



FarmDemo



**SUPPORTING DEMONSTRATION THROUGH
AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND
INNOVATION SYSTEMS (AKIS) FUNDING SCHEMES**

FARMDemo POLICY BRIEF

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ANNE-CHARLOTTE DOCKES,
MARLEEN GYSEN, PETER PAREE,
BOELIE ELZEN, LIES DEBRUYNE

COLOFON

FarmDemo is a close collaboration of 3 European projects (PLAID, AgriDemo-F2F and NEFERTITI) funded under Horizon 2020. They all aim to enhance peer-to-peer learning and focus on farm demonstration as a tool to boost innovation uptake. This policy brief is one of the main outputs of the cooperation between PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F, and were developed based on input received from all partners, and during several stakeholder workshops.



PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F have received funding from the the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and innovation program under grant agreement N° 7273 (PLAID) and N° 728061 (AgriDemo-F2F)



FarmDemo

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1 | INTRODUCTION

PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F Horizon 2020 MA projects cooperate to form the FarmDemo network. The main objectives are to develop an EU inventory of demonstration farms and to collect best practices for demonstration events and processes. The projects have the joint aim to enhance peer-to-peer learning and focus on on-farm demonstration as a tool to boost innovation. On-farm demonstration events focus on showing and understanding innovations within a commercial working farm context or a local setting. FarmDemo zooms in on demonstration activities from the early stages of conception right through to impact assessment, leading to the identification of best practices, innovative approaches and overall recommendations to foster demonstration activities. FARMDEMO will in the next years also cooperate with the follow-up Horizon 2020 MA project NEFERTITI which will set up concrete demonstration activities based on the outcomes and learnings of PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F.

In general, the findings of these projects confirm that:

- On-farm demonstration is an effective way to innovate / to foster innovation / to disseminate research results and best farming practices or systems to a wider audience
- Effective demonstrations foster knowledge exchange among farmers but also between students/farmers/advisors/researchers/businesses joining the events
- Effective demonstrations fare a way for scientists, students, teachers, farmers and advisors to build and share innovation and knowledge
- On-farm demonstration events are a very effective education tool, particularly if farmers have an active role to play in the demo
- On-farm demonstrations have evolved from being a more one-directional way to introduce farmers to innovation, to 'meeting places' where experiences are shared in a farmer-to-farmer setting, and to support knowledge co-creation between farmers and other actors.

The degree of social interaction between the demonstrator and participants and the active engagement required by the farmers is thus crucial. This should become the new understanding of what a demonstration event entails, to be called a peer demonstration or a demonstration 2.0

PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F have cooperated to formulate a set of key messages, primarily intended to support R&I policy-makers and funders in the European Commission, in National Ministries and Regional authorities to increase the impact of their programmes with these advantages. However, these recommendations are also intended to provide value to the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) including educational bodies and the demonstration organisers themselves.



The key messages have been developed into four policy briefs:

- Demonstration as part of dissemination activities in EU innovation support projects
- Education and training to enhance demonstration for farmers, facilitators and demo organisers
- **Supporting Demonstration through Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) Funding Schemes**
- Setting long term (EU) demonstration networks and cross-border exchange programmes

These recommendations have been designed and improved in interaction with experts and stakeholders, and inspired by data collected throughout the project. This was a multi-step process, which was initiated at the start of both projects, with the development of a visionary framework. Data was collected through a pan-European inventory of demonstration farms, developed by PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F. As part of this process, consortium members and sub-contractors identified the trends in on-farm demonstrations in the EU 28, Norway, Serbia, and Switzerland. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of a set of 56 case studies was conducted of demonstration activities on commercial farms in 18 European partner countries to assess the processes involved in achieving efficient and effective on-farm demonstration activities.

Based on this data, a set of best practice guidelines were developed for organising, doing and evaluating on-farm demonstrations. Data was discussed and validated during 3 supranational workshops (Southern Supra-regional workshop Venice, Italy 7th February 2018; Eastern Supra-regional meeting Krakow, Poland March 2018; Northern Supra-regional meeting Leuven, Belgium March 2018), during a number of National Consultative Stakeholder Group meetings in partner countries and during 2 recommendations workshops (Alberese, Italy 25-26th February 2019; Den Bosch, Netherlands 2nd April 2019). In addition to these international workshops, data was also presented and discussed during several national stakeholder consultancy group meetings. As a final step, policy recommendations were presented and validated in 2 workshops, one during and one after the FarmDemo conference (Brussels, 21-22nd June 2019), and sent to the members of the SCAR AKIS network for review and final validation (August 2019).

The entire process resulted in four specific key recommendations, as listed above. This policy brief focuses on "Supporting Demonstration through Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) Funding Schemes", and presents the main challenges, lessons learnt from PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F and the recommendation itself. Throughout the document, stakeholder quotes have been included (in boxes). These are illustrative, and are only there to support our research findings.

