



AGRIDEMO

Case study reports: United Kingdom CS3



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1. Background

The Farming Connect Demonstration Network¹ is a pan- Wales network of Innovation, Demonstration and Focus Sites. These sites host on-farm projects and trials that focus on:

- the integration of new technology and/or new approaches to management
- raising standards of on-farm efficiency
- decreasing inputs, increasing outputs
- ways of increasing profitability

12 demonstration sites (the case study) are located throughout Wales, and have been selected in order to share with the wider industry examples of best practice, innovation and new technologies. They aim to help farmers see at first hand new ways of working and to increase their knowledge base which in turn will improve skill sets, inspiring and encouraging them to implement new ways of working.

Focus Sites (the numbers change each year) located throughout Wales, demonstrate 'one-off' projects or trials on a wide range of topics. These are devised to help address opportunities or problems which are specific to local areas. They trial practical scenarios, testing new methods and approaches. Results and outcomes from the projects are disseminated at regular open events.

8 Innovation Sites operate in conjunction with academic research projects from some of Wales' top agri-education establishments. Projects established at these sites, receive significant input from sector specialists and academics.

Both *open meetings*, which are advertised widely and are open for anyone to attend, and *progression events*, which are closed meetings (invite only) that allow groups to visit a site and discuss particular topics, take place at all these sites

Funding and Governance

Farming Connect (FC) is part of the Welsh Rural Development Plans (Programmes) co-funded by the EU and Welsh Government under the EU's Rural Development Regulation. This includes a broad range of activities aimed at KE; one-to-many events (including farm walks, visits to demonstration farms and strategic awareness events), group discussions and development sessions, and one-to-one advice. For the period 2007-2013 all these activities cost some £4 million per year. Many services are fully funded and free to farmers, others are subsidised by up to 80%. This arrangement is different from England. The topics are industry-focused to support the farming industry.

To benefit, farmers have to register with FC. The Business Wales section of the Welsh Government oversees the FC services to farmers but Menter a Busnes have the contract to run the Farming Connect programme and employ the staff. The demonstration network is a relatively small part of this overall FC programme. The programme is evaluated, and previous programmes have been evaluated as part of the RDP evaluation process for Wales.

Actors and networks

A Technical Development Manager employed by Menter a Busnes coordinates the demonstration network. He manages 10 technical officers (TO) who each coordinate activities on 2-3 demonstration farms and around 10

¹ Since the CS analysis in 2018-19, Farming Connect has launched a new phase of demonstration farms. <https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/news-and-events/newyddion/new-demonstration-network-promoting-best-practice-and-innovation>

focus sites. The technical officers cover the following different categories: 5 Red Meat (beef and sheep); 3 Dairy; 1 Pigs and poultry; 1 Forestry. Farming Connect also has a country level 18 Development officers who deal with all FC services.

How it works

A farmer is selected to host a demonstration farm which will run for 3 -5 years and focus on one (sometimes more) project. At the end of the period an open meeting will disseminate the project findings, periodic smaller progression meetings will be throughout the period. Each farm has a website page on the FC platform with blogs, and trial updates which the TO maintains. The TO has to propose and select farmers to host demonstration (every 3-5 years) and focus farms (annually). Topics are decided jointly, they need to meet the Welsh Government priorities and the farmers' needs, usually these coincide. Information about events is advertised and disseminated but only farmers registered with FC can attend or be directly contacted. Registration is free and simple but not universal.

Farm location

Wales (Beef and Sheep sector), the aims are to reduce production costs through improved grassland management and through finishing lambs off forage

Event was cancelled due to hot dry summer in 2018

Interviewees: 2 Programme level interviewees; demo farmer

2. Method

In line with the Methodological Guidelines, two main data sources are used: a background document and interviews at Programme and Farm level to analyse structural and functional characteristics. Since the event had to be cancelled, no event tools and surveys were completed.

1. A background document for every case study was completed by the AgriDemo-F2F partner who carried out the case study.
2. Interviews with representatives of programme/networks (level 1) and farm level interviews with demonstrators/hosts (Level 1) to reveal how the Functional and Structural characteristics enable learning. Analysis is reported in Sections 3 and 4. Data is sourced from interviews with 2 Programme/Network members and 1 farmer host interview. The analysis followed four themes: (1) Coordinating effective recruitment of host farmers and participants; (2) Appropriate demonstration and interaction approaches; (3) Enabling learning appropriate to purpose, audience, context; (4) Follow up activities.

It was not possible to observe an event due to cancellation

Finally, partners reviewed the case study reports to prepare their workshops with different stakeholders related to the case studies. These workshops aimed at validating the data presented in the case study reports and to discuss on key characteristics related to effectiveness of demonstrations. The workshop for the UK case studies was held on the 19th of October, 2018.

3. Structural characteristics

T1: Programme/network level

1. The main organisation and actors involved in the demonstration activities and their role

See above for details.

With respect to the actors/people involved in organised demos, the farmer keeps a central role for himself, while at the same time s/he acknowledges a critical role for the TO as well as to private consultants and advisers.

