

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

1. Project Title

Empowering Farmers Through Lifelong Learning: Identifying Key Skills for Farmers to Develop Through Lifelong Learning

2. Project Background

The Teagasc Lifelong Learning Programme for Farmers is a cornerstone initiative aimed at equipping farmers with essential skills, knowledge, and best practices to enhance productivity, profitability, efficiency, and sustainability in their agricultural practices. This programme is designed to cater to farmers' diverse needs and facilitate their continuous growth and adaptation in an ever-evolving agricultural landscape. The significance of lifelong learning has been recognised both nationally and internationally. An EU CAP Network Seminar on *Skills and Lifelong Learning for Agricultural Advisory and Training Service Providers* showcased several case studies from a farmer's perspective, emphasising the value of continuous development and improvement. Additionally, the Teagasc Education Strategy has identified continuing professional development (CPD) for farmers as a key priority, reinforcing its role as a fundamental pillar in the strategy.

The proposed study aims to help design and implement a dynamic lifelong learning pathway that provides structured, accessible, and farmer-friendly training opportunities. The study will engage directly with farmers, advisors, and educators to shape a programme that ensures continued professional and personal growth in Irish agriculture. The study aims to address the need for a competency framework to support lifelong learning programmes for farmers in Ireland. Farmers are facing numerous challenges, including technology advancements, changing environmental conditions and evolving market demands. In this context, there is a growing recognition of the importance of continuous learning for farmers to adapt, innovate, and thrive in the face of these challenges.

3. Project Aims and Objectives

The proposed study aim is to contribute to the development of a competency framework for farmers in Ireland, which identifies the core competencies necessary for farmers, which can be improved through a life-long learning programme.

Objectives:

1. Carry out a systematic review of existing lifelong learning frameworks

2. Identify and analyse the competencies required by farmers by developing personas for farmers
3. Develop a competency framework that outlines the essential knowledge areas, skills, and attributes necessary for farmers
4. Develop a competency wheel, which encompasses the key competencies required by farmers in Ireland
5. Make recommendations of learning pathways for farmers as part of a lifelong learning programme.

4. Suggestions for Methodology

This study will adopt a co-design approach encompassing the following methods:

Literature Research:

- Literature research will be used to review existing lifelong learning frameworks by analysing academic publications, policy documents, and relevant reports to identify key components, best practices, and gaps in current models.

Key Informant Interviews:

- By interviewing advisors, educators, and agricultural experts, insights will be gathered into existing frameworks and the perspectives of experts regarding essential competencies for farmers.

Workshops/Discussion Groups:

- Through collaborative activities with farmers, diverse perspectives will be gathered to co-create the competency framework together.

Prototyping and Iterative Design:

- This method is crucial for developing the competency framework, competency wheel, and refining learning pathways.
- Testing these prototypes with farmers and stakeholders in real-world settings allows for iterative refinement based on feedback, ensuring that the final framework and recommendations are practical, user-friendly, and aligned with the needs of farmers.