i2connect

INTERACTIVE INNOVATION

Deliverable 5.15a

Practice Abstracts

30 April 2022

Task 5.6

Interaction with EIP-AGRI and development of EIP AGRI practice abstracts

Deliverable 5.15a

Practice abstracts (First set of practice abstracts)

30 April 2022

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Dissemination Level

PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

Summary

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List of abbreviations

AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
EIP-AGRI	European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability
ISSs	Innovation Support Services
PA	Practice Abstract

1. Introduction

Purpose of Deliverable 5.15

Communicating in an effective way the project outcomes is a crucial aspect to ensure a widely adoption and use of good practice.

In this sense, the main purpose of 5.15 is to disseminate original, inspiring, and replicable practice in the field of interactive innovation support.

The form of the practice abstracts is based on the EIP-AGRI common format that is designed to facilitate knowledge flows on innovative and practice-oriented projects from the start till the end of the project. This aspect will also allow an easy inclusion of i2connect practice abstracts in the EIP-AGRI Support facility and the future database.

The selection of the cases for the i2connect practice abstracts followed the following characteristics: good examples of methods and tools for Innovation Support Services (ISSs) to boost interactive innovation (e.g. participatory method used for providing the advisory service; peer-review methodology); successful functions performed by the advisor/s in Innovation Support Services (e.g. operational groups and multi-actor projects experiences focusing on roles and functions of ISSs); new actors performing ISSs (e.g. regional development agencies in some Italian Regions which can be considered innovation brokers); training packages for ISSs (e.g., examples of training courses that aim strengthening advisory skills in supporting ISSs); governance of processes in the implementation of ISSs; schemes to integrate advisors into the AKISs; effective dissemination activities/channels (e.g., dissemination tools that can be considered effective in reaching farmers); good practices for enabling environment for interactive innovation. This deliverable builds on the results of the activities carried out within the i2connect project, particularly on the updated inventory of AKISs (WP1) and the field reviews and the best practices selected in WP2. Therefore, other 150 practice abstracts will be delivered in the next years and before the project's end, using the results and outcomes of all project deliverables. To better involve partners in D5.15 implementation a PA toolkit (guidelines and i2connect practice abstract template) has been shared with i2connect partners. Moreover, a specific webinar for drafting PA in the i2connect project was held in July 2021.

Section 1 presents the guidelines provided to i2connect partners to compile the EIP-AGRI Practice Abstracts. Section 2 provides the first set of 50 EIP-AGRI Practice Abstract in a communicative form.

Section 1

Guidelines for i2connect EIP-AGRI Practice Abstracts

The main aim of these guidelines is to provide some useful information to select and to compile the EIP-AGRI Practice Abstracts (PAs) included in Task 5.6.

The EIP-AGRI website will host and share those PAs provided at the EU level.

According to the EIP-AGRI common format, the PAs template described below consists in mandatory, recommended, and optional elements. Some required information has been added to the EIP-AGRI common format in order to be able to create more complete PAs.

Required information	Information format	Type of information
Short Title (in English)	Text	Mandatory
Main geographical location (Country)	List	If relevant
Main geographical location (Region/Province)	Text	If relevant
Project/Experience period	Number	Recommended
Keywords	List	Mandatory
Short summary for practitioners	Text	Mandatory
Short title in native language	Text	Mandatory
Short summary for practitioners innative language	Text	Mandatory
Contacts	Text	Recommended
Author/s	Text	Recommended
Useful links	Text	Recommended
Pictures	JPEG; PNG; GIF format	Mandatory

1) How to choose a Practice?

The practice to be shared should be original, inspiring, and replicable in other countries.It should concern one of the following aspects:

- **Methods and tools for ISSs to boost interactive innovation** (e.g., participatory method used for providing the advisory service; peer-review methodology);

- **Successful functions performed by the advisor/s** in Innovation Support Services (e.g., operational groups and multi-actor projects experiences focusing on roles and functions of ISSs);
- **New actors** performing ISSs (e.g., regional development agencies in some Italian Regions which can be considered innovation brokers);
- **Training packages for ISSs** (e.g., examples of training courses that aim strengthening advisory skills in supporting ISSs);
- **Governance of processes** in the implementation of ISSs;
- **Schemes to integrate advisors into the AKISs;**
- **Effective dissemination activities/channels** (e.g., dissemination tools that can be considered effective in reaching farmers);
- **Good practices for enabling environment for interactive innovation;**

In case a project or an experience involved more than one of the above mentioned aspects it is recommended to split it into two or more practice abstracts, one for each aspect.

2) How to fill in the PA format?

- Short title (in English): max 150 characters to describe the practice briefly

Short title in English		0 character(s) / 150

- In some cases, the practice described can have a specific geographical location, interms of country and region or province involved. If the practice involves more than one country, please insert only the main location.

Main geographical location		
(Where the practice is set up: main Country)	*--Select--*	*(if relevant)*
(Where the practice is set up: main Region/Province)		*(if relevant)*

- In some cases, the practice described might be realized in a specific period oftime (e.g., projects; training courses). Otherwise, please leave the section empty.

Project/Experience period	
Starting date *(YY/MM)*	
Finish date *(YY/MM)*	

- Specify the main funding source and the total budget in case of a project, Operational Groups and other funded initiatives.

Main funding source		*recommended*
Project Budget		*(if relevant)*

- Each practice must be described according to one or more keywords from the list in the excel file. At least one of the keywords is required. It should give the idea of the content of the practice.
-

Keywords	--Select--	mandatory
	--Select--	recommended
	--Select--	recommended
	--Select--	
	--Select--	recommended

- This summary should be as interesting as possible for advisors/farmers/end-users, using a direct and easy understandable language and highlighting elements which are particularly relevant for practitioners. Research oriented aspects which do not help the understanding of the practice itself should be avoided.
  The practice should describe (max 1.500 characters) at least the following information:
  - A brief description of the context (e.g., the project in which the practice has been performed; the case study);
  - The main results/outcomes of the practice (expected or final);
  - The main characteristics of the support activities that justify the choice of the practice. What does make this practice so interesting?
  - The main added value/benefit of the practice. How can the practitioner make use of the results?

Short summary for practitioners		mandatory
In english on the (final or expected) outcomes (1000-1500 characters, word count – no spaces). *Do not complete if the summary below is completed in English* This summary should at least contain the following information: – Main **results/outcomes** of the activity (expected or final) – The **main practical recommendation(s)**: what would be the main added value/benefit/opportunities to the end-user if the generated knowledge is implemented? How can the practitioner make use of the results?		0 character(s) / 1500

- Short title (in you native language):. max 150 characters to describe the practicebriefly

Short title in native language		0 character(s) / 150

- See the short summary description above.

Short summary for practitioners in native language		*mandatory*
(*can be the language of the coordinator / one of the partners - otherwise in English*) (1000-1500 characters, word count – no spaces). This summary should at least contain the following information: - Main **results/outcomes** of the activity (expected or final) - The **main practical recommendation(s)**: what would be the main added value/benefit/opportunities to the end-user if the generated knowledge is implemented? How can the practitioner make use of the results?		0 character(s) / 1500

- It is recommended to insert the name, surname and the email address of the person of reference to have more detailed information about the practice.

Contacts	
Person of reference	*Please provide the name of the main contact person to have more information*
email address	

- It is recommended to insert the name and the organization of the Author/s who provided the practice.

Author/s	*Please provide the name of the author of*

- It is recommended to provide useful links (e.g., website of the project; link to audiovisual material; link to news) related to the practice.

Useful links	*Please provide the website or any other link to find more information about the*

- Please provide at least 3 pictures that can describe the practice. Those pictures won't be inserted in the EIP-AGRI common template, but they will be useful for the PAs version published in the i2connect website.

Section 2

First set of Practice Abstracts

Digital farmer: a Telegram channel to promote the circulation of information

"Digital farmer" is a Telegram channel created and administered by a farmer (winemaker) and exclusively addressed to farmers to inform them, in real time, about available innovations, including the results of operational groups, or about webinars and online workshops through which they can keep up to date. Since December 2019, Giuliano Preghenella has been sharing news that he considers interesting for the toolbox of an agricultural entrepreneur and that, according to him, are underestimated by the media in the sector.

The tool immediately raised interest, and grew on its own thanks to the tam tam of subscribers and the sharing on other social networks (Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook). According to the creator, the ideal "Digital farmer" reader prefers to receive only one news item per day, preferably always published at the same time (around 8 am, peak time for visits during the day), from Monday to Saturday. The news is re-posted via social networks and a website, thus multiplying the circulation of knowledge. The channel has around 650 subscribers, including university and agricultural schools students, who find the news, published interesting for their studies. Through public and private interactions, subscribers ask to exchange views or learn more about specific issues.

In the past two years, the channel has provided the opportunity to transfer expertise from researchers and advisors to farmers, thus facilitating the transfer of successful experiences and the creation of a network that, thanks to the facilitated and continuous learning stimulated by "Digital farmer", promotes professional development, bottom-up innovation and the bringing between research and practice.

Geographical location

Italy

Keywords

Dissemination; Facilitation, Mediation; Networking

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Coaching innovation in the Lake Geneva region: Star'Terre project

Star'Terre project is an example of facilitating and guiding innovative project. Using a call for application, innovative project are project leader are invited to explain the concept of their project. These applications are evaluated and selected by a jury study, according to the possible integration of the applicant project in the Star'Terre process and their development (only early stage initiatives can be selected).

Through their activity, the Star'Terre team supported and coached 16 projects and 88 projects have applicate.

As part of the support, the selected projects receive individual coaching. But also the not selected projects can benefit of collective advices through cluster workshops or meetings of 30 minutes of free advice.

The coaching support of the selected projects by Star'Terre team is for a maximum of 3 years and in a limited budget. The first step consists in the assessment of support needs and in fixing together the objectives of the support and the different miles stones to go forward and likely to contribute to the development and success of the project. The projects benefit from the approach according to their needs in all senses (legal, financial, technical, methods, tools, meditation…). At the end of the coaching, project holders have an end-meeting to identify learnings, appreciate the coaching process (what worked well and what could be improved) and what are the perspectives.

The idea is, that project holders will be enabled to develop their project as long as it makes sense for the 2 parties to collaborate. Once the project owners feel ready (sufficiently skilled) to continue on their own or if they fulfil the conditions to be taken over by other support organisations, the support by Star'Terre will be finished.

Geographical location

Switzerland

Keywords

Facilitation, Mediation
Territorial embeddedness
Support to integration into supply chains, local and agri-food systems
Networking, Technical advice/assistance

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Sustainable Uplands Agri-environmental Scheme (SUAS) pilot project

SUAS is one of the 12 successful groups chosen from across Ireland under the new EIP initiative. The key objective of the five-year pilot is to develop practical and innovative solutions that will address the complex agricultural, environmental and socio-economic challenges associated with the land management of commonages and hill farms in the Wicklow/Dublin upland. The enclosed land in the Wicklow Dublin uplands is of high value for biodiversity and is of European conservation importance for habitats and birds.

