

## KT Masters in Agricultural Innovation Support (MAIS) Project Summary 2025

### 1. Project Title

Examining Integration of Environmental Messages with Technical Advice to Reduce Environmental Losses on Farms: What do Farmers Want?

### 2. Project Background

The agricultural sector has come under increased pressure and scrutiny in recent times to meet environmental targets, whilst maintaining economic viability at farm level. Research shows that there has been no significant change in any of the water quality indicators for Ireland's rivers, lakes, estuaries and groundwater's in 2023 with water quality remaining stable. While improvements are happening in some rivers and lakes, these are being offset by declines elsewhere (EPA indicator Report 2023).

Approximately 54% of surface waters in Ireland are achieving satisfactory ecological status (DHLGH, 2024). Ireland's derogation is currently under review and improving water quality is essential to the retention of derogation. Many initiatives such as the 'Better Farming for Water' campaign have been undertaken by Teagasc to support farmers in reducing nutrient losses from the farm to water. However, it is important to examine how best to integrate environmental messages with technical enterprise advice to improve effective dissemination. Currently, the Teagasc Water Quality KT Department and Climate Change and Biodiversity KT department are investigating integration of programme and mainstream advisory approaches.

This has raised a number of questions around how farmers would like to receive environmental messages from Teagasc, and so this project aims to develop a better understanding of how to improve environmental KT dissemination.

### 3. Project Aims and Objectives

**Aim:** To assess how farmers want environmental messages to be disseminated and identify what methods work best for advisors in order to achieve a reduction in environmental losses from farms in all enterprises.

**Specific Research Objectives:**

- Identify what is currently being done in advisory regions in regard to how environmental messages are disseminated to farmers (baseline)
- Explore and document how each of the groups below feel is the best method to disseminate environmental messages within the KT programme (KT environmental departments/enterprise advisors/farmers)
- Development of templates to deliver complimentary environmental/technical advice
- Recommendations on how to better integrate environmental messages into the KT programme, to improve farmer engagement
- Provide a toolkit for advisors and other actors within the sector to engage in reducing environmental losses which will lead to practice change and actions at farm level

#### 4. Suggestions for Methodology

1. The student will examine how the Teagasc KT system works, documenting enterprise (technical) KT and environmental KT departments. As part of this, the student will focus on a number of environmental KT programmes and projects, such as the 'Better Farming for Water' campaign, Agricultural Catchments Programme, ASSAP, and the Farming for Water EIP
2. Key interviews will be conducted with enterprise advisors, ACP advisors, ASSAP advisors, KT specialists, KT managers, behavioural researchers, and farmers
3. Focus group with advisors and farmers on how best to integrate the environmental message into technical enterprise KT
4. Develop a list of recommendation for KT departments on how to better integrate environmental messages with technical advice in order to engage farmers
5. Focus group to assess recommendations, containing a representative or more from each group
6. Document and present recommendations to Teagasc KT directorate