inputs of spouses, offspring and other family members.

Family members can have a variety of concerns about their future roles on the farm and not dealing with these concerns proactively and supportively could lead to an abandonment of the prospective Farm Partnership. If the Farm Partnership planning process is not approached in a genuinely consultative way with members of each farm family, grievances and misunderstandings can ensue. This was the single most serious threat to the establishment of Farm

Partnerships identified by research on Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships (Macken-Walsh, 2011). Furthermore, when such grievances and misunderstandings arose, it was found that they could have lasting and damaging effects on relationships in the farm family. Existing relationships must be respected in the context of newly formed Farm Partnership. In the case of Farm Partnerships between family members, care should be taken to ensure that existing collaborative relationships that have proven to work are appraised and developed rather than reformulated entirely for the purposes of a Farm Partnership.

The Farm Partnership planning process has the capacity to be a positive and constructive process, representing an opportunity to appraise the roles and contributions of various family members. In the context of a Farm Partnership, involving a new business plan and working arrangements, some family members may wish to reduce or indeed increase their input. Members of the farm family can welcome changes such as an improved work-life balance and prospects of a higher financial income. Some farm spouses, working off-farm for example, may wish to reduce their workload on the farm in a context where extra help will become available as a

result of the Farm Partnership. An alternative scenario is where an entrant farmer may wish to have an increased workload in an expanded farm business, allowing the partner farmer to ease his/her workload.

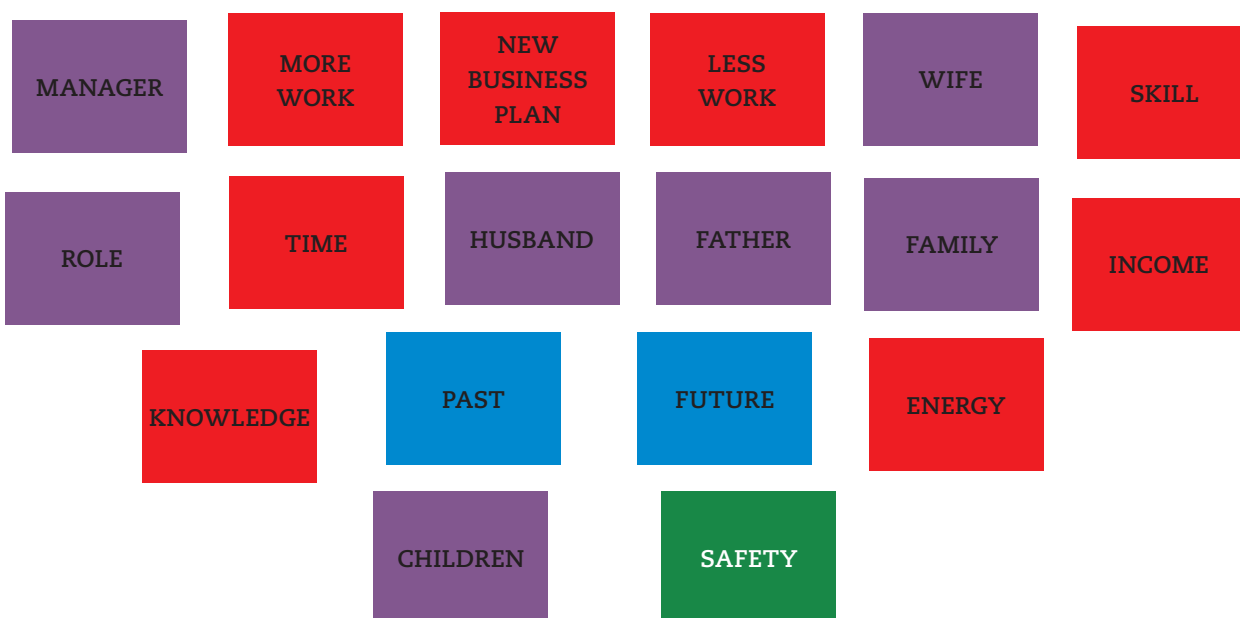
Farm Partnerships can involve new formal roles (involving salaries, for example) for family members in the context of new business plans. However, Farm Partnerships can also realistically entail a variety of informal roles for family members and these should be also considered in the planning process. Family members, wives, sons and daughters, of each partner farmer, are likely to