The SUAS project is based around the idea of commonage management groups, which can be effective to deliver best practice management, a sustainable stocking rate and appropriate timing of grazing using proper breeds are needed to deliver best practice management of the uplands. To achieve this, ongoing knowledge exchange between advisors and farmers is needed for successful upland management. The main principles and ideas of the project are integrated into two SUAS Actions. 1) The establishment of Commonage Groups (CGs), with their own constitutions, which will take responsibility for the development, implementation and delivery of their own Commonage Management Plans (CMP); Development of CMPs, with the integration of environmental (biodiversity and water) and farming activities into a single document/guide. 2) The implementation, monitoring, updating and reporting of the CMP and Farm Management Plans, including the review of annual biodiversity performance data, the review of annual farm performance data and the review of water quality programme. The use of an auction-based payment scheme to incentivise the CGs to develop their own solutions to problems they identify on their commonage.

Geographical location

Ireland - County Wicklow

Keywords

Demonstrations; Advisory method and tools (including digital); Monitoring and evaluation

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Identifying and understanding farmers needs

In interactive innovation support it is vital to create a common understanding of the real needs of farmers who are both actors and target participants. Advisors and their organisation must continuously identify and review needs of these farmers. Advisors goals, activities and planned outcomes should address the real short and long term needs, while recognising that the needs of farmers may differ from person to person and group to groups. This practice is supported by advisors who listen, record and report the changing needs and do not assume that they know the needs already; asking farmers to express their needs regularly. The advisor should ensure that the solutions are practical and meet the real needs of the farmers for a successful uptake of the solution. Advisors are skilled in consultancy, however in interactive innovation support requires skills in listening, questioning and in participatory management. Visuals, on-farm trials and practical demonstrations support and energise interactive learning and adoption. Assumptions about the real needs of farmers are dangerous and should be evidence based. Participants are likely to have a mix of the knowledge, skills, resources and motivation needed to solve the problem, the challenge for the advisor is to get them to work as a team. It requires needs analysis exercises that should form part or all formal advisor training.

An interactive innovation project should have clearly expressed needs, goals and actions agreed by participants and owned by the group. Adviser should use warm participatory approach (e.g. brainstorm) to identify and record the needs of the group and to prioritise needs and agree steps to find solutions, plan actions and work together as a group.

Geographical location

Ireland

Keywords

Brokerage
Demand articulation, Networking
Facilitation, Mediation
Management of advisors and advisory projects

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INTERACTIVE INNOVATION

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Managing conflicts among research and practice: the Agrosyl case

Within the AGROSYL operational group, headed by the Chamber of Agriculture, farmers were involved in the search for solutions, through scientific protocols and analyses, to integrate trees in livestock farming, and support feed autonomy and animal welfare, while improving the climate resilience

The initial idea started from the ground, but the concept and the methodology were set up by research institutes, following a top-down approach. This gave rise to a lot of discussion among the partners, especially on the research protocols. Initially, the work on different tasks was very compartmentalised without exchange between the partners.

There was misunderstanding among farmers and researchers. The biggest difficulty occurred when a breeder who was not equipped to follow the scientific indications (use the mechanisation for harvesting the mulberry production) changed the protocol to make it more feasible in the field. Researchers did not understand his initiative and this created a chill. The Chamber of Agriculture assumed the role of mediator, trying to make the researchers understand that the laboratory aspect does not fit the reality on the field.

In 2019 an advisor/facilitator turned the approach to the project from top-down to bottom-up, introducing brief but frequent meetings, creating WhatsApp groups on different topics, inviting partners to do sessions and assist in experimentations in the field. In this way, the vision of each party changed and communication became more fluid and concrete. In the meantime, the initiative taken by the farmer not to follow the protocol and let the animals graze in mulberry plots proved to be very conclusive, determining the success of the project, whose results were widely recognised, also abroad.

Geographical location

France - Ariege, Occitanie

Keywords

Facilitation, mediation; Advisory methods and tools; Innovation & Transition support;

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Gaining value from diversity among actors in projects

Having a diversity of actors in an interactive innovation project group is important, it provides an added interest and improved learning environment. Diversity can be achieved through age, gender, race, educational background, experience, attitude and many other qualitative personal traits and social and demographic point of difference. Diversity adds value to a multi-actor group by helping to provide a wider perspective on a problem or to bring new energy to group. The inclusion of a range of relevant actors in projects also supports innovation through improved ownership among the actors and their cohorts. It also brings a broader and deeper perspective, with more knowledge and potential to find solutions. This diversity amongst actors may allow for a social learning environment and may prevent or to avoid cognitive, information, managerial, or system gaps within an interactive innovation project or group. Advisors as facilitators of groups need to ensure that acceptance of diversity is cultured and valued by actors by incorporating activities which overcome unconscious bias and promote equality and inclusion. The advisors may need training to deal with diversity related issues and to demonstrate the value of diversity in terms of interactive innovation support.

Geographical location

France, Ireland

Keywords

Innovation & Transition support
Peer-to-peer learning
Scaling-out the innovations
Territorial embeddedness
Brokerage

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CONNECTING ADVISORS TO BOOST INTERACTIVE INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Institutional support and creating an enabling environment

Institutions may act as a support for interactive innovation projects with the increasing recognition of the roles of various types of intermediaries within these types of projects. Innovation brokers/ facilitators (advisors) may seek assistance from institutions at all stages innovation projects. It is the role of the advisors to advocate the support from institutions and to facilitate this for their clients to help create an enabling environment. The enabling environment of a project plays a key success factor in the support of interactive innovation. Without the support of institutions, advisors are maybe less able to work efficiently and creatively. Advisors may have a broad and vast knowledge of agriculture, yet some innovation projects may be specialized and require very specific knowledge or skills. Advisors must acknowledge that assistance may be required for specialist project where advisors may naturally not have access to the resources required for this project. Advisors may need assistance in terms of knowledge, development techniques, testing strategies and implementation of the innovation product. Participants and individual actors are likely to have a variety of skills, knowledge, attitudes and viewpoints on the direction of the project, but are unlikely to have all these which are needed for the innovation. A strong institutional involvement provides a depth of resources, relationship support and knowledge back-up, though this may fall apart due to lack of communication, unclear roles and tasks or clarity of ownership of responsibilities. The advisor must act as a facilitator and assist both clients and specialists to efficiently communicate and support an enabling environment where ideas may develop and grow.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Enabling environment Technical advice/assistance Innovation & Transition support
Specialist support to other advisors
Networking

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CONNECTING ADVISORS TO BOOST INTERACTIVE INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Regular upskilling of advisors

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is essential as basic training and learning is not sufficient to support a long-term career due to the frequency of change in both hard and soft skills. Advisors may not only need technological or practical skills (hard skills), but may need training in the area of soft skills such as facilitation practices, networking, problem solving etc. Advisors who are professionally and methodologically trained with the basic knowledge, skills and attitude may enhance relationship building and trust within his or her environment. Within peer reviews, advisors identified the lack of training or support resources available, and actively pursued their own self development through training and access to information. This knowledge and or methodological skills may build confidence of the advisor. Through upskilling, advisors were able to provide farmers with the technical information needed for the innovation project, as well as the soft skills needed to facilitate this which was hugely satisfying. When managing and disseminating interactive innovations, it may be important for advisors to be skilled and confident in facilitation techniques. This may be implemented through training workshops and courses, self-directed learning, institutional support materials, practice, networking and many other ways.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Advisory method and tools (including digital)
Peer-to-peer learning
Specialist support to other advisors
Training, Monitoring and evaluation

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Application of a circular knowledge model in TRAS.IRRI.MA Operational Group

TRAS.IRRI.MA is an operational group that focuses on how to facilitate the introduction of improved irrigation management models in fruit production. The idea behind the project was to spread knowledge from the European initiative "EIP-water". The issue of water scarcity for agricultural purposes is so widespread in the Basilicata region that all AKIS actors were interested to implement the project.

In the first year, meetings were organised to gather farmers' needs and agree on objective. The University (involved in EIP-water) provided specific training for advisors (technical advisors from Asso Fruit organisation, private advisors and advisors from public extension service), which act as a connection between researchers and farmers and facilitate the transfer of field work to the farmers who are not involved in the project by organising open events. With the acquired knowledge, advisors were able to advise which solution for water management would be most appropriate for a specific problem and adapt it based on characteristic of the farm. But the knowledge flow goes in the other direction too, so the goal is also to collect knowledge and experiences from farmers, who use innovative technologies for water management. Based on the tests made on farms, the best water management models were selected and open field visits on farm were organised. Field visits are open and free for everybody in the Region. In this way other farmers/advisors can also come and learn which water management tools exist, how they work, what are their advantages and how to use them. They can also see other farmers while using the technology and, at the same time, discuss about how to improve irrigation withadvisors, technician and researchers.

Geographical location

Italy

Keywords

Dissemination
Demontration
Back-office
Monitoring and evaluation
Peer-to-peer learning

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CONNECTING ADVISORS TO BOOST INTERACTIVE INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Planning and implementation of a comprehensive communication in successful innovation processes

As with all change management and strategic developments in the corporate world, effective communications both internally and externally in interactive innovation cases are vital and the good practice in interactive innovations projects is that this is planned and managed throughout the project. It is crucial to have a leader who can mobilize people, facilitate open discussion and ensure knowledge exchange among all involved parties. It enables the whole project community to move forward and ultimately achieve a greater impact as they share the same goal and are committed and capable of using a variety of already well-established communication tools and channels. The risk of difficulties and conflicts arises when the involved actors do not share the same expectations and have insufficient or irregular communication. Different actors need to listen to each other, discuss their own ideas to find and agree on a common view and understanding. Framers make the difference since they have a real need to share ideas, experiment, communicate to find solutions. Researchers, advisors, and others have different interests when joining an innovation project (publications, success, money, etc.). The main challenge still remains to find a common view/interest, redefine each actor's own expectations that could be less satisfying but can lead to something new. A clear benefit is that projects are more likely to overcome resistance when people share experiences they feel at the idea or solution came from themselves. There is nothing like a good debate among peers to help people change their minds. A good facilitator sets a higher standard of learning by listening, seeing, doing, and telling. Good internal and external communications also help actors to see their problems through other eyes which is part of the solution to most problems.

