

TEAGASC PHD WALSH SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

"SCIP: Sound Cow Innovation Programme - Piloting and Evaluating a Structured Lameness Control Programme for Irish Dairy Herds"

Walsh Scholarships Ref Number 2024299

Background

Lameness is a painful condition, which severely compromises cow welfare, reduces longevity, fertility and milk production, impacts environmental sustainability, and has significant economic costs. Recent research has demonstrated that lameness is a significant problem on many Irish dairy farms with a lameness prevalence level of 15 – 32% recorded for the worst performing 20% of farms. It is clear that there is much scope for reducing the level of lameness on Irish dairy farms.

Implementing a robust lameness control programme on farm is key to reduce lameness prevalence. The aim of this project is to pilot such a lameness control programme on a small number of Irish dairy farms, to test its feasibility, transferability and effectiveness. This control programme will encompass elements such as identifying lame cows through mobility scoring, recording the specific lesions causing lameness, conducting a risk assessment to identify the farm specific predisposing factors that may be contributing to a high lameness level, identifying key lameness management strategies to address the specific lameness problems on farm, recording results and monitoring progress over time.

In addition to the technical evaluation, the project will include a social science component examining farmer behaviour, attitudes, and decision-making around lameness prevention and control. Understanding the human and behavioural factors influencing uptake will be essential to designing practical, scalable lameness control strategies.

The successful candidate will work closely with the Hoof HealthCheck Technical Working Group of Animal Health Ireland (AHI), to develop the control programme, travel to participating farms to assist with its implementation and gather data and evaluate its effectiveness through analysis of this data.

Requirements

Applicants should have or expect to have a degree in an appropriate discipline (Agricultural Science, Veterinary Medicine or another related discipline), have experience of dairy farms and hold a driver's licence eligible in Ireland. Experience in the area of dairy cow lameness, data processing, and data analysis is an advantage. The successful candidate should be highly self-motivated and enthusiastic. The candidate must be proficient in both written and spoken English.

Award

The successful PhD candidate will work as part of a multidisciplinary collaborative team, which includes many national experts in the field of dairy cow lameness. The student will have the opportunity to develop his/her skills in a broad range of areas, including dairy cow lameness management, social science research methods, farmer engagement, data management and analysis, writing and publishing peer-reviewed scientific papers, and networking with experts in the field. The student will also have the opportunity to attend and present research findings at (inter)national conferences.

This position will allow the candidate the opportunity to work at Ireland's leading agricultural research organisation, attain a PhD from one of Ireland's top-ranked Universities, to gain a skillset and qualification which will equip them for a wide variety of future careers, and to significantly contribute to the reduction of dairy cow lameness in Ireland.

This PhD Scholarship is a joint research project between Teagasc Moorepark, Co. Cork, Ireland, the School of Veterinary Medicine, University College Dublin (UCD), and Animal Health Ireland. The student will primarily be based at the Teagasc Research Centre, Fermoy, Ireland and will be registered at UCD, working under the joint supervision of Dr. Muireann Conneely (Teagasc), and Dr. Eoin Ryan (UCD). The scholarship funding is €31,000 per annum and comprises of University fees of up to a maximum of €6,000 and a flat rate stipend of €25,000 and is tenable for 4 years. The scholarship will commence in January 2026.

Further Information

For informal enquires and further information regarding the position, please contact:

Dr. Muireann Conneely (muireann.conneely@teagasc.ie) or Dr. Eoin Ryan (eoin.g.ryan@ucd.ie)

Application Procedure

Applicants should submit an electronic copy of their Curriculum Vitae and a letter of interest detailing their motivation, qualifications and experience to: Dr. Muireann Conneely (muireann.conneely@teagasc.ie) and Dr. Eoin Ryan (eoin.g.ryan@ucd.ie)

Closing date

11th November 2025