

Applications Open for Teagasc Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management

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Applications for the Teagasc Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management are now open and must be submitted by Friday, 11th July 2014. This new programme in dairy farm management, now in its third year, was designed for those intending to manage their own farms, intending to work as dairy farm managers or those seeking to enter dairy farming through a collaborative arrangement and eventually own their own herd or farm. The programme is a level 7 professional diploma qualification validated by UCD. The Professional Diploma programme combines key elements of the much respected former Farm Apprenticeship Programme with an approach that reflects the requirements of today's dairy farming sector and current educational structures.

The Teagasc Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management was developed in response to Food Harvest 2020 recommendations by Teagasc in conjunction with UCD and in consultation with other stakeholders (including the Irish Farm Managers' Association and Master Farmers' Association).

The core element of the Teagasc Professional Diploma is a two year professional work experience with approved dairy farmers. Participants are required to spend 12 months on a Teagasc approved host farm and then move to a new host. Again Teagasc strongly encourage participants to complete part of their work experience overseas to maximise their exposure to different concepts and approaches. The programme also incorporates monthly discussion groups for the participants.

The contact element of the programme is delivered in blocks and revolves around three modules; dairy farm management, dairy technology and dairy farm expansion & development. The programme is delivered by Teagasc Moorepark researchers, Teagasc dairy knowledge transfer specialists and Teagasc college education staff. The minimum entry requirement to the Teagasc Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management is a Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Agriculture. It is not essential that applicants have completed the Advanced Dairy programme option of the Advanced Certificate of Agriculture. Applicants who completed the advanced programme in Drystock for example can apply. Applicants are required to undergo an interview selection process.

Progress and Challenges to Date

At present there are close on forty students participating across the two years of the programme. There has been comment recently on the level of uptake relative to the looming dairy expansion and the Food Harvest 2020 recommendations. It is common that there is a lag phase in an industry response time to its labour and skills needs. The following observations may apply:

- The enrolments to date for the Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management are a reflection of current demand that exists at this point (pre-quota abolition) for this type of programme. However quota abolition in 2015 will drive a major expansion in dairy herd output over the coming years. The industry's need for a dairy farm managers' programme will become more tangible as dairy expansion accelerates.

- However, the introduction of an education programme in itself is not a guarantee of uptake. Prospective trainees who already have achieved a Level 6 education are likely to focus to a much greater extent on the realisable career prospects and cannot be 'pushed' through an additional round of education. Essentially career prospects and income potential are the key drivers for those seeking employment outside of their own farms. The career incentive and career progression opportunities need to be visible.
- Farm families need to think more strategically about agricultural education planning and to view a good agricultural education as the most important long term investment for the family business. On dairy farms, more thought is needed on what type of dairy education the next generation require. On non-dairy farms the next generation need to be firmly aware of opportunities to establish a career in dairying either on the home farm or through a collaborative arrangement with another farmer.
- To date it has been difficult to source sufficient host farms to support even the current level of intake. It is accepted that many dairy farmers may not be in a position to support a 12 month work experience period. This programme also requires a particular type of host with a very strong commitment to a mentoring/coaching approach in order to develop the managerial capacity and skills of young people in a very positive manner. That such a pool of suitable dairy farmers exists there can be no doubt and this year an increasing number of farmers are expressing interests in being a host farm. Teagasc has prepared an information leaflet for potential host farmers highlighting the purpose and benefits of the programme. This leaflet will be circulated through the Teagasc national dairy discussion group network.
- The Professional Diploma programme is very much in its infancy stage with the first round of graduates emerging later in 2014. As with all new programmes it will be essential to review the programme and establish how well it is meeting its intended objectives from a learner and stakeholder perspective.

There are acute staffing pressures in Teagasc at present and an exceptional level of demand for Teagasc 'green cert' programmes. However it is Teagasc's view that provision of experience based learning opportunities for future dairy farmers and farm managers (and indeed for other sectors should a viable demand exist) is vital. Teagasc is appointing an education programme co-ordinator to support the development of the Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management.

In summary the Teagasc Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management is very firmly anchored in experience based learning with the aid of a host farm mentor and on-going interaction with Teagasc research, knowledge transfer and education staff. It provides an excellent opportunity to develop and refine farm managerial skills which will be essential in an era of considerable dairy expansion.

Please Note

Information on the Teagasc Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management is available at http://www.teagasc.ie/training/courses/prof_dip_dairy_manage.asp and application forms can be downloaded from this site

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