Usually for projects we have an independent consultant or vet to give an independent overview, we never use companies, it strengthens the project, like an agronomist, a consultant or vet [an open event] will start with an over view of the farm, I would discuss FC's role identifying issues and the project, then the vet or consultant will give the results, as I'm not an expert so when farmers are asking it's more in depth (programme level interviewee 1)

2. Networks

To fulfil its targets, both the farm as well as the programme level interviewee, placed considerable importance to the network the farm belongs to. The TOs also have a close relationship, they meet at formal events but are constantly in touch informally as well. The wider network includes for example HCC, university researchers, as noted below, proposals for demo project topics and approaches have to be authorised by these actors.

3. Funding arrangements

The programme arrangements are explained above. For individual farms the Programme interviewee 1 explained that there are some financial compensations to the farmer

4. Governance and agreeing topics

The extent to which participating farmers are involved in the network programme is described in the section on functional analysis.

The topics are very much directed, the main sectors are red meat, dairy, pigs and poultry, woodland. We discuss with HCC [Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales, the industry-led organisation responsible for the development, promotion and marketing of Welsh red meat], we discuss with them what's needed in the Welsh industry, what topics are most likely – lameness in sheep, has knock on effects on the business, pneumonia in calves, those topics have more emphasis in the sector. / Also KT objectives, for example antibiotics is a hot topic and we're hoping to run a campaign on antibiotic use, and run a project on reducing antibiotic use, with evening meetings with a vet, online e learning modules, videos, so different formats are used for disseminating results (Programme level interviewee 1)

The host farmer normally suggests a topic but there is also a need for the project and demo topic ideas to be agreed with higher strategic priorities. This is confirmed by the programme level interviewee (1), who explains that topics have to be 'signed off' by other actors.

4. Functional characteristics

T1: Coordinating effective recruitment of host farmers and participants

1. Incentives

There is no payment for the farmer's time but there is an inconvenience fee for hosting the annual project event. Both the farmer and programme interviewee (2) agreed that farmers do not become hosts for financial reasons, however there are indirect benefits, as the farmer does have access to consultants.

2. Motivations for host farmers

With respect to motivation for hosting a demo farm, the farmer said that it was to improve his business and share information. He went on to explain that a motivation was also using the FC's programme 'Measure to Manage' for recording how their management has progressed over 4-5 years, which he finds beneficial.

The programme interviewee 2 saw the motivation generally as getting information and having a project that is tailored to their farm, so all the benefits and findings are directly associated with their farm. S/he pointed also to the importance of farmer ambition and having a good attitude, explaining that:

They [hosts] need to be eager to learn and eager to work with ourselves [FC], with other farmers, and the attitude to being a demo farmer is fundamental to their success. [...] (Programme interviewee 2)

3. Motivations for participants

Motivations for participants varies, it's the topic and the speaker that's very important. According to the Programme interviewee (1) a lot of local farmers come to events to support the host farmer, while others come to learn from the project, they are often following up on project results they are seen posted on Facebook and twitter pages. The social nature is also an attraction and food is important for this, the farmer said sometimes people comment on it and say that (food) was good; the Programme interviewee (1) agreed:

It's also a social event, at the end we'd have a bacon roll and cup of tea and a lot of farmers will still be here an hour later (Programme interviewee 1)

4. Target audience

The target audience according to the host farmer are other farmers with similar land type and livestock type. Geographically for an open day or field day the target would be a 50 mile radius. For smaller discussion group they would be local and self selecting, not targeted.

The programme interviewee 1 said they want to target the 20-40 year olds but it's usually the 40-60 year olds that come. S/he explained the challenges with attracting younger people.

According to programme interviewee (2) their main audience for demos encompasses all sectors including arable, livestock, horticulture, arable and forestry (although this has not been a focus) and students, as well as younger farmers and women. S/he explained:

We want to be as inclusive as possible, so we want to encourage young farmers into the industry, but they need to be involved in the business in one way or the other. And, ... also getting women into agriculture as well. (Programme interviewee 2)

5. Advertising and recruitment

Different channels are used for recruitment, the programme interviewee (2) explained that:

For an open event we send out about four hundred invites to the locality, We also put it on social media, on our website, technical publications, so it goes far and wide. And any event we have, say if we have the Pembrokeshire show, we'd have a list of events in Pembrokeshire for the next month so people can pick them up. (Programme interviewee 2)

The farmer explained that for a smaller closed event - invited people come along and they know how many will come whereas as for an open event, attendance depends on weather and the subject.

T2: Appropriate demonstration and interaction approaches

1. The nature of interaction

All interviews described that the nature of interaction as entirely bottom-up. With respect to topic selection, the farmer remarked that the host farmer can decide the topic as long as it fits the profile of what FC want. The programme interviewee (1) explained that it's very rarely top down, the Welsh Government ask FC to cover topics, but the final say and decision is by the farmers. However, the programme interviewee (2) explained that there might be different views in the programme about the extent of farmer involvement.

2. Involving farmers in the learning process and the demonstration programme

According to the programme interviewee (2) host farmers are involved to some extent in the network programme and in individual demonstration planning although the process is not formal, it's a discussion and negotiation. It can be difficult for farmers to come up with new ideas and to make the essential practices innovative.

