

Teagasc/UCD Michael Smurfit Business School course in Business Strategy

As challenges multiply due to climate change and market volatility it has never been more important to have a robust and well-thought-out business strategy.

Mark Moore
Teagasc and
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John Sampson, who farms 140 dairy cows at Ballychristy, north of Mallow in Cork, recently completed the Teagasc/UCD Michael Smurfit Business School course in Strategy for farmers.

“The course certainly took me out of my comfort zone,” says John, who is married to Fiona and father to two teenagers. The course acknowledges that management success is all about people. “We gained a lot of insights about ourselves, but also how best to interact with other people, be they staff, neighbours or other stakeholders,” says John.

The course is described as ‘executive education’ and includes subjects such as negotiation, people management, self-management, as well as business strategy, finance etc. The course is structured around business cases from a range of industries, which yield insights relevant to any small business, including farm businesses.

To graduate from the accredited course, participants must complete a strategy for their own business based on learnings from the course.

There are no academic requirements (Leaving Certificate, for example) to join the course, providing you have been running a farm business for a minimum of five years. The class size is limited to 20 and well over 100 farmers (women and men) have now completed the course.

“I wondered was it too long since I had studied,” says John. “I was also concerned about finding the time to get away from the business. Both were not a problem.”

The course is residential, with participants staying at a hotel for two modules: one for three days and the other two days. Day six is where participants present their individual strategies.



John Sampson.



Smurfit Executive Development

UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School

“I thought it was great, as it helped me address a range of strategic issues such as work/life balance, long-term succession, and the sustainability of the business. It gave me the push to create a written plan for the medium term.”

John’s wife Fiona says she would recommend the networking aspect of the course. “Farming is a fairly solitary life and I can see a huge advantage in taking the chance to go and meet up with 15 or so other farmers to tease out strategic issues, on a top level course delivered by the Smurfit Business School and Teagasc.”

“The timing of the course (autumn) and the content was really well tailored to the group and I really enjoyed learning business insights from other

industries. We also enhanced our skills in areas such as negotiation. The whole experience was enjoyable and everyone on the course learned a huge amount by interacting with other participants, as well as the top-class lecturers,” says John.

The course content is business focused and is relevant to any farmer regardless of their enterprise mix. Married couples have completed the course together. The course has run since 2014 and its successful completion earns the participant a Level 8 Certificate from the UCD Michael Smurfit Business School.

The course will run again in autumn 2022. If you would like to learn more, please email mark.moore@teagasc.ie with your contact details.