Geographical location

Latvia

Keywords

Dissemination

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https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/9 780470995235.fmatter

http://www.fao.org/nr/com/gtzworkshop/a0892e

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The Egg Drop Challenge - A teamwork exercise to facilitate understanding of interactive innovation

"The ""Egg Drop Challenge"" is a great team activity that involves collaboration, creativity and problem solving. The objective is to protect an egg from breaking when dropped from a high elevation (several meters). Each team by using only the limited materials provided, builds a structure to protect the egg so that it withstands such a fall. The materials required include: raw eggs, plastic straws, masking tape, newspaper and any other suitable material of choice. This exercise was introduced in the context of a workshop on interactive innovation during the Kick-Off meeting of the i2connect consortium. After the exercise, a debriefing session was conducted during which members discussed what went well and what went wrong during the team exercise. Members were able to relate the group activity to an interactive innovation process and identified several key elements vital to successful outcome of the process such as shared understanding and vision of the goal and the task, mutual trust, commitment, facilitation, cooperation etc.
The activity was very useful to illustrate the interactive innovation process, to facilitate a creative working atmosphere and to enhance team spirit. The activity could be adapted and used in diverse contexts as a simple yet demonstrative exercise to facilitate understanding of the interactive innovation process. "

Geographical location

Germany

Keywords

Demonstrations
Facilitation, Mediation
Advisory method and tools (including digital)

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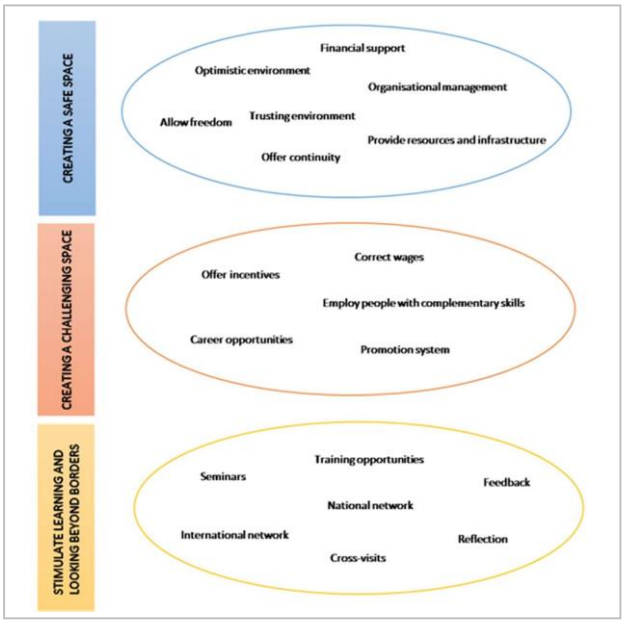
CONNECTING ADVISORS TO BOOST INTERACTIVE INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Repository of required competencies of an innovation advisor



There is a changing structure of the agricultural sector that also makes new demands on farmers' entrepreneurial skills. As a result, the way of thinking about innovation and knowledge transfer started to change, and thus also the view on agricultural extension and advisory services. The purpose of this document is to identify the 'innovation advisor' and provide a repository of required skills and competencies.

A thorough literature study formed the starting point but also an interview guide for semi-structured interviews was created and sent to members of the consortium for their input and feedback. Interviews were conducted with both members from inside the i2connect consortium, as well as with external experts.

As a wide array of terminology is being used to what we, in i2connect, refer to as 'the innovation advisor', several different views in terminology are presented. An overview is given of the functions and contributions, as well as the various types and paradoxes in the functioning of innovation intermediaries. The identified personal competences of the innovation advisor were analysed and sorted using the structure 'Qualifications of an advisor' (Gerster-Bentaya et al. 2009).

Apart from the competencies of innovation advisors on the personal level, responsibilities and requirements for the organisational level were also identified. Three responsibilities emerged (creating a safe space, creating a challenging space and stimulate learning and looking beyond borders.), under which several requirements were clustered. Finally, the implications for policy making were described.

Geographical location

Belgium

Keywords

Innovation & Transition support
Facilitation, Mediation
Training, Brokerage

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A light reflection tool to support individual learning in a project context

i2connect is a H2020 project whose main mandate is to create a momentum of change in innovation support services by 'empowering advisors as well as their organisations to engage and support farmers and foresters in interactive innovation processes. To support partners to learn from project experiences and to capitalise on these learnings at the project level, a light reflection tool was developed. The tool offers a simple, non-threatening support (a template with a list of questions) to structure own reflections and draw conclusions for learning at the individual and project level. The three main questions asked are: 1) What are your observations and learning insights on "interactive innovation"? (2) Which of these insights would you like to discuss with others in i2connect? (3) What conclusions do you draw from your insights for (a) a next event within i2connect and (b) for your professional work? It is expected that at the individual level, repeated reflections on different events related to interactive innovations help the reflecting person to become more aware of the complex setting around an interactive innovation and better understand own actions and the reactions they prompt. At the project level, such systematic and structured reflections help to identify commonalities and differences, synergies and conflicts in the individual reflections for drawing broader implications at the project level.

Geographical location

Germany

Keywords

Peer-to-peer learning
Monitoring and evaluation

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CONNECTING ADVISORS TO BOOST INTERACTIVE INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Farm Check in Baden-Württemberg, Germany: a low-threshold entry point for advisory services

Photo: Oliver Scherer, LEL

In the state of Baden-Württemberg in Germany, agricultural advisory services are offered in the form of modules by private advisory organisations and co-financed by the public sector. However, there are still many, often small, farms whose managers do not make use of professional advisory services. In order to arouse their interest and to lower the inhibition threshold towards privately organised and costly advisory services, the Ministry of Agriculture has developed the instrument of the 'farm check'. This makes it possible for all farms to receive a free assessment of their farm's current situation and decision-making support for the development of the farm in the form of approximately 15 hours of professional advice. Since 2015, up to 100 farms have participated each year, and a survey shows a high level of satisfaction among the farmers with the neutral view from independent advisors and their feedback on farm management plans and decisions. Nevertheless, the prompt implementation of recommended follow-up steps and the use of further advice remain limited to a minority of those taking part in this public support service. It can be assumed that the assessment of the impact and added value of this low-threshold instrument can only be better assessed after a few years of operation.

Geographical location

Germany

Keywords

One to one advice to farmers
Demand articulation
Public extension services

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IKMIS / System of Integrated Plant Protection Information, Consulting, and Training

"External factors such as climate change, technological development, global pandemic, and digitalization change farms are faster than ever before all over the world. Remote services become a routine for majority of us. Certain part of LAAS' services was transferred to electronic space.

IKMIS is a system of integrated plant protection information, consulting, and training consisting of four electronic services for farmers, advisers, researchers, and everyone interested in agriculture. Electronic services are free of charge. IKMIS was developed by specialists of LAAS in cooperation with researchers. The aim of the system is to create conditions for Lithuanian agricultural sector entities to monitor plant diseases and pests more efficiently and at lower cost, improve skills, and make optimal decisions on the use of plant protection products as IKMIS promotes both the sustainable use of plant protection products and the use of non-chemical integrated pest control methods.

It was stated by European Court of Auditors that IKMIS is an example of good practice of the sustainable use of plant protection products in Lithuania. It is a digital tool enabling farmers to carry out more efficient and environmentally friendly agricultural activities.

Electronic services provided by IKMIS are innovative because:

1) It is a network of insect traps and online meteorological stations with integrated mathematical modules for prediction of spread of plant diseases and pests; 2) There is a possibility to connect meteorological stations operated by other countries (possibility of transmission of data); 3) It is a tool for assessment of level of harmfulness of spread of harmful organisms in agricultural plants.

Geographical location

Lithuania

Keywords

Advisory method and tools (including digital)
Monitoring and evaluation
Training
One to one advice to farmers

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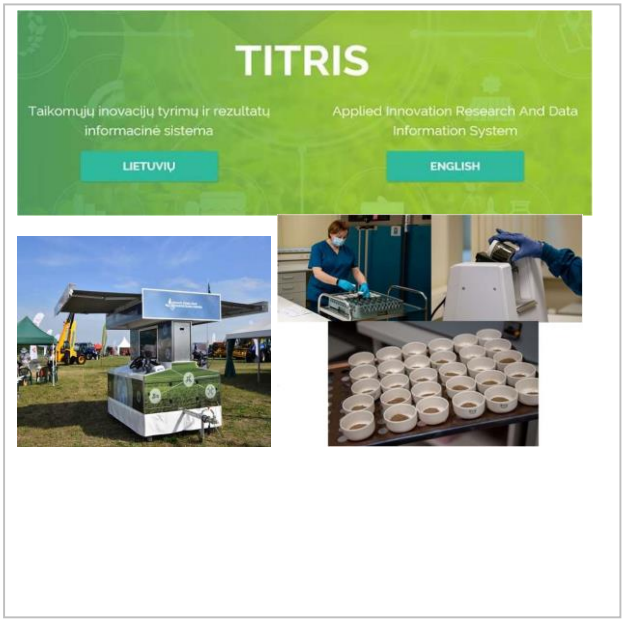
Innovation Gates / Centre for Knowledge Accumulation, Transfer, Development of Agricultural Technologies, and their Demonstration



Only knowledge applied in practice becomes innovation. LAAS in co-operation with Lithuanian study and research institutions as well as experimental farms established an EIP operational group and agreed on the launch of a project.

Complex results were achieved after the project finished. A Centre Innovation gate was established. It consists of Innovation Support Service, Centre of Services of Precision Farming and Competencies with a pavilion for demonstration of technologies and a laboratory, an information system of applied innovation research and results. A network of experimental farms was also formed.

Innovation Support Service is a division of LAAS which collects, organizes and stores information about the need for innovations, innovations already applied and their results. It works as a mediator where innovation projects are initiated and funds are looked for after the need for innovation is clarified.

TITRIS is the first specialized digital database of innovations that can directly be applied in agricultural production. The database is of open access and free. Object of TITRIS is non-commercial scientific research and innovations developed by practitioners that have or might have influence on sustainable agricultural production.

Soil analysis is carried out in the laboratory. Analysis of soil composition, slurry, manure, sewage water, ground and surface water is performed in the laboratory.

The simulation display of precision farming is used to show clients the full cycle of precision farming and to encourage farmers to use innovative technologies on their farms.

