



BEACON FARM NETWORK

INFORMATION FOR FARMERS

Driving research into sustainable livestock farming systems that deliver for people, planet and profit





AgriSearch has announced plans to develop a network of up to 50 “Beacon” farms across Northern Ireland to gather evidence for research into sustainable livestock farming systems that deliver for people, planet and profit.

Introduction

Recognising that the landscape in food and farming is changing rapidly, AgriSearch commissioned a comprehensive review of its strategy. There is a clear need for science to provide evidence of the ecosystem services that are delivered by farmers. To address this, AgriSearch are establishing a ‘Beacon Farm Network’ – a structured, intentional and semi-permanent farm network which can be used for research.

The key challenge facing beef, dairy and sheep farmers over the coming years will be to continue producing high quality, affordable food to feed a growing population, while maximising animal welfare and environmental gains. Indeed, the government target for Northern Ireland to be carbon neutral by 2045 presents a challenge for all parts of industry and society as a whole. Farmers want to play their part in delivering these targets. For too long, agriculture has been presented as part of the problem, but we want to demonstrate through innovative practices and research how farming can be a big part of the solution.

It is intended that the Network will be comprised of a representative selection of farms, covering the wide range of farming systems currently present in the Northern Ireland Agricultural sector (Dairy, Beef, Sheep, Mixed, Full/Part-time, Lowland/Upland etc.). This network of commercial farms will act as beacons for the industry, researching and showcasing the latest innovations and activities that deliver for people, profit and planet. By establishing a Network a basis for improved consistency and longevity in on-farm research will be provided, driving cultural change on farm.

The Beacon network will benchmark carbon sequestration on-farm, quantify the benefit of ecosystem services delivered by farmers, and encourage the development of innovative, resilient and sustainable farm systems. The range of information and data gathered across the network will better inform industry relevant research questions covering production efficiency, profitability, sustainability and environmental impact. This information will be used to better inform policy discussion but also ensure the sector can positively communicate the wider associated benefits of agriculture and land management and how it is going about making the sector more sustainable for the future.

Data will be collected by three main means:

- Site visit (e.g. collection of soil samples, visual assessment of farm habitats etc.)
- Data from central data sources (e.g. Google maps, APHIS, VetImpress, etc.)
- Data collected / recorded by farmers



What we are looking for?

AgriSearch are seeking to recruit up to 50 farmers from across Northern Ireland who aspire to improve both their own on-farm operations and those of the industry as a whole across the three themes of people, planet and profit.

Phase one of the project will commence in February 2021. The initial term of involvement for those farms selected is 5 years and a commitment to data collection and recording is essential. AgriSearch staff will provide training and support but the ability to operate on-phone apps and basic computer software is a requirement.

There will be a significant Knowledge Exchange element to the network and participants will be asked to share information via social media networks etc. In addition, some members of the network may be asked to hold a Farm Walk or take part in online webinars or podcasts. Regular discussion group meetings will also be scheduled for all members of the network to share experiences and allow for feedback on the activities being undertaken.

It is anticipated that the network will be used as a platform for a range of research projects and initiatives and Beacon Farmers will be given the opportunity to participate in additional studies.



Benefits of Taking Part

Farmers will be paid a total of £1000/year over the course of the project for their participation. Mileage will also be paid to attend the discussion group meetings or events. Farmers who host farm walks will be paid an additional sum per event.

In addition, farmers may receive on-farm technology or software to utilise over the course of the project.



Next Steps

To apply, please complete the [online form](#).

A briefing for farmers interested in applying will be held on Tuesday 15th December at 8pm. To register for this webinar click [here](#).

Deadline

Applications forms must be submitted no later than noon on **4th January 2020**.

If you have any specific queries please email: beacon@agrisearch.org

About AgriSearch

AgriSearch was formed in 1997, as an independent charity, to provide a mechanism through which beef, dairy and sheep farmers could have direct involvement in production orientated research. Its purpose is to make the Northern Ireland ruminant livestock sector more competitive, profitable and sustainable.