

Creating Conditions for Innovation in the Irish Agri-Food Sector: The Role of Systemic Instruments

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Abstract

Innovation is increasingly viewed as a mechanism to address the challenge of balancing the demands of rising food production with climate change targets in the Irish agri-food sector. This paper offers a contribution to the formulation of policy measures aiming to influence and create conditions for innovation. It applies the innovation systems framework as a tool to understand and guide support of processes underlying innovation. Innovation system policy strategies, formulated to improve the innovation process of the entire system (Smits and Kuhlmann, 2004) are referred to as systemic instruments and are receiving growing attention from policy makers. A number of empirical studies exist on the growing role (Smits and Kuhlmann, 2004) and formulation (Klein-Woolthuis et al., 2005, Wieczorek and Hekkert, 2012) of systemic instruments. However, despite the increasing interest in the phenomenon few studies address how systemic instruments create conditions for innovation. This paper aims to address this gap, by applying a systemic policy framework to analyse the activities of two intervention programmes operating to address weaknesses in the Irish agri-food innovation system. The results conclude that systemic instruments create conditions for innovation by selecting tools that address the specific needs of an innovation system. This suggests the value in undertaking an innovation systems approach to analyse problems in depth and inform policy intervention. Furthermore, understanding needs of actors helps devise incentives and find a level of commonality required to stimulate coordinated action to address innovation system weaknesses.