"Compared to other knowledge transfer tools, such as brochures or websites or so on, I think that demo activities are a great option for farmers to learn in a very open context. So, in demo-activities they have the possibility to decide themselves: is this practice that I am seeing relevant for my farm, and do I want to integrate it, yes or no" (advisor, Germany)

2 | BUILDING THE RECOMMENDATION

2.1. THE RECOMMENDATION AT A GLANCE

Despite a widespread recognition amongst stakeholders that demonstrations are an effective way to exchange knowledge and facilitate change and innovation, there is too little specific attention to the instrument of on-farm demonstrations to enhance impact. Funding systems should create favourable conditions for demonstration activities, keep the basic ingredients for good practices for on-farm demonstration in mind, consider farmer involvement, and with a clever design of the regulations in order to minimise administrative burden.

We suggest a phased approach, with a focus on the process of organizing RDP

2.2. WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Despite a widespread recognition amongst stakeholders that demonstrations are an effective way to exchange knowledge and facilitate change and innovation, we observed several barriers, existing at various levels: in the organization, facilitation, hosting and attendance/access of on-farm demonstrations.

Specifically farmers and (agricultural) students mentioned that they have problems to overcome these barriers (risks, money to attend). More specifically, a weak aspect of demo activities is the lack of compensation for using farm assets and the (organising) farmers' time for demo activities. Farmers involved in demo activities are often engaged through personal involvement, however this can lead to a situation where the long term sustainability of demo activities relies heavily on personal approaches of some individuals. Provision of public funds for farmers operating as demo farms is seen as a precondition of any effective and systematic inclusion of demo farms in any national AKIS plan.

Furthermore, calls for projects, guidelines for proposals, evaluation criteria and project management requirements often disregard the importance of peer-to-peer learning in achieving outcomes and impact, and the potential role that

“It should be stressed that (financial) compensation of the owner of demo farms seems to be indispensable for the sustainability of the demo farm system. Demo farmers spend their time on demonstrations and also take a certain amount of business risk by presenting their farm and know-how to their market competitors. The above compensation will affect projects budgets, of course. In fact, all actors in the demo process should be compensated. In order to be able to allocate reasonable amount in project budgets to the demo events, budgets allocated to each call should be larger” (advisor, Hungary).

on-farm demonstrations have to play in this (see also Recommendation 1). Existing easy-to-access funding possibilities in Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) for demonstrations are often not used.

Finally, there is a lack in follow up and evaluation activities for on-farm demonstration events, and demonstration organisers have very little incentives to do so. This omission hampers opportunities for continuous learning from past experiences

2.3. WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM PLAID AND AGRIDEMO-F2F?

Based on the case study analysis, and further discussions with stakeholders, **it is clear that the RD programmes offer opportunities for accessing incentives and targeted funding for on-farm demonstrations.** At the same time, there is a wide diversity in AKIS structure and composition across EU countries, resulting in very different ways of organising and supporting on-farm demonstrations across Europe. So, as a result, RDP measures are being implemented in very different ways across Europe. The advantage of these national and regional structures in RDP is that they consider the existing local contexts and barriers (which are again diverse across EU countries), and adapt locally to help overcome them. There are lessons to be learnt, inspiration to be found in the way this is organised in other countries.

Evidence from the AgriDemo-F2F and PLAID case studies clearly indicate that:

- Funders of innovation support, advisory services or education have a lot of influence, and can couple funding to specific requirements or requests.

As such they can specifically require:

- to organize and carry out on-farm demonstration activities, at varied moments all along the project period
- that host farmers, advisors, facilitators, demonstrators and organisers are trained for demonstration activities
- to enable access (e.g. through additional funding) of “hard-to-reach” farmers to attend on-farm demonstration activities
- for education bodies: to organize participation and to assign a specific role to the students during on-farm demonstration activities. E.g. students could play a role in evaluation and stay at the end of the demo day with the organisers to share their evaluation.
- for researchers: to attend on-farm demos in order to better network with practitioners and cooperate in the building of demo events



- Increased farmer involvement in hosting/leading demonstration activities contributes to effectiveness. This could be achieved by making funding directly available to farmers for this purpose, and could cover:
 - the time they dedicate in organising and hosting demo events
 - the investments made, necessary to facilitate demonstration activities: on farm trials, meeting rooms, accommodation and catering facilities
 - following trainings on competences needed in demonstrations
 - associated risks (e.g. hygiene and biosecurity equipment, or damages on and around the farm (equipment, yield reductions, ...)).
- Funding should be coordinated to help implement the essential requirements for good practices for on-farm demonstration events: there should focus on facilitating access, creating a learning environment (mediation methods...), and increasing impact through evaluation and follow-up activities. The latter are crucial to improve the quality and enhance reflection and learning on past demonstration activities. Evaluation should not lead to an overload of paperwork, but should be aimed at enhancing interaction between practitioners. Support can be more effective on the long term, when networks between stakeholders are created and supported.