continue to play a role on the farm. The roles of wider family members is an important characteristic of family farming, important for farming culture and knowledge to transfer from one generation to the next. The participation of wider family members in the farms involved in the Farm Partnership can have several benefits. Wider members of the farm family are generally skilled in farming and have a contribution to make on the farm. The Farm Partnership can benefit from their work-inputs, without which labour may be in tight supply. The participation of wider family members is necessary for farm

succession. However, in the context of a Farm Partnership, a critical factor is for the planning process to facilitate discussion of each family's future roles and contributions. Any prominent role anticipated by a family member should be clearly defined.

One particularly important issue to discuss is the issue of farm safety. In the case of a Farm Partnership where one farm family has young children and the other has not, the implementation of additional farm safety measures on the expanded farm enterprise may be necessary.

Prompt Cards Addressing Family Farming



Stories and Scripts Addressing Family Farming

A Family Decision

“Although the farm is in my name, the decision to go into a partnership was not my decision alone, but my wife’s decision and my father’s decision. If I started making decisions about the Farm Partnership without discussing it with them, all hell would have broken loose. They were involved at the beginning and their views were taken on board”

A Farm Partnership between Two Families

“Our farm is like other farms, I do most of the work but my wife helps out a good bit and the lads and sometimes my father when he’s able. They still help out, they need to sometimes when there’s a lot of work on. One of the young lads might become a partner himself in a few years – he’s big into farming and is at ag’ college now and will be able to do new things on the farm. My partner and myself want to keep the young lads and girls involved in the farm because they have to keep in touch with it and know what’s going on. Otherwise they won’t know what to do with the farm in later years. They’re good at the farming as well, and you couldn’t find better to help out. My wife still does all the things she’s been doing for years. There’s a good relationship between the two families. The farm is part of a bigger a business now and everyone has to keep to the rules. I think first before I let the young lads come up on the farm, what’s going on up there and whether they will be a nuisance or not, and that’s a good thing for them as well as the farm – they have to respect it as a business. We thrashed all these things out when we were drawing up the Farm Partnership agreement”

A Father's Fears

"It was my father's farm and his father's before him. Hopefully one of my lads will take it over as well. My father was the one who was nervous about this whole partnership thing. He thought someone else was going to be in running the farm and calling the shots. He's delighted with it now. He sees the farm coming along all the time and I think he sees that I'm much happier now with the way things are working. I didn't have time to 'bless myself' when I was doing it on my own and I think he was concerned about that when he wasn't able to help out as much any more"

Family Tensions in advance of a Farm Partnership

"One day we went down to the house and there was a vibe. ... wasn't happy about it, I knew well what was going on. Twas grand between the two of us but ... wasn't happy. We never talked about it again after that.... There was no point..."

Succession and Fears of Siblings

"When we started talking about the partnerships, the other lads thought that was the end of them out of the farm. We had to take a decision and they're all grand with it now and still do the help"

Roles of wider family members in the Farm Partnership

"When I thought about the partnerships, I was thinking like that all the young ones would be up around the farm. That's a different ball game, like. I had to think about that one"

Loss of Herd Number

"I felt my mother worked hard for years and I felt a lot of women worked hard for years and they weren't seen as farmers in their own right and they had no title after all the work they did over the years in the farms they married into. So I didn't want that to happen to me because I was farming in my own right, I worked hard all my life on the farm, I was entitled to keep my own herd number"

New Roles and a Happier Home Life

"My wife is delighted with the changes. She was coming home from work and doing work on the farm some evenings as well as looking after the house. With the extra help in the partnership, I'm not as much under pressure now and I can help her out instead of the other way around. The future is looking better financially as well."