Geographical location

Lithuania

Keywords

Advisory method and tools (including digital)
One to one advice to farmers
Demonstrations

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BioDistricts: A territorial approach to organic farming

In recent years interest around Biodistricts has greatly increased, in Italy, also thanks to recent regulatory initiatives, that recognize them as "*Local production systems characterized by the presence of strong organic supply chains*" and to the mounting interest around territorial approaches to agro-environmental measures spurred by upcoming CAP. A Biodistrict can be defined as a locally rooted multifunctional project based on the values of organic farming. They involve farms, institutions, supply chain actors and consumers, as well as any other actor that wish to be engaged. Each of them could be the promoter of initiatives that will lead to the elaborations of activities that, staring from local food supply chains, will meet the needs of the territory. The objectives are the development of local organic agriculture, the shortening of agro-food supply chains and their integration with other sectors (i.e.: HO.RE.Ca.), food education and continuous training for operators. The wider scope is to generate income through local agriculture, so to benefit local society as a whole. Biodistricts can take a variety of corporate forms, and whenever compliant with law requirements, can access specific funding. Given their multi-actor nature, Biodistricts have already proved to be able to connect different subjects around shared objectives. Their nature of aggregating entity facilitates the connection of farmers to training bodies and upstream actors of the supply chain and foster communication along it. Their presence is therefore a value added in Operational Groups (eg. TERRITORI BIO in Veneto, specifically aimed at providing qualified technical assistance to organic farmers), or in Cooperation initiatives to the benefit of local producers (e.g. Biodistretto della Val di Vara - MIS 16.04)

Geographical location

Italy

Keywords

Territorial qpproaches to Organic Farming
Local Development
Public-Private Partnerships

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ASSAM: the regional agency for Agri-Food Sector Services acting as innovation broker inregion Marche

ASSAM - Agency for Agri-Food Sector Services of Marche Region (IT), is a public body reorganized in 1997 and well embedded within the local AKIS since decades that acts as a local focal point of connection between farming systems and scientific research.

It provides a multitude of back-office and services to agricultural operators: agrochemical laboratory and sensorial analyses on products; technical assistance; research and dissemination; vocational training for students, advisors and farmers; product certification and traceability, irrigation and wastewater planning; phytosanitary and agro-meteorological services and; innovation brokering.

Under the RDP 2024-2020, ASSAM was delegated to apply the role of public innovation broker to help the emersion of problems/needs from the field, performing territorial animation to facilitate the dialogue between relevant actors (e.g. info days, research and innovation days) and disseminating innovative solutions (e.g. open days), until supporting the setting up of the operational groups (OGs) at regional level and the exchange of experiences with others at interregional and European levels (e.g. networking days).

The web portal www.innovamarche.it is mainly used as a working tool for providing and sharing scientific, technical and dissemination information.

ASSAM is partner in 12 out of 42 of regional OGs in Region Marche, where its functions range from research and application of farming practices and techniques to laboratorial analyses until communication and dissemination of the results.

Geographical location

Italy

Keywords

Networking, Dissemination, Technical advice/assistance, Territorial embeddedness, Brokerage

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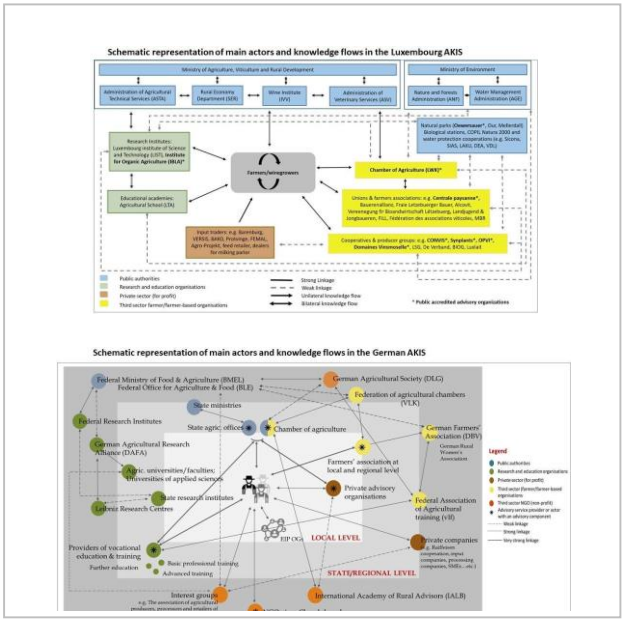
AKIS diagrams: a visual lens to understand the complexity of actors and knowledge flows



In the frame of the i2connect project, over 30 partners from 27 countries compiled their respective country's Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) inventory in 2020/2021. To kick start the process, the task coordinator outlined a simple "hypothetical AKIS diagram" that deconstructed the AKIS concept. This helped all authors of the AKIS reports to have a common understanding of the concept and task at hand.

The hypothetical AKIS diagram presented five categories of AKIS actors (public authorities, research and education, farmer-based organisations, NGOs and private companies) labelled by five different colours. Additionally, the diagram presented linkages between the identified actors either with a solid straight line (strong linkage) or a broken line (weak linkage).

Inspired by the hypothetical diagram, respective AKIS inventory authors drafted their own AKIS country diagram based on literature and their own knowledge. Then they used their drafted diagram as a visualisation tool to interview experts about AKIS actors at the national, regional or local level as well as their linkages. Based on the results from the expert interviews, the authors revised their AKIS diagram, which they incorporated in the final report. Visualising AKIS actors and knowledge flows with the diagram assisted authors to summarise their country's AKIS situation in a clear and precise way. Furthermore, the diagram served as a good entry point for further exploration of actors' roles and complex linkages that gave a comprehensive understanding of AKIS at a national/regional/local level.

Geographical location

Germany

Keywords

Training
Monitoring and evaluation
Facilitation, Mediation

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Interconnecting research with advisors for a greater integration within the AKIS

The collaboration between CREA (Council for Agricultural Research and Economics) and CONAF (Council of the National Order of Agronomists and Foresters) is pluriannual and set by Memoranda of understanding (MoU) within which CONAF and each Research Centres of CREA (12) undertake specific activities of exchange of expertise and knowledge and collaboration. Within the framework of the National Rural Development Network (NRN) 2014-2020 and of some European research H2020 (i2connect) and Erasmus+ (RAMONES-PL) projects, of which CREA is partner, this collaboration implies: the collection of information for the assessment of AKIS and advisory services; joint informative and training events on specific technical-scientific and economic aspects of farming practices and on the CAP; webinar-series that allow the participant agronomists/foresters to gain training credits, as they are integrated within the binding life-long learning. A joint working group conducts systematic exchange of knowledge and experience for the co-definition of a methodological framework for monitoring and evaluating the performance, of a methodology for simplified costs, and for the identification of relevant practices of innovation support and dissemination of advisory services. A network of researchers and advisors aims at collecting, based on transparent and scientific methodologies, up-to-date information on land assets and rents for the estimation and analyses of relevant structural and socio-economic indicators and for the provision of advisory services. Benefits for CREA and CONAF regard the increased evidence and impact-based orientation of research and the enhanced capabilities of advisors to better interact within the AKISs and the CAP.

Geographical location

Italy

Keywords

Networking; Technical advice/assistance; Innovation & Transition support; Advisory method and tools (including digital); Back-office

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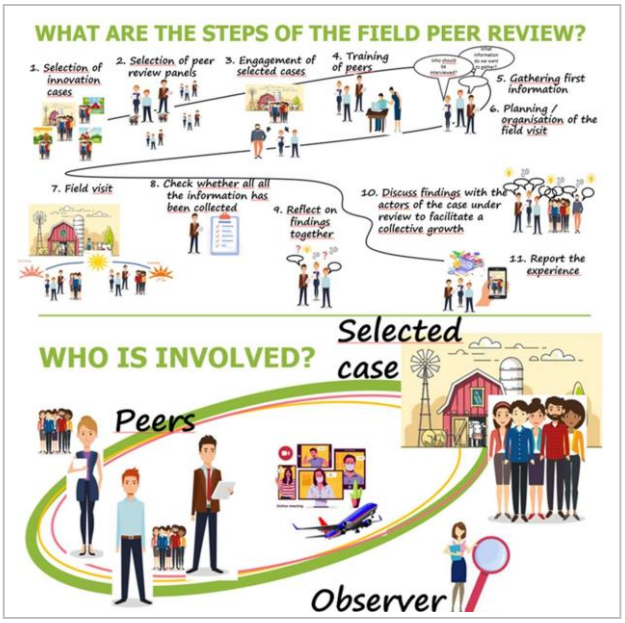
Field Peer Review



The Field Peer Review consists of the review of a practical case innovation process, with a particular focus on innovation support functions, by colleagues (peers: farmers, advisors, researchers, etc.) from another innovation case, with the purpose of experiencing and reflecting about approaches, methods and tools, as well as enabling norms, rules and practices that facilitate active participation, interaction and cooperative learning between different actors, thus stimulating innovation and change. A Field Peer Review methodology was set up and tested within the i2connect project.

Field Peer Review is carried out through field visit, observation and interviews carried out by peers with different actors' groups of an interactive innovation case. A clear procedure and an analytical framework have been developed to allow the reviewers to focus on well-defined aspects (support services, effectiveness of innovation support, internal and external conditions that enable specific actors to play support functions) that are hardly addressed, going far beyond a mere exchange of practices.

The Field Peer Review could be implemented by managing authorities, advisory systems and organisms, networks (e.g. the CAP networks) to: i) analyse the role of different actors in innovation processes, especially innovation support service providers, ii) implement an effective (peer-to-peer) M&E system for interactive innovation processes and iii) implement a system of continuous peer-to-peer learning that will empower relevant actors to discover innovative ideas and enable their uptake in a co-creative way.

Geographical location

None

Keywords

Peer-to-peer learning; Advisory method and tools (including digital); Innovation & Transition support

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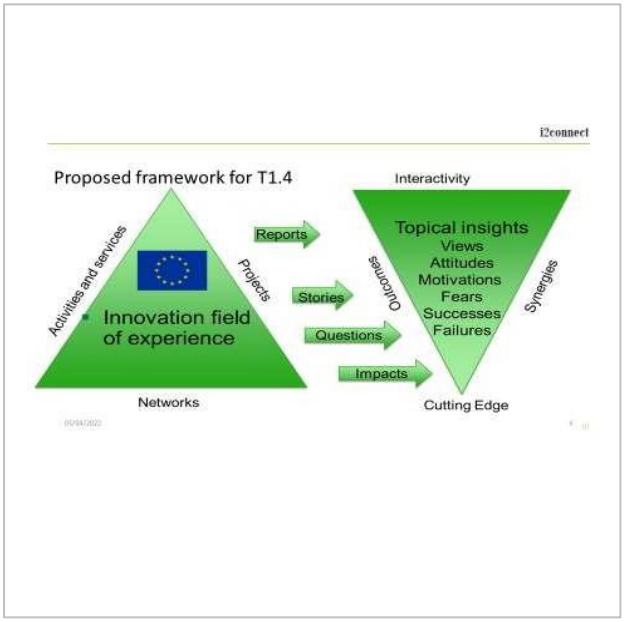
Topical insight collection in a Multi-Actor project



The vast quantity of information which is embedded in diverse actors in a Multi-actor (MA) project provide a basis for continuous flow of relevant information to inform decision making, improve relevance and motivation of actors and participants in their numerous activities and tasks. The i2connect project supports advisors to help farmers and rural enterprises through interactive innovation or a more effective bottom up approach. Over the five years of the project a lotof activities are planned and implemented through the various WorkPackage Tasks. As the i2connect project is participatory and its actors and participants are people with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

These experiences which are relevant to interactive innovation support by farm advisors provide many topical insights and are recorded every 4 months on the i2connect share drive are documented in an annual report as a project deliverable.

