

2021 KT Walsh Scholarship (MAIS) Project Summary

1. Project Title and Associated Programme

KT Programme	Agricultural Catchments Programme/Rural Economy & Development Programme
Project title	How will Irish dairy farmers adapt if permissible organic nitrogen stocking rate limits are reduced: Farmer preferences for actions needed to adhere to current stocking rate intensities

2. Project background

Since the removal of dairy quotas in 2015 the Irish dairy sector has experienced substantial growth. Intake of cow's milk by processors has increased by 29% from 6395m litres in 2015 to 8292m litres in 2020 (CSO, 2021). This expansion has raised concern in relation to environmental consequences of intensive dairy farming and the continuation of a nitrates derogation which allows farmers to operate at stocking rates above 170kg organic N per ha currently allowed under the Nitrates Directive. Of the six catchments monitored in the Agricultural Catchments Programme, Timoleague, Co Cork has the highest percentage of land in derogation, 66% in 2018. The total organic N loading is also increasing. In 2020, 7,000 Irish farmers submitted nitrates derogation applications to the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine. If Irish farmers are required to adhere to the original Nitrates directive limits of 170Kg/N/Ha what actions would farmers be most likely to take. A number of hypothetical scenarios including increasing farm size or reducing the existing stocking rate intensity will be investigated. In order to understand farmer preferences for these different scenarios a survey of ACP farmers already in derogation will be undertaken to identify which measures they would be willing to adopt and which measures they would not in a non-derogation scenario.

3. Project aims and objectives

Overall project aim:

The overall project aim is to develop a deeper understanding of the farm level difficulties involved in dealing with a reduced permissible organic nitrogen stocking rate or a non-derogation environment.

Specific research objectives are:

- To carry out a survey of farmers currently in nitrates derogation in an intensive grassland catchment
- To assess farmer preference for a number of farm management decisions.

- To develop a deeper understanding of farmer concerns in relation to policy change
- To develop a deeper understanding of the applicability of theoretical options at farm level
- To investigate if other options exist