



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 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 are 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 “Setting long term (EU) demonstration networks and cross-border exchange programmes”, and presents the main challenges, lessons learnt from PLAID and AgriDemo-F2F and the recommendation itself. Throughout the document, stakeholder quotes have been included. 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

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 there is a general consensus that well organized 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 and to disseminate and validate research results in practice, thereby bridging 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.

“The challenge with demonstration projects is to combine the needs of science, of politics and farmers”
(policy maker, Germany)

“Projects including farm demonstrations should involve demo farm owners in planning the project from the very first step (i.e. use the multi-actor approach from the first step). If demo farms are positioned in grant proposals almost as end-users, the convertibility of project results into practice will be questionable”
(advisor, Hungary)

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 gives 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. Increased farmer involvement in leading demonstration activities could be achieved by making funding directly available to them. In EU rules for rural development programmes this is possible, but some national regulations do not allow this.
- Demonstrations and cross-visits at regional, national and international level are a good way to engage farmers and practitioners in EU research and innovation projects, in particular when demonstrating what is in their view an interesting novelty. 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 demonstrations, 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. It would be appropriate if projects at a European level could act as platforms to host such exchanges. Good examples of successful projects that include demonstration activities are thematic networks and Interreg projects.

"Demonstration is a specific tool that fits as a part of the advisors' toolbox. In professional advisory activities, it should be coordinated with other tools to incentivise the take up of innovations. It may be less efficient if it is managed in a separated way" (researcher, Italy).

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 an essential part of the dissemination activities of EIP Agri Operational Group innovation projects, Thematic Networks and other European project programmes such as Horizon Europe and 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 and innovation.

On-farm demonstrations can follow a wide range of approaches, are planned with different objectives in mind, and are initiated and organised by a wide range of actors. Given this variety, there is no 'one-fits-all' approach for a successful on-farm demonstration event.

The FarmDemo design guide offers an overview/checklist of the most important elements that should be considered when it comes to preparing, carrying out and evaluating on-farm demonstrations. It proposes 6 simple steps to follow when designing an on-farm demonstration event, starting from a clear definition of the objectives and ending with a good evaluation and follow-up. Follow-up and evaluation is crucial to stimulate further learning after the event, 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, and should be linked to the initial objective of the demo event. Feedback and Information can be collected on the set-up (programme, locations, facilities, topic, ...) and organisation of the demo, but also on what participants have learned, and what they believe to be applicable for their farm, assessing outcomes and impact.

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 share their experiences with interested farmers. To stimulate follow-up, it can be useful to have 'multipliers' present at the demo event. These can be e.g. advisors, but also agricultural media, press and web content providers, since they can assist in further dissemination of the results. Projects could also be encouraged to find innovative ways to reward the best practices of demonstration and knowledge exchange.