Safety

"Safety is a big issue where children are involved. Extra safety precautions are on the farm now as I don't have children but my farm partner has children. The farm is safer for everyone involved now"

11.3 Compatibility

Farmers must be compatible to operate a Farm Partnership successfully. For farmers to be compatible, it does not mean that farmers must be similar. Farmers can have different aptitudes, skills, circumstances, needs, preferences and aspirations. The circumstances of a part-time farmer, for example, can lend him/her towards a preference for weekend and part-time evening farming. In partnership with a part-time farmer, his/her partner farmer can work full-time during weekdays, with some weekends and evenings "off-duty". In such a partnership, both farmers can potentially benefit from the work inputs of each other, working together at particularly busy times, and benefiting from the increased scale and efficiency of their enterprise. Another example is where one farmer partner has little interest in learning about and implementing new technologies. In partnership with a farmer who has a particular interest in learning about and implementing new technologies, both farmers can pursue their interests in a complementary way with the farm enterprise benefiting from the combination of skills. Such farmers, although different, are compatible in the context of a Farm Partnership.

Farmers, often used to working at least the majority of time on their own, can have concerns in relation to how they will 'get on' with their farm partner. In practice, however, farm partners may not work alongside each other all of the time. Farm partners can work at different times, at the same time on different tasks in different locations on the farm, and on different aspects of the farm enterprise. Farm Partnerships allow farmers to cooperate and have extra help at particularly busy times when required. Members of farm families and neighbouring farmers often have long-standing experience of working alongside each other at particularly busy times, with families often having cooperated for generations.

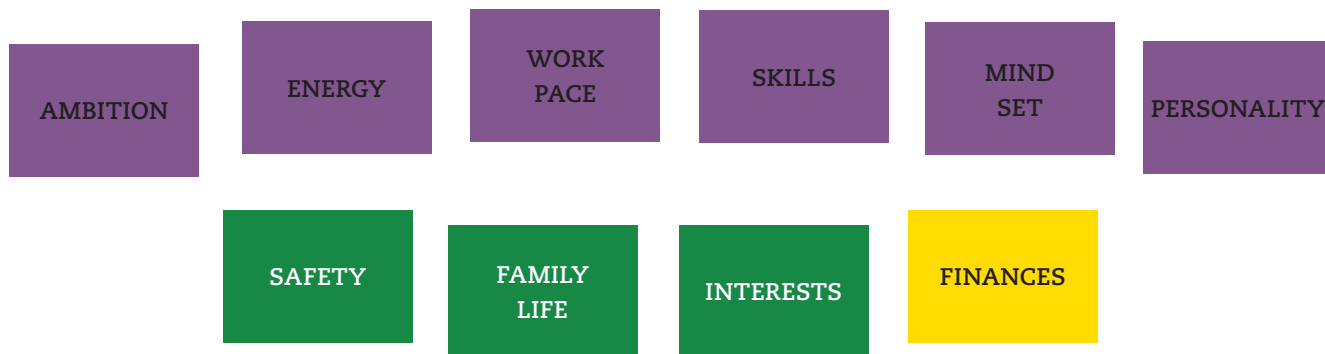
There are some issues of compatibility that can be particularly problematic. Farmers can have different work ethics and different priorities. Some farmers may wish to prioritise farm profitability and efficiency. Others may wish to prioritise non-financial aspects of the farm. Some farmers want to work long days and others want to work fewer hours. Such differences can be accommodated in the context of a Farm Partnership, where one farmer is remunerated through a profit share agreement and associated salary arrangements for his/her extra input. For some farmers, such an arrangement is not preferable as they wish to establish a Farm Partnership with a farmer who works equally long days.

