



FarmDemo

**DEMONSTRATION AS PART OF DISSEMINATION
ACTIVITIES IN EU INNOVATION SUPPORT PROJECTS**

FARMDemo POLICY BRIEF

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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.



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FarmDemo

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1 | INTRODUCTION

PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F cooperate with NEFERTITI to form the FarmDemo network. All 3 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 creates resources about 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.

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 and between students/farmers/advisors/researchers
- 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.

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 the dissemination activities in the innovation support projects in EU**
- 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 exchange programmes



These recommendations have been designed and improved in interaction with experts and stakeholders, and are 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 supraregional 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).

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”

2 | BUILDING THE RECOMMENDATION

2.1. THE RECOMMENDATION AT A GLANCE

PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F showed that on-farm demonstration events are well-accepted by farmers, advisors, researchers and agricultural industry members as valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and learning about innovation processes that contribute to making agriculture more sustainable.

They are furthermore considered as a suitable environment for knowledge co-creation, where farmers, industry stakeholders, advisors and researchers are incentivised to jointly address specific problems.

Based on this, we propose that on-farm demonstrations should be actively promoted as desirable outputs from EIP Agri research projects, Thematic Networks, Operational Groups and other European innovation project programmes like Interreg.

2.2. WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Inventory results and observations provided by consortium members of PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F projects as well as discussions with stakeholders showed that on-farm demo events are well-accepted by farmers, advisors, researchers and agricultural industry members as valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and co-creation and learning about innovations.

Despite this general consensus about the fact that demo events are useful instruments to stimulate innovations, to disseminate and to validate research results in practice and to bridge the gap between science and practice, **demonstration activities are rarely included in project calls, and as a result, are seldom part of project proposals and projects.**

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

Analysis of the inventory data, country reports, case studies and workshop recommendations yield the following key messages with regard to integrating on-farm demonstrations as part of dissemination activities in EU innovation support projects:

- Demonstration is not a 'one way knowledge transfer', it also give scientists a chance to listen and learn from farmers' practices and expectations which can help to improve research findings. On-farm demonstrations bring a range of stakeholders together in the context of collaborative relationships and opportunities for interaction and exchange on a range of topics
- Demonstrations work well on research farms but a demo activity might have more impact when the host farm operates under the same 'real life' conditions as average farms. Farmers want to identify with the host farm. Demonstrations on commercial farms increase the credibility of research findings.
- Demonstrations and cross-visits are a good way to engage farmers and practitioners in EU research and innovation projects. Increased farmer involvement in leading demonstration activities could be achieved by making funding directly available to them
- There is a clear demand for more organised on-farm demonstration, especially where agriculture is regionally based (e.g. Italy and France), where farmer networks are generally weak (much of Eastern Europe) and at the EU scale. Agricultural advisors are often the key stakeholders that bring together multiple actors to organise and host a demonstration event.
- Organisers of on-farm demonstration (e.g. public, private and charitably-funded advisors, farmers, researchers) would benefit from opportunities to network across regions and countries in Europe. Projects at a European level can act as a platform to host such exchanges.
- Thematic networks and Interreg projects are good examples of successful projects including demonstration activities.



2.4. WHAT WE RECOMMEND

In each application form of EU research and innovation projects there is a section about the dissemination of the project outcomes. Many project programmes also emphasize the need to involve end users in project results and innovations.

For example, the H2020 manual states that:

“Dissemination means sharing research results with potential users - peers in the research field, industry, other commercial players and policymakers. By sharing your research results with the rest of the scientific community, you are contributing to the progress of science in general.”

“Involve potential end-users and stakeholders in your proposal. If they're committed from early on, they may help guide your work towards applications. End-users could come from the regional, national and international networks of the partners in your consortium, or from the value chains they operate in. They could be involved as partners in the project, or, throughout its duration, as members of an advisory board or user group tasked with testing the results and providing feedback.”

Demonstration should be put forward in programme manuals as a valid option to effectively disseminate research results and actively involve stakeholders.

We propose that on-farm demonstration should be a relevant part of the dissemination activities of EIP Agri research projects, Thematic Networks, Operational Groups and other European innovation project programmes such as Interreg. This way, we encourage researchers to work together with end-users and other stakeholders in the agri-food chain (farmers, advisors ...) and to build demonstration activities together in order to improve, to validate and to disseminate their research findings.

Furthermore, we suggest that a specific focus is included on the follow-up and evaluation (see also Recommendation 3), to improve i) the impact of the actual demonstration (through follow-up), and ii) future demonstration events (through monitoring and evaluation). However, this focus on follow-up and evaluation should not lead to administrative overload for the demonstration organisers. Monitoring and evaluation should be done as much as possible in an interactive format. Follow-up activities to stimulate further learning and networking could include e.g. providing online videos and reports of the demo event or creating an online platform, social media groups, blogs or physical networks in which researchers and practitioners can report their experiences with interested farmers. Projects could also be encouraged to find innovative ways to reward the best practices of demonstration and knowledge exchange.