2.4. WHAT WE RECOMMEND

Existing programmes and funding schemes (at EU, national and regional level) have the potential to create more opportunities for on-farm demonstrations, but to achieve this potential, there needs to be a more specific and explicit focus on on-farm demonstrations in the various project calls, guidelines, criteria and requirements. These funding systems should create favourable conditions for demonstration activities, keep the basic ingredients for good practices for on-farm demonstration in mind, consider farmer involvement, and with a clever design of the regulations in order to minimise administrative burden. The focus of support should be on rewarding and raising enthusiasm rather than control (through KPI's and tendering) and additional paperwork. Attention should be given to coordination of demos within and across programmes to avoid fragmentation and duplication, and to facilitate integration into advisory landscapes/AKIS to reinforce messages.

Not all recommendations can be brought in action at the same time, so we suggested a phased approach, offering specific recommendations for different phases of building up support structures.

We focus on the process of organizing RDP.

- In 2019, the Member States will start preparing their CAP AKIS Strategic Plans. In these plans the AKIS is described as follows: “the combined organisation and knowledge flows between persons, organisations and institutions who use and produce knowledge for agriculture and inter-related fields”. A more inclusive AKIS induces better knowledge flows supported through interventions, supported by advisory services and networking activities. We recommend to firmly position on-farm demonstrations as an effective tool to organize, test and disseminate innovations. Quantification of the activity is possible: an impression of the type and amount of demonstration farmers can be found in the FarmDemo Hub. All countries and regions should start with following up what exactly is happening in order to gain understanding and improve their AKIS with the appropriate actions
- In 2020, after agreement between EU Ministers of Agriculture, European Parliament and European Commission (EC), the Member States start the design of national plans, to be approved by the EC. In this phase we recommend to include such measures in these plans that on-farm demonstrations become an essential instrument, and include this explicitly, wherever possible:
 - Funding for EIP Operational Group (OG) innovation projects through the “cooperation” intervention (Art 114 and 71). For the understanding of the EIP-AGRI, see Art 114 is useful. The EIP interactive innovation model principles are the basis for practical innovative solutions: actors with complementary knowledge cooperate must tackle concrete farmers’/foresters’ needs and opportunities and work together intensively all along the project. Note that OGs can support all 9 CAP specific objectives..
 - Funding Knowledge exchange and Information Actions, including one-to one advice, organising Information Actions, setting up modern advisory & innovation support services, etc; through the intervention “Funding for knowledge exchange, advice & information” (Art 72).

In this planning phase, we recommend to include also the interventions that support these OGs and Information Projects

- fully integrate farm advisory services covering economic, environmental and social dimensions and delivering up-to-date technological and scientific information developed by research and innovation in the AKIS (Art 13). These farm advisory services also include innovation support (= innovation project brokering, innovation project facilitation, etc) for preparing and implementing innovative OGs
 - create conditions to form CAP networks at EU level and national levels, to foster innovation and knowledge flows and thus contribute to a well-functioning AKIS (Art 113)
- When the national/regional plans are fixed, and the management structure is organised, we recommend to:
 - Communicate early enough about the possibilities of the new CAP for on-farm demonstrations through Knowledge exchange and Information Actions and OGs and, via the channels and in the language that farmers use. Communicate about the quality of support needed for successful projects.
 - Start reflection early, so that so that the first calls can be opened asap.
 - Reflect on a few specific themes that need to be covered by the first calls for OGs and Information Projects,
 - Ensure also openness of themes to get bottom-up ideas in, for instance short supply chains connecting consumers and producers (increased interaction between producers and consumers supports better mutual understanding, and potentially new business models), care farming, or whatever project proposers may see as potentially innovative
 - Include in the management authority people who can judge plans (proposal phase) and reports (execution phase of projects) and communicate in an stimulating, effective way with the stakeholders;
 - Include independent people with experience in on-farm demonstrations in the committees that do the selection of submitted projects.
- When projects are running, we recommend to:
 - Open demonstrations for a broader public, where suitable
 - Do not wait until the end of the project, mid-term demonstrations help to promote the project and create awareness. It is also a



moment where the invited participants may come with additional interesting ideas which may add value for the other participants or help the project by enriching it while still running,

- Use various local, regional, national and EU websites, like the local agendas from EIP/rural networks, or the agenda at EU level of the EIP-AGRI and on farmdemo.eu, to communicate about planned demonstrations.
- In the review of the projects, we suggest to
 - Support people responsible for the project with tools to report on demonstrations in an easy way
 - Communicate about the results in local language as well as in English (if relevant; costs for translation should be included in the budget).