There are incompatibility issues unrelated to work-input that are more difficult to negotiate and resolve by means of a working agreement. These can be called 'mind-set' issues. One example is where herd fertility is concerned. Some commercially oriented farmers prioritise herd fertility and strive to replace infertile animals. Other farmers may have a more patient approach, associated with, for example, an attachment to the pedigree of animals. Such differences between farm partners can cause irreconcilable conflict. In cases, however, a farm partner

may become convinced of the other's approach. Other irreconcilable differences noted by farmers who established or considered establishing Farm Partnerships related to animal welfare. Some farmers

prioritise animal welfare at all costs, while others had comparatively less regard for animal welfare. Such differences were found to be difficult to reconcile.

Prompt Cards Addressing Compatibility



Scripts Addressing Compatibility

Different Personalities in a Farm Partnership

"I'm kind of easy going like, and he's all go if you know what I mean"

Different Work Ethic/Style

"One lad could be running around all day, and the other strolling around"

Different 'Mind-Set'

"We have different philosophies to life. He would want to be working all the time. I wanted more time off. In a way, we both got what we wanted because he's working far more than me now – that's what we agreed at the start."

Different Approaches to Animal Welfare

"My cows would get the same treatment, or maybe worse, as his. I couldn't go into that, I'd prefer to give up farming altogether"

12. Concluding Remarks

Irish farmers' experiences of Farm Partnerships largely concur with farmers' experiences internationally. Farm Partnerships have the potential to address a breadth of social and economic challenges experienced by family farmers in diverse circumstances. They are versatile enough to respond to different circumstances, needs, aspirations and preferences. However, the versatility of the farm partnership model to accommodate diversity simultaneously makes it vulnerable to obstacles and threats. A particularly meticulous and comprehensive approach to the planning processes, so as to avoid difficulties and conflict in the operation of farm partnerships, is required. Extension supports, in negotiating the complex socio-cultural terrain of farm families, are challenged with providing an interactive and socio-culturally sensitive approach in facilitating the devising of workable farm partnership agreements. In this document, attention is drawn to issues that are of particular consequence for Farm Partnerships' success in a template for a participatory form of extension practice.

In-depth customised facilitation is needed to assist farmers to individually consider and negotiate between each other the range of issues implicated in the devising of a workable Farm Partnership agreement. This individualised and customised approach to the farmers establishing a Farm Partnership is indispensable. Notwithstanding the need for individualised, customised supports to farmers establishing Farm Partnerships, there is significant potential for a group-based extension process to undertake some of the preparation work while also generating knowledge of Farm Partnerships among the general farming population.

Group methods, where farmers interact with each other in their own terms/language and with reference to the contexts of their own farms and lives, can lead them to take ownership of the learning process. Farmers in a group-based extension method, facilitated by a Farm Advisor, can talk about, debate and interrogate new ideas in their own language. It is in this process

of discussion, debate and interrogation that the vast majority of the successful learning takes place. The Farm Partnership Incubation Group is a discussion and action group, constituted of farmers who are candidates for establishing partnerships and wish to explore the feasibility of establishing partnerships. The Farm Partnership Incubation Group will create

a process where participants will be facilitated to confront the critical issues determining the success of Farm Partnerships. The overarching objective of the Farm Partnership Incubation Group is to promote a farmer-led learning and development process that will assist farmers to comprehensively consider and prepare for Farm Partnerships in an empowered way.

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Annex I

Milk Production Partnerships – Information and Application Forms

1. [Milk Production Partnership Covering letter](#)
2. [Brief Guide to Milk Production Partnership Regulations](#)
3. [Instructions for preparing Milk Production Partnership Application](#)
4. [Milk Production Partnership Checklist](#)
5. [Milk Production Partnership Application Form](#)
6. [Milk Production Partnership Milk Quota Confirmation Form](#)
7. [Evidence of Partnership Bank Account](#)
8. [Milk Production Partnership District Veterinary Office Form](#)
9. [Milk Production Partnership COE Form](#)





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