

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

1. Project Title

Devising and Testing an Advisory Strategy for Dairy Clients with Low Milk Solids Production Per Cow

2. Project Background

As dairy expansion has come to a standstill amid very high financial set up costs within an uncertain Nitrates and EU Derogation future, a significant number of Teagasc dairy clients in the Tirlán area are at or below Tirlán's current 'milk solids (MS) per cow sold' figure of 410 kgs of MS per cow. Tirlán have recently launched a 'Milk Solids Tracker' with the objective of increasing the milk supply from its current supply base to ensure recent investments in processing facilities are fully utilised and profitable. Initial presentations on Tirlán's MS Tracker seem to be totally focussed on fat: protein ratios on farm, and they intend to text suppliers when fat % exceeds protein % by a ratio of 1.4 or greater to 1. Appropriate feeding advice will then be offered. No apparent focus is being put on 1) Genetics (EBI and Milk Sub index), 2) Calving interval and 6 weeks calving rate, 3) Whole farm and milking platform stocking rate, or 4) Grassland management.

Teagasc and Tirlán have a well-established Joint Programme in place and this project could benefit both parties. For Teagasc, it offers an opportunity to develop an advisory strategy for all advisors to use when dealing with below average milk solids producers, helping to improve farm incomes. For Tirlán, it can contribute towards improving its supply of high constituent milk for processing, ensuring full utilisation of processing plants in-situ.

3. Project Aims and Objectives

This project aims to design and test a targeted advisory programme with a group of dairy clients to improve their milk solids per cow production.

Specific Research Objectives:

1. Identify the on-farm factors currently hindering milk solids production
2. Develop a 12-14 month advisory plan to work with these farmers targeting the factors identified above
3. Pilot the advisory plan with this group of farmers (group of approx. 15 clients)
4. Develop and implement an action plan for each farmer which is both realistic and achievable
5. Measure the effectiveness of the advisory plan and re-design it for wider use by other Teagasc dairy advisors

4. Suggestions for Methodology

This project will apply an action research approach in which an advisory plan to improve milk solids on selected dairy farms will be designed and tested. This will involve:

- a) Interviews with dairy advisors to identify 12-16 dairy farmer clients who will be invited to join the pilot programme
- b) Interviews with selected farmers to establish a baseline in terms of the farming practices that influence milk solids
- c) Workshop with advisors and the selected dairy farmers to co-design the 12-24 month action plan
- d) On-going monitoring through documenting the story of each farm in a research journal to identify changes made on the farms in relation to improving milk solids per cow
- e) End-of-project workshop with participating farmers and advisors to discuss the experience of the pilot project and propose amendments which allow for the wider use of this approach to improving milk solids on farms