When asked about to what extent that participating farmers are involved in the network programme, Programme interviewee (2) described an informal feedback process:

Because we are very much industry facing the discussions we have with farmers are always fed back. We deal with farmers on a day-to-day basis ...and take their concerns on board. There is no formal governing structure or a group of farmers that guide us on the way, Programme interview 2

3. Focus

Regarding the focus of the demo network the farmer and programme Interviewee 1 described this as 'Whole farm', while Programme Interviewee (2) described it as 'In between'.

4. Design

All interviewees described the demo as taking an approach which was a mixture of 'Experimental' and 'Exemplary', for the farmer this allowed everything to be put in the context of the farm. For the Programme Interviewee (1) s/he explained that being a commercial farm they can't always do rigid experiments, they do trials on farms where it's possible but it has to be more flexible on most farms. S/he recognised the limitation of this approach.

The Programme Interviewee (2) said that it depends on the technology and acknowledged there was no single model:

If the technology's really exciting, using the technology and its research is really interesting and it draws a crowd. But then you've also got to talk about the nuts and bolts of the soil quality, nutrient value of slurry and manure. Those things are not exemplary, they are facts, and that information you've got to get across to a farmer one way or another. There's no single model and depending on who you're speaking to they will either take it on board or not. (Programme Interviewee 2)

5. Group size

With respect to optimal group size, the farmer said that an ideal visit would be 10-15 people, this size allows him to can practically talk to everybody and take them around on a trailer. However he acknowledged that an open day [at the end of a project] is bigger [according to the Programme Interviewee about 40 farmers attend the open days].

The Programme Interviewee 2 described the strategy for dealing with larger events by having a lot of different stations and split it up into a morning and afternoon session. He acknowledged that with anything over 20 there will be less interaction and the chance of having 40 people knowing each other is reduced.

T3: Enabling learning appropriate to purpose, audience, context

1. Facilitating interaction and learning: structure, content and techniques

With respect to the structure of the day, this depends on the events. If small it can be informal with a farm walk. Whereas the Programme Interviewee 1 described one of the bigger open events:

We use one of the sheds and sit on hay bales, we start with ppt, giving an overview, then go out to field and then it's more of a question time, the consultant will refer to the ppt and say this is what we mean, it's more of a visual thing. (Programme Interviewee 1)

A lot of consideration is given to the social nature of the event and the timing, as the Programme Interviewee 2 explained:

The social element of it is very important. If we're having a dairy meeting we tend to start at 11 o'clock, have an hours session, stop for lunch then have a walk around the cows and field. That is a useful model because you have a nice break so people don't arrive there and force each other to talk, some people will sit down and will listen for a bit, see what everybody else is up to, have a quick lunch and go for a walk. (Programme Interviewee 2)

The farmer cited 'Participants ask questions & talk openly', as the most important aspect of a demo although recognised that all aspects were important. The Programme Interviewees 1 and 2 cited 'Good quality expert advice & technical presentations', as the most important, P1 because he felt that farmers go away with problem solving if they have achieved the other 3 aspects and P2 because, he s/he explained, it:

Doesn't matter how good the project is or what you're showing if the person there can't present and can't convey that information to a high level. It's pointless. So it's vital that you have good quality expert advice, technical presentations, that's fundamental really to the work we're doing. (Programme Interviewee 2)

2. Taking into account variation in learning

The farmer said they did take variation in learning into account, they adjust the pace and try and make it interesting to all. He remarked that style of presentation is also a consideration.

Programme Interviewee 1 agreed saying that they always have a ppt and print it out for the slower readers, leaflets and videos and they can go on the website afterwards. They speak predominantly English on the farm because for an open event they don't know who is coming and often the consultant is from England but if it's a small meeting of Welsh speakers then they will talk in Welsh.

Programme Interviewee 2 described their approach as fluid saying they adopt action learning techniques where they can, so the audience then come to a conclusion by themselves. He said:

We also do demonstrations where they can have a look at a tractor wheel, check what's going on, see the soil [so it can be quite hands on] yes. But have the literature available to them as well. (Programme Interviewee 2)

T4: Effective follow-up activities

1. Follow-up activities and materials

The farmer said that he did engage with participants after the event informally. People contact him afterwards with questions [he suggested about 10% of participants]. Programme interviewee (1) said that they don't really do much follow up as a programme but rely on the website. For follow up materials the farmer said he directs farmers towards the technical officer and to the website as "there is so much on line now". The Programme Interviewee (1) agreed that the website is the main portal for information as all the demo and projects results are there.

2. Assessing impact

The farmer said that sometimes he assesses the impact of the event amongst participants but only informally through the people who have phoned up asking for more information. The Programme interviewee (1) however described a more formal process in which FC phones all members who have been to on farm events and say "I see you've been to a fertility meeting" and ask "did you make any changes?". That's only done once a year. He/She was not confident that this generates very good feedback however. Programme interviewee (2) explained that they try and call participants but he will also rely on his team to report back any impact.

Regarding assessing the impact of the event in the wider farming community, this is informal, through word of mouth.