These topical insights may come from other projects, activities, experiences or events and reflect the huge knowledge reservoir and flow of information that exists with the project partners. Over 100 topical insights were collected in the first 2 years and 40 have been published.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Innovation & Transition support; Peer-to-peer learning; Specialist support to other advisors; Scaling-up the innovations; Networking

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A management and monitoring tool for advisory services: the case of Campania region

Timely tracking and keeping log of the provision of advisory services at farm level is extremely relevant for managing, controlling, monitoring the implementation of measure 2 of the RDP 2014-2020.

As well, the collection of relevant data and qualitative information allows assessing the functioning, effects and satisfaction about advisory services at farm and system levels.

All this, in a system perspective is crucial, because means providing evidence about the state of art and the performances of the advisory services within the AKISs.

The "Management and Monitoring Tool for Advisory Services" (MMT4AS) was developed under the responsibility of Campania Region for all these purposes.

The functionalities of MMT4AS are set to allow the managing authority to keep log of all administrative and advisory activities and being constantly in contact one to each other, since the selection of the advisory organization until the final payment. The web application allows sharing: advisory plans and the reports on the services provided for each beneficiary farm; details and timing of the advisory activities and methods; farmers' satisfaction questionnaires; controls' procedures; requests of payments.

Farm advisors report benefits in terms of simplification of the administrative procedures.

The tool is demonstrating its usefulness also for planning the interventions on the use and the enhancement of advisory services for the CAP 2023-2027 because it's providing relevant baseline information to define, for example, simplified costs, timing and methods to foresee for the different advisory services in relation to the CAP topics.

Geographical location

Campania Region (Italy)

Keywords

Technical advice/assistance, farm, MMT4AS

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Strengthening rural advisory services: the RAMONES-PL project

RAMONES-PL (Rural Advisory Monitoring and Evaluation System linked to Precision Learning) is an ERASMUS+ project that aims to strengthen rural advisory services based on management, monitoring and evaluation methods and tool designed to support performance assessment and precision learning until the definition of total quality certification scheme. The project is characterized by an overall end-user driven and transdisciplinary approach reflected by a partnership mostly composed by advisory organizations and using cross-fertilization of tacit and codified knowledge to design robust and evidence-based assessment methodologies on advisors' performances and competences.

The project is on-going and it already delivered some useful and ready-to-be-put-in-use tools for advisors:

- a Rural Advisory Services dictionary of competences: a tool that covers competences needed to perform specific tasks and CAP topics, based on capacities that are common to an organization and the related indicators to monitor such competences;
- a e-Learning Platform containing a series of e-learning packages tailored to the need of field advisors, according to the preliminary data collection steps of the project, such as the identification of the most frequent activities, the dictionary of competence, and the questionnaire to access importance and proficiency level of advisors regarding certain service areas and
- a tracking and monitoring platform of advisory activities, a tool to timely keep log, monitor and assess performances of advisors based on robust scientific quality standards.

It enables clients feedback, work-based learning and knowledge-based development of precision e-learning programmes.

Geographical location

Hungary; Croatia; North Macedonia; Slovakia; Italy; Latvia

Keywords

Monitoring and Evaluation; Training; Technical advice/assistance; Advisory methods and tools (including digital)

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Ensuring the project is steered by farmers and end users, not expert-driven

Field peer reviews carried out within the i2connect project show how important the involvement of farmers and foresters in all project decisions and activities is, as they can make a difference and enable agricultural innovation to go further. When partners listen to each other, without imposing their own vision/solution, sharing their views on the problem to be addressed and the goals to be achieved, the ideas of individuals are reformulated, resulting in a new shared understanding and framework for action, which leads to a common sense of ownership of the problem, and it contributes to strengthening the commitment of actors and increasing the possibility of producing positive action and results. In some reviewed cases, farmers took risks on a personal and economic level since the proposed solution from research was not reasonable form them and they tried to find a different solution. As an example, in Agrosyl operational group, researchers wanted to impose their solution, but the farmer was not equipped to apply it. There were misunderstanding among farmers and researchers and communication difficulties. Researcher did not understand the farmer's need to make the innovative solution more feasible in the field. The Chamber of Agriculture play the role of mediator inviting partners to interact and become aware of other's ideas. In Futter Nova 11 case, the farmers were steering the project, looking for an appropriate solution and were willing to try new ideas. Where advisors encourage farmers to take lead roles in the project, this has a huge knock-on effect for the group and other farmers.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Innovation & Transition support; Demand articulation; Facilitation, mediation; Public extension services

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Knowledge and ability to write project proposals and access to funding

The proper writing of a proposal and identification of the best fitting funding schemes is an enabling condition for a sound project implementation and effectiveness. This implies the need of mediating the possible different views of the partners on the project and translating them into the proposal, as well as maintaining a dialogue between the writer and the farmers/other. Besides, crossing across different sources of funding, application arrangements and deadlines requires certain skills and ability. The advisors must be familiar with "several languages": farmers, academic and project writers. Every so often it is difficult to transfer the knowledge/information between partners with different educational levels and experience for this reason a skilled person should be involved for the definition of the full proposal. By involving a writer to prepare the project proposal, the partnership/group could rely on the professional knowledge of the substantial, administrative and procedural requirements to apply the specific scheme (e.g. M16 of the RDPs; LIFE+). This could help them to navigate across the different opportunities for funding and properly complete the application in a timely manner. The writer should have the ability to listen to the emerging needs and expectations of farmers, advisors, and other partners, and to build-up a strong case around their ideas but also providing their own ideas, to design the sounding intervention logic of the project. Writing project proposals and access to funding is profession that requires special qualified and methodological knowledge, and having good proposal writing skills contributing to a well-designed and documented intervention logic of the project helps the implementation of the innovation process and expected results.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Innovation & Transition support; Brokerage; Demand articulation

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Playing the function of innovation support services within the AKIS: theItalian National Rural Network

"Progetti multi-attore per la ricerca e l'innovazione in agricoltura: un'opportunità di dialogo"

The Italian National Rural Network (NRN) is well embedded within the AKISs as it plays a key role in innovation support services since the programming period 2007-2013. A working group of around 30 experts is organized by fields of expertise and territorial basis. This allows embracing several types of actions to support policy design and implementation along with promoting effective participation of the plurality of AKISs' actors at different levels (national, regional and sub-regional). The promotion of innovation in agriculture, food, forestry and rural areas is one out of four priorities of the NRN and it strongly relates to the EIP-Agri implementation, particularly by:

- Networking, demand articulation and facilitation of knowledge flows and exchange among the different AKIS's across rural areas and related sectors.
- methodological and operational support and institutional intermediation on policy design and implementation on AKIS-related interventions: training and information; cooperation for innovation and advisory services.
- information, communication and dissemination about research and innovation in agriculture, including the operational groups (OGs).
- Provision of advisory and training tools and materials.
- Research, monitoring, statistics and evaluation of policy implementation, innovation approaches and cases.

For the CAP 2023-2027, the NRN played a crucial role in supporting policy makers through promoting common reflection, mediating dialogue, at national and regional level, in order to achieve a shared vision about the AKIS strategy and related intervention logics.

Geographical location

Italy

Keywords

Networking facilitation; Dissemination; Brokerage; Innovation support; Embedding

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i2connect
INTERACTIVE INNOVATION

CONNECTING ADVISORS TO BOOST INTERACTIVE INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Ambassador farmers to spread innovation results

Within the Agroinnowacja EIP project, sowing a catch crop for forage has enabled the six partner farmers to improve higher gross margins and cattle performance. Each of the six farmers participating in the project act as ambassadors to spread results. They share their experiences, changes made to their farm and results achieved, with other farmers in the producer groups to which they participate. Each producer group has approximately 20 farmers, which are going to be influenced by the ambassador farmer. At Producer Group meetings the advisor presents the idea to the group and the ambassador farmer shares his/her insights and experience of implementing that idea and getting results. This is an effective method for influencing other farmers and showing them what is possible. The dissemination of the success and results achieved in this project has had a real impact on the other members of the producer groups. The farmers are now approaching the advisor to ask if they can be part of a project and are willing to co-operate and work with others to develop and implement new solutions.

An interesting channel that has become very effective for marketing and promoting the results of innovative research and development projects is You Tube. High quality and well-produced videos are created to showcase the project and the results and then put on YouTube. These videos are then shared/promoted by agricultural influencers who are successfully using the solutions. When an agricultural influencer shares the video, it results in thousands of views by people in the target audience. The success of this effective marketing approach has shown the advisor that it is not necessary to have more than six farmers involved in a project in order to have an impact.

Geographical location

Poland

Keywords

Dissemination; Scaling-out the innovations; Peer-to-peer learning

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Interregional Network for Agricultural, Forestry, Aquaculture and Fisheries Research

The Italian AKIS is characterised by a multi-level governance and needs coordination bodies, at interregional and transregional level, aimed at defining common vision and support for policies implementation, mediating different positions and articulating demand about R&I policies and programs. The Interregional Network for Agricultural, Forestry, Aquaculture and Fisheries Research was set up spontaneously by regional bodies in 1998 and since then it has been playing an increasing crucial role in coordinating the design and implementation of European, national, and regional legislation, policies and programs regarding agricultural R&I and advisory services in Italy. It is composed by the representatives of the administrations who are responsible for the design and implementation of agricultural R&I and advisory policies at regional/A.P (Trento and Bolzano) level. It is organized by thematic groups (themes/value chains) and its secretariat is held by Tuscany Region. The activities are ensured by regular meetings, the organization of discussion events, frequently by involving other experts and representatives from the MIPAAF, and the drafting of notes and opinions. The Network has effectively carried out a meaningful work of coordination, promotion, and direction of public research, through the articulation of the demand, to better target the needs of the different territories, the definition of objectives and priority actions for research and experimentation.

Geographical location

Italy- Regions

Keywords

Coordination bodies; AKIS integration

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Engaging all the value chain actors in interactive innovation

The Operational Group Oleocolza was born from a need detected by rural advisors working together with farmers. The Portuguese biodiesel industry, was interested in obtaining rape seeds for their factory, and was buying seeds from all over Europe. However, they knew that this crop would have great potential in Portugal, namely in the vast fields of the Alentejo. It turned out that Portuguese farmers were unaware of this crop and its specificities. So a multi-actor group was set up, composed of the industry, which shared its needs, necessary specifications and know-how, a group of rural advisors, farmers from the Alentejo and researchers.

This is one of the key points of this project: how it was possible to engage all the value chain actors in interactive innovation. The openness, transparency, sharing and commitment of all actors of the chain, from production, advisors, researchers and the industry, for a common good was decisive: to evaluate the impact of different varieties on the production capacity of COLZA in the Alentejo and test it as a rotation crop.

