



Strategy Document 2013

A Strategic Review of UK Dairy Farming's priorities for R & D and Knowledge Exchange for 2013-2020

Knowledge Exchange Subgroup - Terms of Reference;- "How to improve uptake of technical and business information through better knowledge exchange"

Introduction

Flow of information amongst researchers, advisors, farmers and other professionals has variously been referred to as extension, technology transfer (TT), knowledge transfer (KT), technology interaction (TI) and Knowledge Exchange (KE). Latterly, KE has become the fashionable term. Knowledge exchange has always gone on within the farming industry, which to date not been precious over protecting intellectual property, at least in the ruminant sector. Many of the best developments in R&D originated or were stimulated through interaction with practical farmers. Often researchers further developed, measured and parameterised, before recycling more rounded information back to the industry. Knowledge is not generated solely through formal research. Farmers learn from other farmers. Individual farmers continually 'experiment', and increasingly have the tools to do so. Neither can the opportunity to build professional advisory expertise, through contact with a diversity of clients and production systems, over an extended period, be underestimated.

KE in practice

Models have been put forward to describe the uptake of new ideas and technologies, for example, by classifying the recipient (innovator, early adopter etc) or as part of a linear process (creating awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, adoption etc). There is often no single best practice KE method. Increasingly it is recognised that problems are not exclusively related to lack of knowledge. Although better appreciation of business performance does tend to increase receptiveness to technological change, a quick look at any benchmarking data will confirm that financial performance is often not the main motivating factor. Social marketing approaches can be highly effective, for example, the development of the Healthy Feet Project by Bristol University. Appreciation of the context, and the ability to be able to draw from a range of communication channels and approaches, are key elements. More often than not, a range of stakeholders may be involved.

A variety of KE delivery methods and approaches is recognised – demonstration activity, peer to peer mentoring, 'monitor farms', regular discussion groups, impact groups, 'stable schools' etc. Some have been imported from other countries. Advances in technology also provide a range of tools – interactive media, cost calculators, scenario planners, internet based resources etc, which permit rapid sharing of information, benchmarking etc. The most effective, but resource intensive, form of contact is still one to one, between the farmer and a trusted advisor. Given the volume of information available, a good deal from international sources, the ability to contextualise and apply appropriate to the circumstance becomes even more important.

Understanding client needs is central to the effective provision of any service. Aiming to better target levy payers with its products and services, DairyCo has recently completed a study of 750 dairy farmers. This arrived at a value-based segmentation (Appendix 1) identifying five categories or profile of dairy farmer, based on their objectives and views of the business. Thirty years ago the advisory landscape was based on a national network of advisors, focussed on increasing production, supported by a range of demonstration farms, experimental husbandry farms and dedicated research units. Individual specialisms were well catered for, often providing technical support to more generalist advisors. Many of today's dairy consultants, are of a certain age. Most began their careers in organisations such as ADAS and SAC, which allowed the time and space to develop whole-systems skills and perspectives.

Conclusions

Sharing knowledge is of limited value, unless practically implemented. The ultimate aim of KE could be to provide a range of opportunities, which allow dairy farmers to access the information, tools, methods and support they feel they require, to meet their business and personal objectives. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is as much needed in dairy farming as in any other science and technology based business.

Industry leaders will forge ahead, read and travel widely, and use the best consultants almost as sounding boards. The challenge to the consultant in interacting with this group is to be continually on top of their game.

There is no immediate prospect of a return to a national extension system. It is a question of how the current generation of farmers and advisors, can make better use of resources and the opportunities available.

Appendix 1

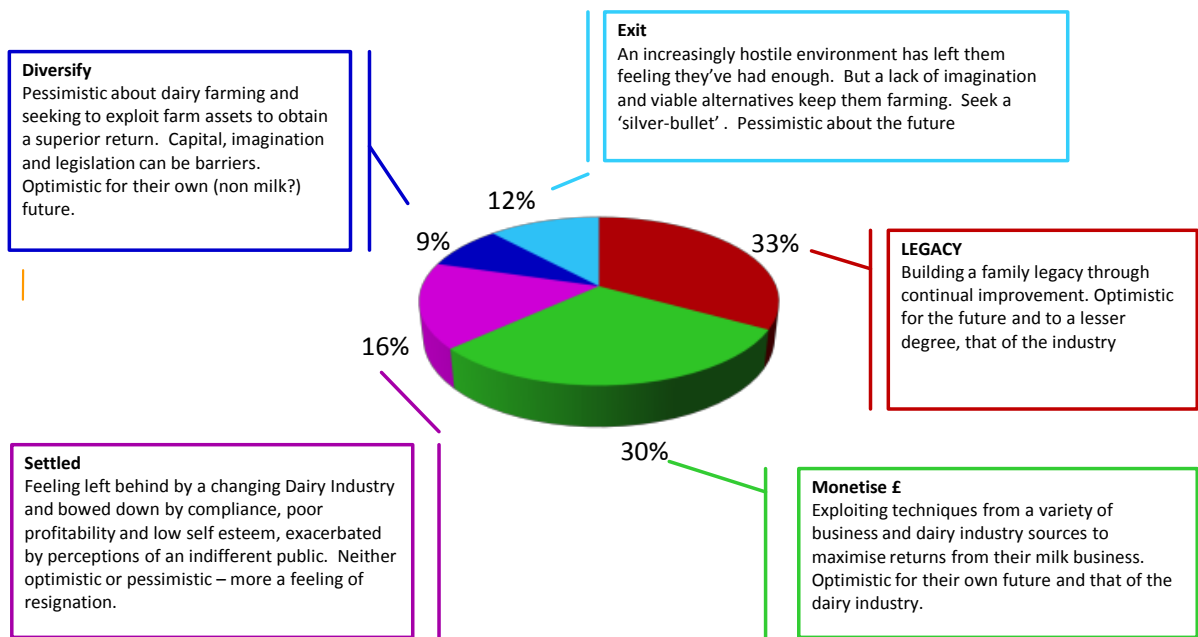
Recommendations

- Ensure better take up and impact by involving the industry in the research process to ensure relevance. This is now standard in 'applied' EU projects
- Create more opportunities for leading farmers to interact more directly with applied researchers and encourage the concept of CPD.
- The Dairy Science Forum could lobby for a framework to develop the skills of early career dairy consultants
- Make greater use of integrated delivery models which use social marketing techniques
- The Dairy Science Forum could encourage greater sharing of (non competitive) information across the supply chain
- Encourage international exchange programmes for dairy consultants
- Network more effectively with research and extension bodies in Europe
- The Dairy Science Forum could explore opportunities for a greater degree of networking and 'joined-up-ness' by those involved in the delivery of advice to dairy farmers (e.g. private consultancies, DairyCo, retailers, universities and colleges, industry bodies, Government, agencies etc)

Appendix 2

A recent DairyCo segmentation model of the dairy industry, based on personal and commercial goals

Sample profile summary (Quantitative research)



Base: 750

DairyCo