

Report of the meeting with the Irish stakeholders for the Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform

Report by Chris Warkup and Huw Jones, Genesis Faraday

The meeting with the Irish stakeholders of the Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform (FABRE-TP) was held near Backweston, Celbridge, Co. Kildare on July 7th, 2008. The meeting was hosted by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

John Dardis from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food acted as the local contact to organise the meeting. Representatives of the major Irish animal production industries and breeders organisations, and from the Universities and Research Institutions involved in animal breeding and reproduction, and other relevant organisations like the Department of Agriculture, were invited to attend the meeting. A total of 24 people participated in the meeting.

John Dardis first gave a brief introduction to the meeting. Donagh Berry for Teagasc then gave an overview of the current Irish research activity and priorities in the field of genetics/genomics and reproduction. The introduction to FABRE Technology Platform was then given by Chris Warkup. This presentation outlined what Technology Platforms are, and why they are important. The presentation was then used to describe why and how FABRE-TP has been established and its activities so far. Following this, the Strategic Research Agenda was explained, with particular focus on the Technology Research Priorities. The participants were also informed of the opportunity to set up a National Mirror Group for Ireland.

The attendants were then provided with an opportunity to express their views on FABRE-TP in general, and in particular, the Strategic Research Agenda. These comments were recorded, and then circulated to those who attended the meeting for possible corrections and additions. The final list of significant comments is as follows:

1. It was stated that the FABRE Vision was well written and was generally in-agreement with the overall thinking and views of those involved with animal breeding and reproduction in Ireland.
2. The priority species for Ireland would be dairy and beef cattle, sheep and horses. Ireland has organised breed evaluation programmes for all these species. In horses the emphasis was on show jumping ability.
3. There was some concern that that short-term implementation issues, such as uptake of new technologies by breeders were not covered. Getting the Irish Industry to participate in application to EU funding calls was a particular challenge. Chris Warkup explained that it was hoped that more short-term implementation focused initiatives would be funded through national programmes. It was important to remember that across the EU, substantially more funding was available through national programmes than was available through the Framework Programmes. Chris added that participation of industry in

framework bids was a challenge EU wide, but some countries were more successful than others.

Other possibilities for involving industry in EU funding bids were seen as:

- Funding for SME's: Projects with two research partners and three industry partners from different member states; the EU grant can provide up-to 75% of the cost, but at least 40% of the money must go to the research partners. The SME partners must also provide part of the cash for the project. These projects tend to be of around 18 months in duration and for up-to 2M euros in value. They must show clear collaboration and a real quantifiable impact on the SME businesses.
- Establishing a network of excellence – to stimulate uptake of new technologies by the industry.

Although two good options, it was acknowledged that both calls were very competitive and the chances of success were likely to be higher by applying for funding through national programmes.

4. It was suggested that in developing projects to meet Framework Programme calls, more emphasis should be put on technology transfer aspects, and possibly more collaboration with social scientists built in to meet this need.
5. In all EU vision documents it is important to make the proposals relevant to the EU consumer/wider public, making sure that the potential benefits to them are explained. One possible example would be, reduced human deaths on farms through genetic improved of temperament in cattle.
6. In Ireland they were very keen to adopt new technologies but this should only be done in a way that would not be to the detriment of the countries green image. With this in mind, revisions to the vision document should include more emphasis on benefits to the environment of improvements to animal agriculture through animal breeding.
7. The vision document could be made stronger by focusing on specific traits, such as traits that are related to animal welfare. Chris Warkup explained that that had been the original intention but that in writing the document it became apparent that due mainly to different priorities in different countries, it was very difficult to include information on specific traits.
8. It was suggested that the vision document should also include some aspect related to the development of national or international recording programmes for animal health. A good integrated recording scheme could provide good data that could be used for research and used in breeding programmes. The potential benefits from such a system were seen as large.
9. John Dardis said that DAFF would give serious consideration to facilitating the development of a mirror group for the FABRE-TP in Ireland. The likely benefits from a unified voice were even higher in the current situation where the national budget for agriculture was being reduced.

10. The participants asked in of the technology Platform would continue after the end for the current project. Chris Warkup responded by saying that EAAP, EFFAB and GFP have agreed that together they would try and ensure that the Technology Platform does continue, however there would not be a significant budget for the activity.