Regarding the interactive innovation methods, the role of the advisors was determinant, promoting discussion forums, with special focus on knowledge exchange, which had a much greater impact than the knowledge transfer, that is, the sharing of experiences and cultural methods was valued more than the knowledge coming from the academy. On the other hand, the role of advisors was fundamental as facilitators and innovation brokers.

Geographical location

Portugal - Alentejo

Keywords

Demonstration; Facilitation, Mediation; Peer-to-peer learning; Support to integration into supply chains, local and agri-food systems; Monitoring and evaluation

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i2connect Advisory Services Database

Given the pluralistic situation of advisory services in the EU, which is reflected in the heterogeneous interests and needs of individual advisors, and a particular trend towards small-scale entrepreneurial units driven by privatization, the challenge of designing an attractive, user-friendly and professional database that meets all needs is quite significant. The i2connect Advisory Services (AS) database is an EU-wide directory of professional advisory organisations and individual actors that provide knowledge services to actors in agriculture, forestry, horticulture and related fields along the agro- food value chain, as well as to other related actors in rural areas. It aims at (a) providing information on existing practical cases and training opportunities across Europe, (b) identifying advisory service providers in agriculture and forestry, and (c) exchanging and networking among advisors engaged in interactive innovation. Moreover, it is a good opportunity for advisors or organizations to make themselves visible within an EU-wide network of innovation advisors, to be connected and develop synergies with other advisors and organizations, develop their professional capacity being updated about opportunities taking place across Europe.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Dissemination; Networking facilitation

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Technique day

"Dan Technikes" is an annual event, entirely managed by advisors, that was born from the idea of two people, an advisor and a farmer who are linked by a long-standing friendship. Travelling to neighbouring countries to learn about new technologies and keep their knowledge up to date, they came up with the idea of organising an event in Slovenia that would allow farmers to socialise, attend demonstrations and receive independent advice to know how and which technologies can improve farm performance and sustainability, before buying them. The idea was immediately supported, even financially, by the head manager of the public advisory service and the local municipal authority, as it met the community on the topic of environmental sustainability.

To achieve the defined goals, a variety of actors with different practical expertise and knowledge (farmers, researchers /academics and equipment suppliers/producers) has been involved, allowing multiple needs of farmers to be addressed. The novelty lies in that all of them are independent, meaning that no one is linked to companies producing equipment being demonstrated, and that the event mainly focus on peer-to-peer exchange. In this way, relationships of trust that go further than the demonstration event can be developed. This also allows farmers to actively contribute to the organisation of the event, expressing needs and ideas, even though advisors, and providing their own experience and equipment.

Geographical location

Dolenjska (Slovenia)

Keywords

Demonstrations; Peer-to-peer learning; Networking; Public extension services; Innovation & Transition support

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Enabling recently accepted project managers in their EIP-Agri application process

The "Project Manager Meeting" is an annual event run by the Swedish Rural Network and at the beginning of the year. The meeting is organized to bring together experienced managers of previously EIP-Agri-supported projects and managers of newly approved projects. Researchers, innovation financiers, and other actors involved in the innovation system in Sweden attend the meeting to network and initiate collaborations.

Information is provided about the general purpose of EIP-Agri, the funding opportunities, and the various supporting channels for applicants throughout the application process. Previously funded innovation project managers are invited to inspire and motivate managers of recently accepted project. They present their innovation project, the journey from an idea to a product or service in the market, raise the advantages and disadvantages within the process, the challenges and difficulties, explain how certain things were managed and implemented, and answer questions and concerns. Every year around 80-90 participants attend the Project Manager Meeting.

The Annual Project Manager meeting serves as an effective dissemination activity, and it is a good practice for enabling an environment for interactive innovation. Furthermore, the annual meeting is a mean to support managers of recently accepted projects in their expectations about the EIP-Agri and functions as a preparation for the application process. It is an opportunity for sharing knowledge and experiences, and a possibility for networking. It strengthens the self-confidence of managers of recently accepted project managers and supports them in not falling into typical pitfalls during the application process.

Geographical location

Sweden

Keywords

Dissemination; Facilitation, Mediation; Networking; Peer-to-peer learning; Demonstrations

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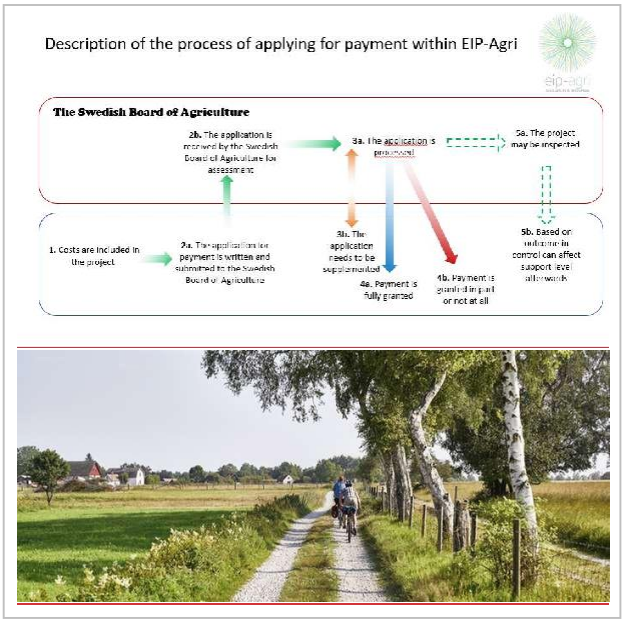
Flexibility in application to EIP-Agri Operational Group support



In Sweden, the EIP-Agri support is divided into Group Support and Project Support and characterized by frequent decision-making rounds and the absence of targeted application periods. Meaning innovative ideas can be submitted for assessment at any time of the year. The separation of support creates flexibility for applicants, as they can apply for one or both supports. The division serves to facilitate the entry into the EIP-Agri support system, because less documentation is required. The whole application processes can become an administrative burden for a small farm seeking support for an innovative idea, because the application for Project Support is high demanding for the applicant. The Swedish Board of Agriculture assesses the applications for Group Support approximately once a month. The Operational Group must consist of at least two of the following actors: researchers, advisers, or entrepreneurs within the industry, to be funded. Project support is intended to assist in the implementation of an innovative idea and the management of an innovation project. Assessment rounds occur approximately 4-6 times per year by an External Advisory Committee (RÅK). The Committee does not have a decision-making mandate but an advisory mission. The recognized strengths of the division are the facilitation of the formation of Operational Groups with complementary knowledge and expertise and encouraging the Operational Groups to start working on a common purpose and developing a joint plan for reaching the goal. The Group Support application makes the Operational Group more prepared and experienced in writing applications and facilitates the production of the more complex application for the Project Support and the realization and execution of the innovative idea.

Geographical location

Sweden

Keywords

Enabling environment; policy delivery; EIP-Agri support; operational groups

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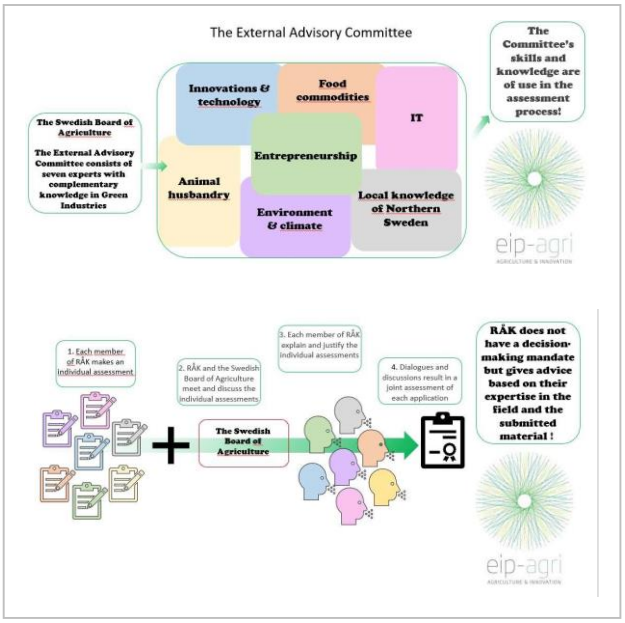
The assessment of Project Support by Operational Groups



In Sweden, applications for Project Support by operational groups are evaluated approximately 4-6 times per year by an External Advisory Committee (RÅK). The Committee consists of 7 external reviewers with different skills and complementary knowledge within Green Industries and the Innovation System. Under the leadership of the Swedish Board of Agriculture, RÅK reviews applications for Project Support and provides the Swedish Board of Agriculture with its recommendation for decision. RÅK does not have a decision-making mandate but gives advice. Experts can be member of the Committee as long as they want to, and their skills and knowledge are of use in the assessment process. Over the years, experts can leave, and new experts come for various reasons. The Swedish Board of Agriculture is also looking into the possibilities of procuring companies or organizations which send a suitable person for the assessment.

Each member of RÅK performs an individual assessment of all the applications, without being in contact with other experts. Then, RÅK and the Swedish Board of Agriculture meet and discuss the individual assessments, and each member of RÅK explain and justify the assessments. Dialogues and discussions result in a joint assessment of each application.

The Committee rejects applications that lack of information about entering the market, that is a clear marketing plan, business plan, and potential customers description. If the Innovation Group does not have a marketing plan, the Committee assesses the project as an idea, not as an innovation.

RÅK members examine the criteria concretely based on their expertise in the field and the submitted material and provide their perspectives on the application and innovation.

Geographical location

Sweden

Keywords

Enabling environment; policy delivery; EIP-Agri support; operational groups

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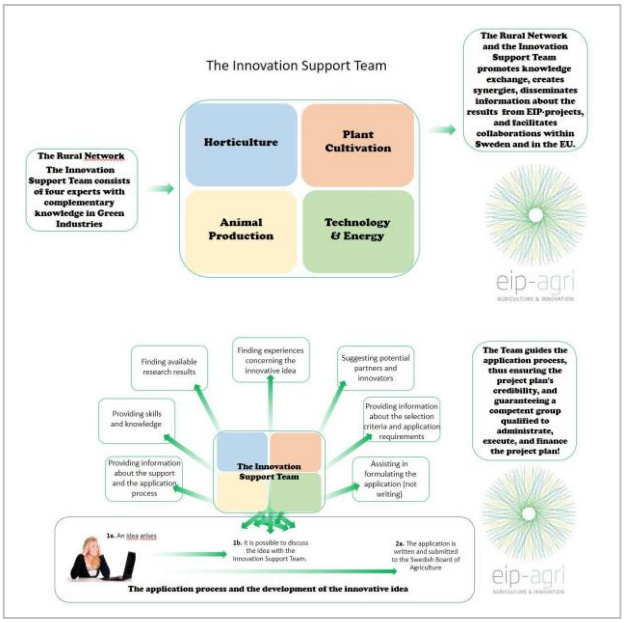
Supporting innovative groups in their EIP-Agri implementation process



The Innovation Support Team consists of four experts with complementary knowledge in Green Industries. Expertise in horticulture, plant cultivation, animal production, technology, and energy. When the EIP-Agri support was new, the Team played a more active role by meeting potential innovators and providing information about the support and the application process. This included marketing, particularly the support at various events, agricultural meetings, and fairs.

