



FarmDemo



**SETTING LONG-TERM (EU) DEMONSTRATION
NETWORKS AND EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES**

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.



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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 projects showed that on farm demonstrations are valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and innovation processes. Nevertheless, the dissemination and peer-to-peer learning effect of a demonstration event depends on a well-structured organisation as well as specific skills for the hosting farmers, organisers, facilitators, and demonstrators. Exchanges between actors of demo events are an excellent way to improve these skills and thus demonstration practice, both at local and EU level.

Networking at EU level should be supported both through a greater commitment for demonstration in EU projects and through the funding of long term networking between demo organisers and farmers.

2.2. WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

When it comes to fostering European agricultural innovation and sustainability, policy is largely driven at the EU level, while demonstrations are organized mostly at a local level. This possibly results in a mismatch between demonstration programmes, often focusing on the national/regional level, and the challenges that need to be faced at a European level. There is also a need to coordinate demonstration networks and events at both regional and EU level.

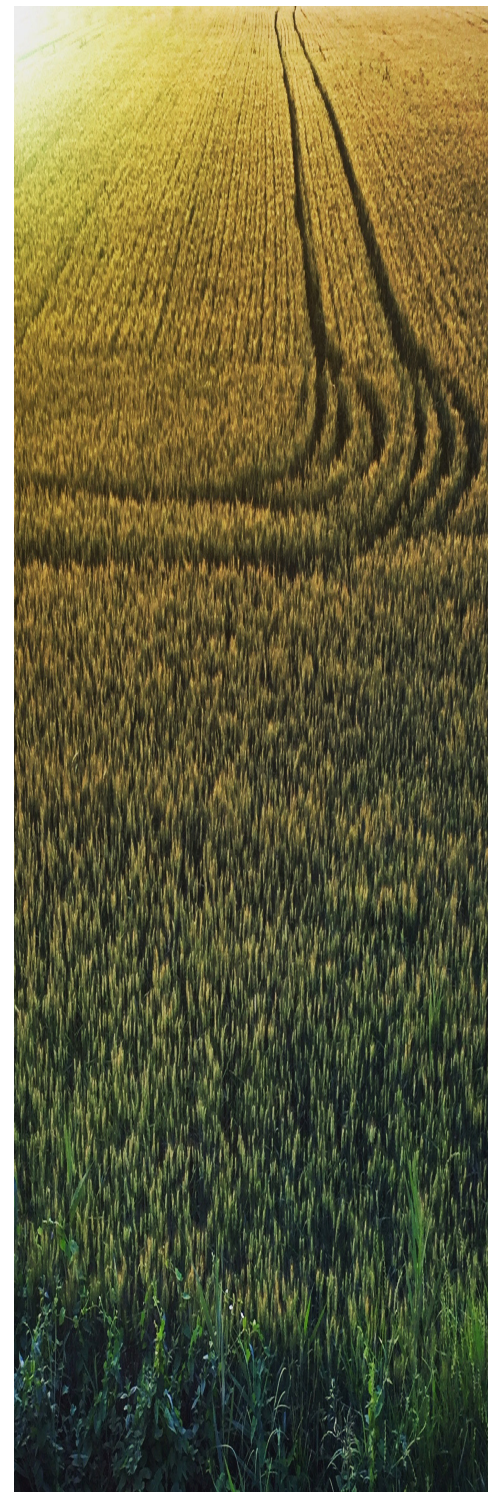
Experiences from the FarmDemo projects also clearly showed that demonstrations are organised very differently within Europe, and the approaches that are being used differ greatly between countries and regions (e.g. Eastern European countries tend to have less interactive demonstrations, while demonstrations in the south of Europe are less commonly used as a means of dissemination). These differences however create learning opportunities.

By broadening exchanges and networking across borders, we believe that this will create more opportunities for cross-fertilisation, and should allow to broaden the vision of demo organisers and to develop the number and the quality of on-farm demo events. Experiences can be shared both on on-farm demonstration approaches, but also on technical or agricultural innovation aspects.

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 setting long-term demonstration networks and exchange programmes:

- Participants and demo organisers express the need to improve their skills and experience and to benefit from exchanges with their peers, at national and EU level. The case studies showed that exchanges are a good way to improve practices on demo activities both at local, national and EU level.
- The 56 demo cases we studied in the projects showed very different demonstration activities and approaches, indicating an important diversity of interactive practices, according to the regions and countries
- Demonstration organisers expressed a great interest in a better knowledge about demonstration practices in other countries. Learning from each other is the main objective when they get involved in projects like PLAID or AgriDemo-F2F. They are motivated by knowledge exchanges about how to demonstrate, as well as exchanges about the topic and content of the demonstrations.
- During the PLAID project, a demonstration workshop was organized in Croatia with practitioners from each case study, small interactive groups among the practitioners were organized these shared the exchanges between countries. The participants explained that to see each other's context helps to reflect on their own context and practices.
- NEFERTITI project is already based on these analysis, and on the hypothesis exchanges about Demo activities, these are an important source of continuous improvement of the practice in EU. NEFERTITI organizes structured and monitor cross-visits among EU countries, which constitute a kind of "living lab" of one or more future EU network(s), at the core of this recommendation.
- Both host farmers and 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.



2.4. WHAT WE RECOMMEND

The organisation of exchanges about on farm demonstration at EU level, and of a network of demo organisers at that level are an excellent way to improve:

- The skills of demo organisers (demonstrators, facilitators, host farmers)
- The number and quality of demonstration activities
- The general knowledge about sustainability issues in agriculture
- Sharing of specific technology and practices

We propose two main recommendations. Firstly, we suggest to make use of existing projects, like NEFERTITI, Eureka and EU project programmes like the Thematic Networks and Interreg project, where cross-border exchanges are implemented, to capitalize on their experience, in order to improve their methods, bring renewed insights to demonstrators, offer more opportunities for accessing new knowledge both on demonstration methods and practices and on diverse technical issues in agriculture. Secondly, we propose long term demonstration networks at European level. These long-term networks can reinforce trust among partners, allow further expertise development in the network and consequently build a network of real “demonstration experts” to support technology and practices that develop more sustainable agriculture in their countries, and at EU level.

Two target groups can be identified for this EU network:

- All actor types involved in the organization and facilitation of demonstrations. They will benefit mostly in cross-topic networks, centered on exchanges about demonstration methods, facilitation practices and tools, policy supports...
- Host farmers and thematic experts involved in demonstration. These will possibly be more interested in thematic demonstration networks, focusing on their specific sector. However, focus should be both on exchanges about thematic content and demonstration methods and approaches.

Our recommendation thus combines several aspects:

- The EU Commission could directly fund a network of demonstration organisers and trainers, on a long term basis (at least 5 years), based on cross visits, skills exchanges and cross methodological trainings
- Some EU projects could put an emphasis on networks about demonstration. We recommend to support and fund more thematic networks and Interreg projects after 2020, including cross country demonstration activities directly involving farmers and advisers or demonstration organisers. The projects could benefit from a funding duration over a period of 5 years and should be evaluated on their capacity to propose longer term knowledge and practice exchanges, but also rewarding of the best exchange initiatives (See also Recommendation 1).

