



Climate change mitigation & Environmental care

AKIS-in-practice! 8.2

Signpost advisory programme to support climate and sustainability actions on farms



Keywords/Tags



Advisory



Demo-farms



Peer-to-peer learning



Discussion groups



Potential users



Managing authorities of the CAP 



Farmers and demofarms



Advisors and advisory organizations



Researchers and Universities

RATIONALE



The Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement call for transformational shifts toward climate-resilient development. Consistently, the CAP 2023-2027 emphasizes sustainability and climate mitigation to address environmental challenges and maintain biodiversity by promoting climate-smart innovations. Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) play a crucial role in modernizing the agricultural sector while ensuring environmental care and climate change mitigation through collaborative research, innovation, and digitalization.

Key contributions of agricultural advisory and innovation support services include:

- Education: Provide training on sustainable practices and regulatory compliance.
- Tailored Guidance: Offer personalized support based on individual farmer contexts.
- Technology Access: Facilitate adoption of precision farming and renewable energy, along with demonstration projects.
- Sustainability Action Plans: Assist in developing plans aligned with CAP objectives, focusing on nutrient management, water conservation, and biodiversity.
- Monitoring and Benchmarking: Help farmers track emissions and resource use while comparing performance against benchmarks.
- Collaboration: Foster partnerships among farmers, researchers, and stakeholders for sharing best practices.
- Community Engagement: Create platforms for peer learning to enhance sustainability efforts.
- Adaptation Strategies: Provide guidance on adapting to climate impacts.

To follow-up with the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement along with the CAP goals, Ireland has declared a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency and is pursuing a Climate Action Plan aimed at achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, with a 51% reduction by 2030.

TEAGASC supports these efforts with a Climate Action Strategy 2022-2030, aiming to empower farm families to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% while maintaining profitability. This strategy is based on three interconnected pillars:

1. Signpost Advisory Programme.
2. Sustainability Digital Platform.
3. Virtual National Centre for Agri-food Climate Research and Innovation.

The resources devoted to the Teagasc Climate Action Strategy are funded by the Government.

SOLUTION



The Signpost programme is a multi-annual campaign to lead climate action by all Irish farmers, and achieve early progress in reducing gaseous emissions from Irish agriculture while also improving water quality, maintaining (and in some cases improving) biodiversity, reducing costs and creating more profitable and sustainable farming enterprises. Teagasc plays a crucial role in leading innovative research on various agricultural practices, including animal management, land use, and energy efficiency. Its aim is to develop effective knowledge-transfer interventions that facilitate the adoption of new technologies and practices among farmers, while also enhancing communication between farmers and stakeholders. This includes prioritizing tailored advisory services focused on low-carbon farming.

In 2022, Teagasc launched the Signpost Advisory Programme to support climate and sustainability efforts on farms, outlining a roadmap with key milestones for 2023-2032.

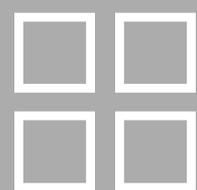
The Signpost Programme is currently supported by over sixty partner and supporting organisations, and provides a national anchor point for networking and training for the many actors across the Irish AKIS.

This programme aims to empower farm families to adopt technologies and production systems that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2030 while ensuring farm profitability. It is free and available to all farmers, utilizing a network of Signpost demonstration farms for enhanced advisory and training support.

Specific Objectives:

1. Support the transition to sustainable farming systems.
2. Aid the agricultural sector in reducing emissions in line with national policies.
3. Avoid unintended consequences of emission reduction efforts while improving water quality and biodiversity.
4. Promote practices that enhance farm profitability and sustainability.
5. Build national capacity among farmers and their supporters to implement necessary changes.
6. Serve as a trusted knowledge source, facilitating collaboration among programme partners.

The Signpost Programme is backed by over sixty partner organizations, providing a central hub for networking and training within the Irish Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS).