The current priority is to provide skills and knowledge to support actors in their application process and the development of their idea from the ground. The Innovation Team assists applicants in finding available research results, knowledge, and experiences concerning the innovative idea. The Team promotes knowledge exchange, creates synergies, and facilitates collaboration by suggesting potential partners and innovators. Among other things, connecting actors by supporting the universities in getting in touch with practitioners, and practitioners finding economic and technical collaborators for executing their innovative idea. The Team handles all received material and information about innovative ideas with confidentiality.

The Team supports applicants by answering incoming questions, providing information about the selection criteria, and what application requirements to meet. Finally, it assists applicants in formulating the application, but not in writing it (as a matter of fairness). The Team guides the application process, thus ensuring the project plan's credibility, and guaranteeing a competent group qualified to administrate, execute, and finance the project plan.

Geographical location

Sweden

Keywords

Advisory method and tools (including digital); Scaling-out the innovations; Specialist support to other advisors; Technical advice/ assistance

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The use of an Innovation Coach to boost interactive innovation and stimulate the AKIS

Foto Inger Pehrson

Since the 1st of December 2021, the Rural Network provides an Innovation Coach (IC) service. This new position has never previously been used as a method of boosting interactive innovation. The fundamental idea of using an IC is to encourage and support the AKIS. Role definition and responsibilities were broad and freely designed, leaving the IC the opportunity to act.

The IC attends the Innovation Support Team's meetings, as well as meetings between this Team and the External Advisory Selection Committee, to understand the assessments and reasons for rejections. The innovative ideas not fitting EIP-Agri support are the target group: the IC assists and supports them in finding other types of funding or collaborative partners for their innovative idea.

The research struggles to liaise with practitioners, because of the different ways of communicating and their inability relating and understanding each other. The same applies to the research and advisory sectors since they lack close ties. The IC is a neutral party between the various actors, able to bring them together in interactive activities, initiate collaborations, and communicate their knowledge and needs. To play this role effectively, the IC should possess knowledge of the sectors, have a practical background in the different parts of the innovation system, and know how to communicate with the various actors. The key to the success of the IC in Sweden is due to her complementary and multi-sectoral background in Innovation Science research, the 10 years of experience in advisory, and her practical experience running agriculture enterprises. The result is a good understanding how the various sectors are organised, why the actors act the way they do, and how they think and communicate.

Geographical location

Sweden

Keywords

Dissemination; Facilitation, Mediation; Networking; Specialist support to other advisors; Technical advice/assistance

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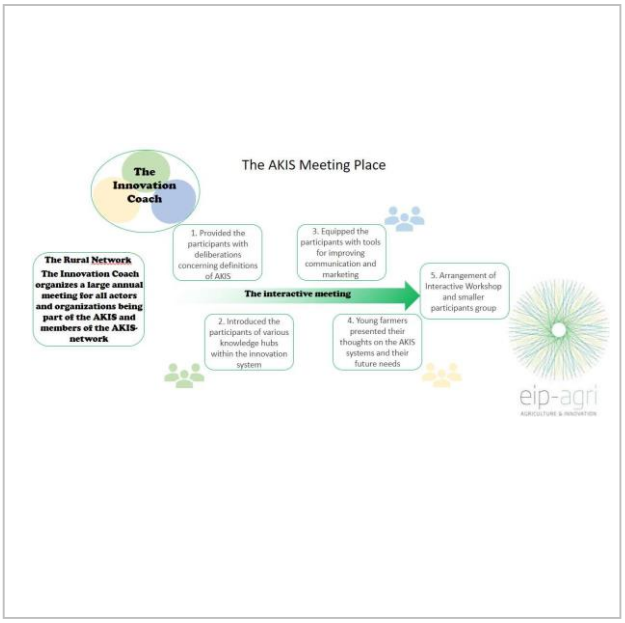
A Meeting Place for AKIS actors to initiate multi-actor collaborations



The "AKIS Meeting Place", organised by the Swedish Rural Network, is the large meeting of the year for actors and organizations being part of the entire agricultural knowledge and innovation system (AKIS) and members of the AKIS-network. The last edition provided the participants with deliberations concerning definitions of AKIS, presentations of various knowledge hubs within the innovation system, tools for improving communication and marketing, and young farmers presented their thoughts on the AKIS systems and their future needs. The meeting ended with the arrangement of an interactive workshop and smaller participants working groups. The workshop's mission was to encourage the members to develop an action plan about: How actors and organizations working within the entire knowledge and innovation system should go from words to actions. The participants identified and prioritized the three most necessary actions and needs, which will guide the work within the network in the coming year. The Innovation Coach keept track of and facilitated the work within the network, and together with the members, they designed activities for fulfilling the needs, organize workshops, follow-up events, and create interactive activities enabling various members of the network to initiate multi-actor collaborations. The advantages for the members and participants in the annual meeting are the receival of external monitoring, description of the current situation, and the opportunity to express their needs. The network is members-driven creating participation and ownership. According to the actions and needs defined at the annual meeting, 4-5 physical activities will be organized around Sweden. Each activity has aspecific theme based on the actions and needs listed.

Geographical location
Sweden

Keywords
Demonstrations; Dissemination; Monitoring and evaluation; Networking; Training

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CONNECTING ADVISORS TO BOOST INTERACTIVE INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

DIAL - Local Agroecological Innovations Scheme

The project aims to set up an innovative mechanism for consultation between partners who contribute to the development of innovative and agro-ecological practices implemented by farmers in Southern Aveyron. It aims to promote the emergence, design and development of local agro-ecological innovations based on "the feed autonomy" of farms. The project seizes the opportunity to bring together several agricultural and regional actors for cooperation and thus also to intensify the common exchange. “DIAL” is a multi-skilled approach to serve the agro-ecological transition with partners, farmers and other invited experts. The challenge is to develop innovative and agro-ecological techniques in cooperation with various actors in research, extension and agricultural practice, to evaluate and discuss them, optimize them and disseminate those using appropriate methods. The objective is to jointly develop and implement innovative and agro-ecological solutions. In this way, farm emissions and certain aspects of biodiversity should be increasingly balanced. Results are the knowledge sharing and technical activities:

- Regular sharing of each partner's productions and observations (Results of trials, observation of farming systems, learnings from trainings),
- Organisation of joint events;
- Several field trials, demonstrations and technical seminars.

The project manager/adviser has an important role as a contact person, communicator, networker, organiser, facilitator, mediator of ideas, etc. The senior advisor and researcher are global project trainers, facilitating the exchange of farmers, advisers and researchers enables the project community to move forward and achieve a higher level of common understanding and action.

Geographical location

France - Occitanie, Aveyron Sud

Keywords

Advisory method and tools (including digital); Demonstrations; Dissemination; Facilitation, Mediation

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Effective communication channel between research and advice

Functional communication channels between research and advise are crucial in ensuring that the required knowledge will reach the farmers in the right way. In this sense, a close collaboration between research and advice is the key to provide farmers with up-to-date knowledge. Both of them are necessary to transfer knowledge to farmers. On one hand, researchers create innovative solutions, on the other hand, advisors can transfer them and interpret the farmers response, as they understand best the "language of farmers".

Considering that, some good elements to have an efficient flow of information between researchers and advisors are: i) feeding a constant and continuous flow of knowledge; ii) building long-term relationships, outside of funded projects and fully integrated advisory and research projects; iii) using support mechanisms/actions (e.g. enabling continuous exchange between research and advisory, internal newsletters, podcasts, videos, workshops and team meetings, vouchers, etc.); iv) having clear visions and clear divisions of tasks between advisors and researchers and v) trusting in each other's work.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Dissemination;
Innovation support

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Providing opportunities for social interaction among partners

Providing opportunities for social and informal interaction among partners is a good way to improve the performance of both advisors and farmers, reducing anxiety and fuelling the search for new and better idea. To reach this goal, advisors should create a safe, trustworthy environment to share in depth information and experiences (both successes and failures) and on farm practices. Key factors for a successful social interaction are i) the advisor's sensitivity for group processes combined with general knowledge of the topic at hand, ii) knowing which people to invite and how they match within a group; iii) keeping the balance between the responsibility of the group members and the intervening as the advisor. There are challenges in making sure the information is relevant for every partner, and the timing of this information being shared. The correct time in which 'new information' is encountered, there is a certain level of symmetric information exchange between partners, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect. Farmers may also encounter challenges in discussing one's own experiences in a group scenario which can be helped where there is social dimension.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Networking; Territorial embeddedness; Facilitation, Mediation; Networking

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International perspective to boost new ideas

Visiting study tours, international exchange programs, and digital meetings can be good opportunities to allow advisors and farmers to learn from the experience of peers in other countries and to exposure to new ideas and new ways of doing things that may be relevant to them.

In Finland, international discussion groups have been set up. When establishing this good practice, the main challenge the advisors/facilitators have to overcome is to identify contacts and build a network of advisors and discussion group facilitators in other countries. ProAgria facilitators looked for relevant contacts through internet and, also, through a travel agency. During the initial phase, the ProAgria facilitators spent a considerable amount of time travelling to other countries to meet advisors and discussion groups and to get inspiration to shape the concept for the international discussion groups. Facilitators must prepare a detailed plan and objective for the study trip, as well as providing the farmers with information on the farm before the study trip. Each member of the group has a friendship farmer in the host country. The friendship farmers visit each other's farms to share knowledge and experience, and to spend some time working on their farms. The farmers and friendship farmers are matched based on similarities of their farms. Farmers visits their 'friendship farmer' more than once, getting the opportunity to build a reciprocal mentoring relationship that lasts beyond the duration of the study trip, to have more in-depth discussions and learn from each other. At the end of the study visit, the advisor facilitates a collaborative discussion with visiting and home farmers, to share their experience, new insight, and knowledge with the group.

Geographical location

Finland

Keywords

Peer-to-peer learning; Networking facilitation; Training

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Discussion groups facilitated by a team with complementary skills

In Finland, farmers participate in 'basic groups' discussion in which they share knowledge and practices, focusing on a specific production topic. The members of the basic groups can also participate in other short-term discussion groups focused on other topics of interest such as human resources, or financial management, in which results and farm data are compared and analysed. They can also participate in study trips abroad and be a member of an international group. The average number of farmers in a group is 8-10, although some are smaller and some larger. One group member is selected as the 'monitor farmer' for the year to help maintaining cohesion among the group members. Most of the group meetings are held on the monitor farm. Each year the group sets targets and decides which issues to observe and focus on for the year ahead.

