**AgriSearch**

**DRAFT STRATEGY FOR CONSULTATION**

**17th September 2014**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

AgriSearch has embarked upon a journey of transition and change. As a first step we are conducting a strategic review, through which we are seeking contributions from trustees, representatives, stakeholders and trusted advisors to help shape our future. In doing so we have followed good practice in strategy development and are seeking the following outcomes from the process;

* A clear purpose
* A long term vision
* A well-defined mission
* A set of ethical values and principles
* A set of clear, measurable, and achievable objectives
* Determinable outcomes and benefits
* A performance framework that drives success

The purpose of this draft strategy document is to communicate what we have determined so far and to seek your views and comments. As you read through each section you will find questions to consider and space to make comment. We sincerely hope you will take this opportunity to help us build a sustainable future, so that we in turn can help our industry to become more successful.

When we determine these important elements of our strategy, our next step will be to build and resource an implementation plan and a business plan.

**2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

AgriSearch has analysed and assessed the strategic context in which we operate. We have come to a crossroads in our existence, and are critically reviewing everything from our purpose, to the way we are funded, to the benefits we can bring to the agri-food industry and to farming. This review gives us an important opportunity to remodel our organisation and our way of working for long term sustainability and success.

To do this we must undertake a significant step change in our structure, our leadership role, how we attract funds and from where, our levy arrangements, our staffing and resourcing model, our business model and plan, and our strategic and working relationships with our farmers, government, partners, and stakeholders. Not only in NI, but also in the Republic of Ireland, the UK, the European Union, and further afield if appropriate.

When we achieve this remodelling we will open up research based opportunities from which the industry can benefit. The opportunities include European Union projects such as Horizon 2020, The UK Agri-Tech Strategy, the NI Going for Growth initiative and the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme.

So far, the development of our strategy has been internal with our Trustees and Representatives. It is the intention to use this document to consult further with external stakeholders and trusted advisors, to help shape the strategy and to look at opportunities for collaboration and partnership. It is also important to note that our strategy will continue to evolve and change over the coming years, as we proactively respond to industry, economic, social and environmental changes, challenges and opportunities.

**3. SWOT ANALYSIS.**

This SWOT analysis is a representation of the views of AgriSearch trustees and representatives in relation to its internal strengths and weaknesses as an organisation, and in relation to existing and future opportunities, as well as external threats.



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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **STRENGTHS (Internal)** |  | **WEAKNESSES (Internal)** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| • | A good reputation with government and the industry | • | The levy model won’t resource us for future plans |  |
| • | We have good blueprints and systems for production |  |  |  |
|  |  | • | Lack of resources to support vision |  |
|  • | We have a body of committed trustees and | • | Weak succession planning |  |
|  | representatives. | • | Not strong enough in funding process |  |
|  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **OPPORTUNITIES (External)** |  | **THREATS (External)** |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| • | We can position ourselves to attract EU Funds | • | Reducing stock in NI |  |
| • | We have an opportunity to educate the agri community, | • | There is still a heavy dependency of farmers on government |  |
|  | especially the young |  | and EU funding |  |
| • | With the right model and funding we can do more market | • | The conacre issue is a constraining factor in NI |  |
|  | driven research | • | There is a lack of business knowledge and acumen in |  |
|  |  |  |
| • | New entrants to farming are increasing |  | farming generally |  |
| • | NI has some of the best farmers in the world | • | Reducing funding from EU and government |  |

* NI is small but that is our strength
* There are emerging opportunities such as NIRDP, Agri-Tech, TSB, and Horizon 2020.

**Question 1: Do you see any other strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats for AgriSearch?**

**Please insert your comments**

**4. PURPOSE, VISION AND MISSION**

**PURPOSE**

AgriSearch was established in 1997 to answer a threat from the government of the day who were looking to withdraw from near market research. Through farmers and the industry showing their willingness to contribute to research, government funds could be leveraged. Being an organisation of limited resources, we have always worked in partnership with AFBI and CAFRE. In recent years AgriSearch has taken a vital role in hosting and chairing linkages between industry and research. AgriSearch has had increasing involvement with similar organisations outside Northern Ireland and is now in a position to provide a valuable interface between scientists and industry by way of “Operational Groups” proposed recently by the European Commission.

**We have determined that the main purpose of AgriSearch is to make the NI Ruminant Livestock Sector more competitive,**

**profitable and sustainable.**

This can be further explained as follows;

1. **Competitive - in terms of quality, value, positioning, price, market advantage and supply chain management.**
2. **Profitable - in terms of inputs such as raw materials, energy, environmental costs, and production costs, against outputs such as products and services, market penetration and distribution, waste, and residual products.**
3. **Sustainable - by way of long term sustainability principles and actions for economic stability, social advancement, and environmental protection and animal welfare.**

**VISION**

Now that AgriSearch is well established as an important contributor to the development of the NI industry we have determined an

ambitious and challenging vision for the future as follows;

**AgriSearch is committed to being an important driver of excellence and innovation in the NI ruminant livestock sector and being recognised by the industry and government as such.**

**MISSION**

Accepting this vision we understand that we will have to set out our mission in terms of the broad principles and approach we will follow.