Signpost Programme is based on two pillars:

- The network of 120 Signpost demonstration farms that are amongst the first to adopt climate mitigation and adaptation technologies, supported by their advisors and they are central to farmer-to-farmer learning, sharing their experiences with other farmers through farm walks, events, articles, videos, media etc. Beyond these farms, the target for the programme is to register 10,000 farmers each year with 50,000 participating in the programme between 2023 and 2030.
- The Signpost Advisory Programme, that includes a plurality of services, advisory methods and tools aimed at supporting farmers to make a tailored Action Plan and implement it through a range of advisory supports, including both group-based and individual follow-up and advice. Twenty-one signpost climate advisors are in place countrywide, and their mission is to help farmers to contribute to the emissions target reduction set for their industry. A team of Signpost advisors has been committed and it is listed on the programme website.

The steps to access and implement the programme are:

- Farmers register for the programme and are subject to a baseline assessment, which is accessible through the Sustainability Digital Platform, of the current actions being implemented in view to be provided by the total emissions figure to reach by the end of the programme support (3 years).
- An Action Plan for the farm is developed in conjunction with an advisor.
- Participation in the programme is for 3 years.

To implement this programme, Teagasc devoted a significant amount of resources, in terms of funding and staff, by including 30 advisors across the country. Moreover, about 62 partners collaborate to the successful realization of this program and this is likely to enable and consolidate relations within the AKIS.

The support is provided free of charge for all farms on a three-years period and services and tools provided under the framework of the Signpost advisory programme are vary, by including:

- Workshops and short training courses, focused on climate actions, including mitigation and adaptation measures.
- Assessment of current climate actions of associated farms.
- A farm specific Signpost Action Plan.
- One-to-one Climate Action in-group advice.
- Support in interpreting our farm's GHG emissions and carbon footprint, and in benchmarking farm's performance against industry targets.
- Farm walks and seminars.
- Thematic discussion groups.
- Support in the implementation of farm's Nutrient Management Plan.
- Digital newsletters, updates and text messages.

Farmers have also access to a comprehensive list of advisory tools regarding a vary of topics (e.g. Nutrient Management Planning, forestry, biodiversity, Self-Assessment Tools for Reducing GHG and others).



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY



- Establishment of the advisory plan and tools.
- Availability of resources, in terms of budget and professional pluralistic capacities by advisors. As well, a good geographic coverage of the territory is a must.
- Capacity and resources to deliver pluralistic and attractive services to adhering farms.
- Back-office by researchers, industrial enterprises, ICT statistics and program development and other expertise that is needed to deliver a wide range of advisory services, including digital tools and DSS.
- Back-office on about administrative procedures, communication and ICT for the organization of the events (e.g. in-situ workshops and discussion groups) and release of dissemination materials (e.g. newsletters, video).
- Continuous learning and updates by the advisors along with networking and alignment on advisory contents, methods and tools.
- Definition of guidelines and procedures for advisory provision on demand.
- Trusted relationship with farmers and, possibly, a network of demofarms.

BENEFITS



Specific benefits highlighted for this practice are:

- Empowering farmers on a country-level climate change mitigation pathway.
- Provision of a wide range of advisory services for free leading to more conscious climate action by farming and entrepreneurship models.
- Continuous monitoring, data series development and assessment of farms sustainability state of play.
- Creation of an enabling environment for the development interactions and professional/business relationships among a plurality of AKIS actors, possibly leading to more innovative farming systems.
- Relying on the ongoing advisory support services currently in place at the current demo farms ensures consistency and good integration into existing advisory programmes.



Box 1: Examples of topics touched by the Signpost advisory Programme:

- Farming for Water EIP.
- Sustainable Tillage Practices.
- GROFarmS - Growing Resilient Organic Farming Systems.
- Climate adaptation in tillage.
- Update on feed additives to reduce methane emission.
- Digitalisation of advisory services: vital to support sustainable agriculture.
- Combining targeted measures and EIP funding to deliver water quality improvements.
- Managing Soil Health.
- Protecting Farmland Pollinators.
- Ecologically Significant Habitats on Farmland.
- Nitrates and anaerobic digestion.
- The opportunities of climate action.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION



- Webpage that includes lots of practical publications on the programme.
- Explanation of the Signpost programme.
- <https://www.teagasc.ie/environment/climate-change--air-quality/the-signpost-series-webinars/>.
- The Signpost Series as a podcast.



Ireland



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Watch this AKIS-in-Practice!