A key feature of the discussion group model in Finland is that it uses two facilitators or one facilitator and one working pair, that is an advisor with the technical/subject matter knowledge for the topic of the group. The benefit of having two facilitators/advisors is that they learn from one another and each brings a different perspective to the group. One facilitator takes on the role of organising the discussion group meeting and setting up the WhatsApp group while the other facilitates the discussion. After every discussion group meeting, the facilitators reflect on the meeting to identify what worked well and what could be improved for next time. Either the facilitator or the working pair changes regularly. The EU funding covers the costs of planning discussion groups, developing the discussion group model, the advisors costs and 2/3of farmers' costs for participation.

Geographical location

Finland

Keywords

Facilitation, Mediation; Advisory method and tools (including digital); Peer-to-peer learning; Technical advice/assistance; Territorial embeddedness

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A network of facilitators to develop facilitator skills

ProAgria in Finland has set up a network of facilitators to share experiencesof leading, managing and facilitating discussion groups and to learn from each other. The group is led by Anu Ella, an advisor/facilitator who also provides training for facilitators. Anu realised early on that the discussion group facilitators needed training. While her own background is in agriculture and teaching, she recognised the need to undertake training in psychology to broaden her skills.

In ProAgria, a mentoring approach is used to train and develop new discussion group facilitators. New facilitators take on the role of assistant facilitators at discussion group meetings as part of their training. A new facilitator can be an assistant facilitator for up to two years where they act as an apprentice and the experienced facilitator acts as their mentor. By acting as assistant at discussion group meetings they become familiar with the process.

The network provides the facilitators with a safe space to practice their facilitation techniques and to reflect on and share their experiences. This group meets two or three times per year and the meetings are very motivating for the new facilitators. They use WhatsApp and MS Teams to share information or ask questions. They also have a book on facilitation skills that is shared with the new facilitators. A key part of the training for facilitators is to participate in study trips and to observe discussion groups abroad.

Geographical location

Finland

Keywords

Peer-to-peer learning; Facilitation, Mediation; Advisory method and tools (including digital); Training

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Advisors having a strong network within the AKIS

Source: Report-preparing-for-future-akis-in-europe_en.pdf

Considering the different types of farming systems and farmers, proposals should examine how farmers make their decisions and who influences them most. The aim of the activities is to analyze the role of advisor in the AKISs. Considering the impact of face-to-face interaction, projects should identify the key factors in the creation of trust between farmer and advisor to enable effective knowledge transfer and exchange. Explore the relationship between advisors and researchers and between advisors and farmers, identifying the main elements facilitating the flow of information in both directions. Particular attention is related to advisors' potential to boost innovation, focusing on practice needs into research activities, participating and intermediating in farmer-to-farmer learning processes and interactive innovation projects. A network within AKIS may permit increase knowledge, development of relationships amongst the people sharing professional interests. A strong relationship within a network can be challenging for advisors, through a constant availability to other actors, and consequently the need to continuously update skills and knowledge to satisfy clients by anticipating their needs and demands, thus gaining respect and trust. Challenges may occur in the ability to anticipate the needs of other people, especially farmers who may have a lack of time in keeping up to date, may lead to a decrease in the critical thinking of the farmer. This good practice has been shown to enhance the processes of inspiration, idea generation, and motivation of the actors within an innovation project. With the use of this good practice, farmers argue that there are different levels of learning from the enhancement of knowledge, which makes farmers think differently about the future of farming.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Technical advice/assistance; Networking; services; Innovation & Transition support

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Providing foresters with new skills: the experience of For.Italy project

With the relevant exception of the Alpine regions, forests has been long time neglected in Italy, since they have lost economic relevance. Nowadays, forests have gained importance, mostly for environmental reasons, thus there is the need of a qualified know how, that so far has been lacking, to support the rising of a new interest in their management.

The "For.Italy" project, developed as an action of the National Rural Network Programme, can be considered the first attempt of a unified training in the forestry sector, trying to standardize operators competences in a sector in which training in the field is very different from region to region (from nihil to excellence). It involves 9 Italian regions led by Piemonte (Piemonte, Basilicata, Calabria, Liguria, Lombardy, Sardinia, Sicily, Tuscany and Veneto), but has been developed with the active contribution of all the other Italian regions.

Its main result will be a getting to a bunch of people, ready for work in their regions, with a standardized set of competencies ready to be transferred to local workers that in the end will result in more qualified manpower.

As part of the project, starting from 2021, 6 demonstration and information sites on forestry training and 7 training courses for Forestry Instructors in felling and preparation will be carried out with the aim of training 90 new forestry instructors who can be employed throughout the country in the implementation of training courses in forestry promoted at regional level. Demonstration sites were aimed not only at forest workers (at all levels: lumberjacks, foresters, civil employees) but also public administrators, students of secondary and university level courses in agriculture and forestry sciences.

Geographical location

Italy

Keywords

Demonstrations; Peer-to-peer learning; Networking; Forestry Training
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National Council of Agronomists and Foresters (CONAF)

The Italian National Council for Agronomists and Professional Foresters Order (CONAF) currently represents about 20,000 agronomists and foresters with the aim of promoting the development and defense of the profession with a strategy based on knowledge and innovation through continuous professional training. It is organized at regional or sub-regional level, ensuring a complete coverage of the Italian territory.

The access to CONAF is regulated by national laws and it is subject to a specific examination; while the Order is responsible for setting up and maintaining the respective codes of conduct and lifelong learning programs.

Particularly, it promotes the training of its associates that must attend vocational training on regular basis by law (use of training credits). These credits can be achieved participating in courses, meetings, webinars, conferences validated by the Order. This requirement contributes to the continuous updating of skills of the members.

CONAF also carries on ad hoc studies, also in collaboration with other institutions, that could further support the development of the profession. Moreover, it supports the relationships with national and international institutions by implementing coordinated initiative, at the support of the development of the profession. The National Council promotes, realizes, and manages, directly or through the collaboration with other subject's services and activities of interest to itself or to other professional orders.

Geographical location

Italy

Keywords

Training; Technical advice/assistance; Networking

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Enabling environment for the advisors to create and build a wide network

Having a strong network as an advisor is an important aspect of knowledge transfer and exchange. In fact, networking of advisors is important both for advisors and for farmers. For the former the networking and cooperation in the partnership deliver better results than working on their own and enable opportunities for new ideas/solutions to arise. For the latter (as end-users of advice), it means that the service provided in this way is based on a broader professional and methodological basis and that the advisor can interact with others bringing in new knowledge and experience. It is important to create this environment to enable advisors to

i)create and build a broad network; ii) use new and better communication channels to expand existing networks; iii) improve advisors' time management (especially advisors' ability to network in addition to their daily work); iv) create opportunities to network outside their own work area, avoiding isolation; v) raising awareness of the importance of networking; vi) provide soft skills training and involve advisors in meetings, webinars, info days,demo events, using social media and group messaging.

Also advisory organizations can play a crucial role in supporting networking and providing the necessary supportive environment.

Geographical location

Europe

Keywords

Networking; Territorial embeddedness; Support to integration into supply chains, local and agri-food systems; Facilitation, Mediation

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Cooperation among actors to use catch crop as an alternative source of income in Poland

Within the Agroinnowacja EIP project, sowing a catch crop for forage has enabled the six partner farmers to produce high-quality forage and keep more cattle on their land, improving higher gross margins and cattle performance, while providing environmental benefits. Strip-till technology is used to sow maize on the day the catch crop is harvested thus maximising land use. Co-operation among different actors (advisors, farmers, researchers from university, agricultural input suppliers and one entrepreneur) was critical to the success of the project. The idea for this project came from the farmers in producer groups and finalised with advisors basing on the experience of Germany farmers. Since the advisor was acknowledged about a mixture for a catch crop to be used as a source of animal feed developed by the University, he decided to create the EIP project. The leading advisor is the president of a private agricultural advisory that organises and provides services to producer groups in Poland. AgroIntegracja advisors have been working with the farmers in the producer groups for many years and have built up a significant level of trust, which enable them to quickly identify problematic issues. At the same time, co-operating with outstanding experts enables them to effectively advise producer groups. The advisor would have liked to involve the University at an earlier stage to ensure that the correct research methodology was outlined when planning the project. However, at the beginning, he encountered difficulties in co-operating with the University due to formal procedures that had to be followed. It was much easier to engage with the University on subsequent projects because the co-operation had been formalised.

Geographical location

Poland

Keywords

Innovation & Transition support; Brokerage; Networking Management of advisors and advisory projects

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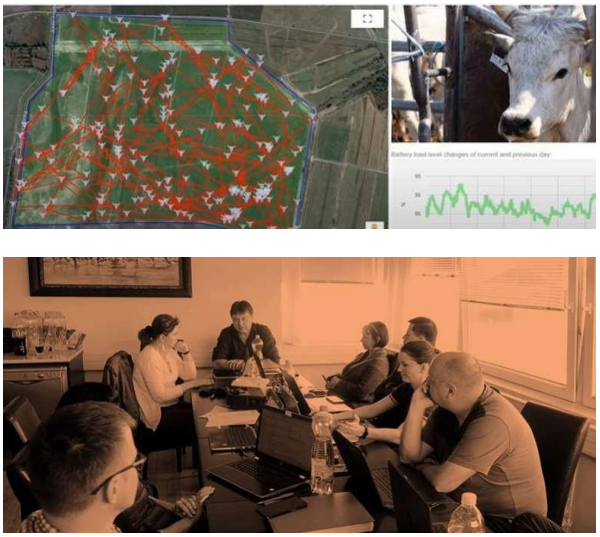
Holistic advice for digital technology uptake



In Hungary, advisory service supported the development of a long lasting and long-distance solution based on IoT technology, in order to monitor the motion, geolocation and other environmental parameters of Hungarian Grey Cattle wandering around large areas of the Hungarian Kiskunság Puszta. The innovation is not only achieved at the technical level, but rather by the mode of delivery, as the solution is offered as part of a farm advisory service package, which includes an online software for real time visualizing several parameters of the tracked animal, integrated with a breeding management information system and a farm logbook platform, connected to the national bovine identification registry.

The project is a classic example of multi-actors cooperation involving a private agricultural advisory services owned by public partner, animal production farm managed by farmer, commercial IT companies involved in development of the monitoring system design and establishment, market actors, administrative bodies.

The advisory service played a major role throughout all the project phases, embedding the farmer, with his own need, in a network of well-established partners aiming at an increase of competitiveness of farms.

Two specific aspects are very relevant for a holistic approach to agricultural advisory services provision: a) IT services are a part of commercial advisory package, not separate services requiring some additional payment; b) there is a combination of public policy instruments with provision of high quality agricultural advisory services at an individual farmer/client level: the costs of commercial advisory package are covered in 90% by support for farm advisory provided by RDP 2014-2021.

Geographical location

Hungary

Keywords

Advisory method and tools (including digital); Facilitation, Mediation; Innovation & Transition support; Territorial embeddedness

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