**To realise this vision, we have embarked on our mission to be a trusted, valued provider of research based knowledge, applied**

**research, and knowledge based services.**

**Question 2: How do you view the purpose and role of AgriSearch?**

**Please insert your comments**

**Question 3: How closely do you think our vision and mission match the needs of our farmers and our stakeholders?**

**Please insert your comments**

**Question 4: At present the membership of the charitable body, The Northern Ireland Agricultural Research and Development Council (AgriSearch) is specifically the Trustees, the Chairs of AgriSearch Advisory Committees and three corporate members (UFU, DairyUK & NIMEA). These three organisations represent, respectively, the contributors of the levy that funds AgriSearch and the businesses that collect the levy on behalf of AgriSearch. Should AgriSearch consider opening up membership of the charitable organisation to levy payers, with a view to giving a greater sense of 'ownership' and mutual involvement? Should there be a provision for ‘corporate’ membership available to companies and co-operatives that are collectors of the levy? Should the provision for corporate membership be open to other agricultural organisation or businesses who don't collect levy on behalf of AgriSearch?**

**Please insert your comments**

**5. VALUES AND PRINCIPLES**

Every strong organisation has at its very foundation, a set of cherished and time honoured values and principles that guide it through challenges to success and sustainability, and that act as a reference for all conduct and behaviours, internally, and with customers and stakeholders. These values and principles will be prevalent in all of our activities and reflected in all of our work.

**AgriSearch will uphold in every way possible the following values and principles;**

* **Honesty and integrity**
* **Ethical leadership, good governance**
* **Principles of sustainability**
* **Accountability to farmers**
* **Consultation, engagement, communication**
* **Collaboration and partnership**
* **Value for money**
* **Excellence in research and services**

**6. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

It is vitally important to carefully consider what our strategic objectives should be and how we will achieve them. This is a process of reiteration and refinement, together with the determination of a clear, realistic and achievable plan of delivery. At a broad level we consider there are 3 main strands to what we do;

1. Knowledge Building and Learning
2. Communication and Developing
3. Collaboration and Partnership

As a result of internal discussion we have identified the following strategic objectives for further refinement;

1. To build an understanding of global advances in production systems, practices and techniques, through funded research, knowledge sharing, and collaboration.
2. To establish a new funding and operating model based on a structure and legal entity that is appropriate to the new vision for AgriSearch.
3. To lever funding through collaborative research partnerships, actively seeking partners locally, nationally and internationally, and developing mutually beneficial relationships.
4. To establish AgriSearch as a sustainable knowledge building and learning enterprise in NI, with a strong EU profile.
5. To establish the expert fund raising and research capabilities to support a proactive, responsive approach to emerging opportunities and industry challenges.
6. To fund and support the development of at least 20 ‘monitor farms’, including working, for example, in the realm of research to minimise or eliminate the impact of animal diseases.
7. To communicate more effectively and directly with farmers and to increase active participation by farmers in research.

**Question 5: How clear and how achievable do you see the above objectives?**

**Please insert your comments**

**Question 6: Are there any other strategic objectives that you think we should consider?**

**Please insert your comments**

**7. OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS**

At a broad level we would hope to realise the following outcomes and benefits for AgriSearch, for farmers, and for the wider agri-food

sector in Northern Ireland.

* A sustainable, successful, and enterprising AgriSearch that provides real and tangible benefits to the industry in NI
* Meaningful, beneficial and valuable collaboration and partnership across the industry locally and internationally
* The sharing and application or implementation of research based knowledge and learning, that adds real value for farmers and the industry
* The establishment of expert fund raising capability and the successful award of funding for initiatives that engage farmers at farm level
* The advancement in production systems, practices and techniques that helps to ensure NI farming remains productive, competitive, profitable, and sustainable
* The successful delivery of a ‘Monitor Farms’ project that raises productivity and profitability for the farms involved.

**Question 7: How do you view these desired outcomes and benefits and how can they be more targeted, focused and needs based?**

**Please insert your comments**

8. **MEASURING OUR PERFORMANCE**

No strategy would be complete without a clear performance measurement framework or set of performance indicators. Again, at a broad level to begin with, we see the following measures or indicators as being important for us in the future;

* Funding applications applied for and awarded, including partnerships
* Improvements in productivity and efficiency
* Improvements in systems, processes, and practices
* Increased profitability and profits
* Reduced input, overhead, and energy costs
* Increased or more productive use of land
* Strength of AgriSearch profile locally and internationally
* Level of industry/farmer confidence in AgriSearch research models, methods, and outcomes
* Strong collaborative relationships in government, the industry, and scientific and academic community

**Question 8: How do you view the above measures and indicators and are there any other measures we could adopt?**

**Please insert your comments**

**Any other comments you would like to make not covered by the above questions:**

**Please insert your comments**

**Thank you for taking the time to consider these issues and for you important contributions. Please ensure you return your**

**comments to us by Thursday 9th October 2014.**

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