Issued 9/11/2016

Business Development Group (BDG) Scheme

Notes for Farmers

1. Introduction

Knowledge transfer through Business Development Groups (BDG) is a scheme funded through Pillar II of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020.

BDG's are part of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme which will provide support for knowledge transfer, innovation, cooperation and capital investment to farmers. BDG will use a group approach to improve the technical efficiency of the farm business and will also offer participants the opportunity to gain a level 3 qualification. More details can be found on www.cafre.ac.uk/industry-support/business-development-groups.

The scheme will open for applications on the **16 November 2016 at 10.00 am.** Completed applications must be submitted by **4.00pm on 30 November 2016**. Applicants will be notified of the outcome within 8 weeks of the scheme closing date. The BDG meetings will commence in early 2017.

2. Need for Scheme

Currently 15% of the people working in the NI agricultural industry do not have an agricultural qualification. This compares to 7% across other business sectors. This has led to a shortfall in management skills in relation to production, business, marketing and information and communication technology (ICT). As a result agri-food businesses are limited in their capacity to adapt to changing market demands and volatility. Educational achievement is well documented as an important indicator of the sustainable growth of the farm business.

The BDG scheme aims to address the educational imbalance within the agricultural industry and also help farmers plan before making financial on-farm investments by up-skilling a limited number of farmers.

The scheme aims to have 3,000 farm businesses participating in Business Development Groups by 2020. It is estimated that there will be approximately 160 groups with between 15 -20 like minded farmers working together and sharing knowledge and experiences.

3. What is involved?

Group members will be invited to engage in a programme, for at least 3 years which will involve:

- Joining a small group of like-minded farmers
- Meeting up to eight times a year, mainly on members' farms
- Attend meetings focusing on topics agreed by the group. Activities will include on-farm meetings, demonstrations and skills training
- All meetings are facilitated by a dedicated CAFRE Development Adviser.

The benefits to being part of a Business Development Group are as follows:

- Development of a business plan specifically for your farm
- Guidance with interpreting farm benchmarking data to help identify areas that have the potential to be improved.
- Improve your profitability
- Keep up to date with latest technologies
- Option to gain a qualification

4. Scheme Eligibility

Stage 1:

To be eligible to the scheme you must:

Dairy

- *Have a DAERA Category 1 Business ID.*
- *Be currently managing a dairy cow enterprise.*
- *Be willing to host a group training event.*
- *Be willing to share benchmarking information within their development group.*
- *Not be currently participating in a dairy BDG (no duplicate applications will be accepted).*
- *Be over 18 at the time of application. If you nominate someone to attend on your behalf, they must also be over 18 at the time of application.*

Pigs

- *Have a DAERA Category 1 Business ID.*
- *Be currently managing a pig breeding enterprise with a minimum of 70 sows.*
- *Be willing to host a group training event.*
- *Be willing to share benchmarking information within their development group.*
- *Be over 18 at the time of application. If you nominate someone to attend on your behalf, they must also be over 18 at the time of application.*

Stage 2:

If the number of applications from within a particular sector is greater than the target, a selection process will be applied based solely on the information contained in the application form.

Stage 3:

In the event that applications within a sector achieve the same score or the sector remains oversubscribed after Stage 2 is complete then CAFRE will use a random selection to award places to a BDG for those applications affected. This random selection will be witnessed by a representative independent from CAFRE.

The success of the scheme will depend on the willingness of group members to engage with the facilitator to work towards meeting the objectives of the scheme. Members will also be required to maintain confidentially within the group. It is important that farmers appreciate the value of the key elements of the scheme which are:

- maintaining an active business development plan;
- benchmarking their business;
- attending the training events; and
- sharing information with other group members.

5. Payments

Farm business owners will receive a support payment to facilitate their (or their nominee's) full participation in the scheme. The support payment is payable following attendance at a minimum of six training events within each year. Attendance at the minimum number of training events will result in a payment of £367/year rising to £490/year where full attendance has been recorded. Farm business owners will also receive a payment of £600/visit for hosting a training event at their farms.

6. Administration of the Scheme

This scheme is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and is delivered by CAFRE. Each dairy and pig BDG will have a dedicated CAFRE Adviser assisted by a Support Assistant.

Successful applicants will be required to sign a membership agreement which will detail the requirements of the scheme, rules and conditions for payment. It shall be the responsibility of the farm business owner and the group member to familiarise themselves with this information.

7. Application to the Scheme

The scheme will open for applications on the **16 November 2016 at 10.00 am** and close for applications at **4.00pm on 30 November 2016.** Please refer to the Application Form Guidance Notes for more details on the application process. Applicants will be notified of the outcome within 8 weeks of the scheme closing date. The BDG meetings will commence in early 2017.

If you are a new farm business you must have first obtained a Category 1 Farm Business Identification Number before an application can be made. If you have not already done so you should contact your local DAERA office as soon as possible to obtain advice and the New Farm Business (FB1) application form. CAFRE cannot accept any responsibility if a Category 1 Farm Business Identification Number is not issued before the closing date for applications.

All applications **must** either be submitted online or received by **CAFRE Knowledge Transfer Administration, Greenmount Campus, 45 Tirgracy Road, Antrim, BT41 4PS** before the closing date of **Wednesday 30 November 2016 at 4pm.** Late applications will not be accepted after the closing date/time.

Unsuccessful applications will have the right to a review of the decision. Details of this process are available on request.

For more information on the Business Development Group Scheme, please e-mail kt.admin@daera-ni.gov.uk or call Knowledge Transfer Administration on 028 9442 6790 or visit www.cafre.ac.uk/industry-support/business-development-groups.

Closing Date for receipt of completed application forms is:

Wednesday 30th November 2016 at 4.00 pm

No LATE or INCOMPLETE applications will be accepted.