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Meet: Kieran Kenny

Agricultural Advisor and Educator

Country

Ireland



Introductions

- I have worked with Teagasc for over 25 years.
- Teagasc – the Agriculture and Food Development Authority – is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities.
- I have been involved in delivering training and education courses for all my entire career.
- My main focus is on environmental courses.
- These tend to be short courses, delivered over a day or half day or a module or two that are included in our longer-term courses



The perception amongst lot of advisors now is that the farmer, kind of he's so reliant on the advisor, he kind of nearly ignores the fact that he needs to know a certain amount himself.



What Skill Gaps have you identified

The farmers tend to rely heavily on their Teagasc advisor for information and upskilling.

That applies to both technical skills and keeping up to date on new regulations or initiatives.

Knowing how to find information themselves is a definite skills gap. They can be reluctant to take responsibility for their own learning and knowledge.

They can also struggle with keeping up to date with the latest changes in regulations.

Describe the Training Tools and Methods you find effective



We run in-person training events, as well as webinars, and there is a huge amount of online training material that Teagasc has developed over the years.

The in-person trainings are popular, there is a social element, and that can be as important as the actual training.

However, the webinars are run both regionally and nationally and allow farmers to attend without taking too much travel time out of their day. They are also convenient for part-time farmers as they are run in the evenings.

What are the challenges in delivering digital education to farmers



Given the personal nature of the relationship between the Teagasc advisor and their client list, farmers are most likely to pick up the phone directly to seek information rather than access all the resources that are available online.

There is also the fact that farmers have different levels of comfort with using digital tools; some are more comfortable with them than others. Generally, someone in the house has the skills if the actual farmer does not.

Top Tip

An online call is fine when it's a meeting. But I think when it's education, I think you're much better having some part of it in person, or at least having interactive elements to make sure the farmers feel included



What Opportunities have you identified?

In my area of training on environmental issues, there is a definite opportunity to develop an app or some form of better access for farmers to go online and check regulations and compliance and changes to those regulations.

There is also a need to look at issues around climate resilience. We are seeing a lot of serious storms, and very wet summers as well as periods of drought. Seasons are not as regimented as they used to be. Some farmers still think it won't happen to them, but if you can show examples from across the country and across Europe it would help them consider what might happen and prepare to look at consequences and maybe measures they need to take



Recommendations?

Farmers need easy-to-use technology, like apps. Also, they have to be able to get the information they need quickly, so it has to be easily accessible..



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