

This series of informative fiches aim to present, in summary, examples collected by the ENRD Focus Group on Knowledge Transfer and Innovation. The case studies describe practices and approaches that EU Member States and Regions have put in place in order to promote Knowledge Transfer and Innovation, mainly but not exclusively, through their Rural Development Programmes in the current period. These examples aim to contribute to the understanding of what has worked well and less well in supporting innovation through the 2007-2013 RDPs and as far as possible, draw lessons in the view of future improvement of the programmes.

Agro Living Lab project in Finland

The collaboration between farmers and the supply industry in Finland

SUMMARY: The Agro Living Lab project in Finland was a user-centred platform bringing together end-users and companies in order to improve the usability and acceptability of new ideas and solutions in machinery used in agriculture and forestry.

1. Why the approach has been put in place

Competitiveness in agriculture and rural areas is often hampered by the fact that new information, technologies and innovations are not being implemented or transferred into production efficiently. Particularly poor usability can be one of the limiting factors for market penetration of new technologies.

This constraint can be addressed by lowering the implementation threshold by focusing at increased usability and user-centred design. New machinery or equipment that meets the user's needs and is easy to use can be

integrated into the user's daily work processes much easier. User-friendly machines and equipment can also increase the efficiency of daily routines and reduce work-related stress and physical strain. In addition, operating a user-friendly device is easier to understand; no additional time is needed in order to learn how to use it, while work can be performed faster than before. Overall, the same amount of work requires less time resulting in enhanced competitiveness.

2. How it was achieved in practice

Overall, the project aimed to increase the usability of machinery and equipment for end-users, e.g. farmers and foresters. The Agro Living Lab was essentially an R&D tool aiming to offer farmers and foresters products and better tailored services and facilitate their daily work as well as to increase their efficiency.

The initiative started by two development organisations that identified the need for activities of this kind, namely the Seinäjoki Technology Centre Ltd. and the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences. The Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for South Ostrobothnia, was also involved as a finance provider.

Current KT&I support examples across the EU27

A preliminary analysis was performed before initiating the preparations for the project. During the preliminary analysis, the role of two development organisations in the project was defined. In parallel, negotiations were launched with the third organisation that provided support for developing the project plan and especially its financial part.

In practice the Agro Living Lab acted as a platform bringing together end-users and companies producing agricultural and forestry machinery and equipment, as well as universities and other development organisations. The project assembled a register of farmers and foresters who were willing to participate in the Agro Living Lab's activities. At the same time, interested machinery companies contacted the Lab which maintained the end-users network and negotiated the assignment with the company. The Agro Living Lab coordinated and facilitated their interaction with the end-users.

During brainstorming's sessions, farmers, foresters and companies got together to discuss about new products and solutions, devising and applying models and methods, working on studies of user needs and assessing the usability of technologies. The development organisations played the role of

facilitators. They collated the farmers' and foresters' views which were then submitted to the companies for consideration. They were also responsible for organising events, including fact-finding trips, testing, discussion events as well as interviews. In addition, the organisations supported the assessment of ideas and facilitated innovation workshops. For every event invitations were sent to all parties and everyone could register to those events in which they were interested in.



Communication was a significant part of the project. Reports were regularly produced presenting the results of the project's activities and published on the Agro Living Lab website. The website was a key communication tool and provided news on the progress of the project. On a broader scale, the project results were presented at agricultural and forestry seminars and on a dedicated seminar organised for this purpose.

3. Lessons learnt for the future

Results: Agro Living Lab did pioneer work for considering agri-machinery end-user needs and developing user-friendly machines and services. It also facilitated the application of techniques used in ICT and other sectors.

Farmers and foresters were given the opportunity to test and influence new ideas, as well as to be among the first to learn about future solutions. In addition, a channel was

been created for them to present their own ideas and receive feedback on their feasibility.

The Agro Living Lab also provided farmers the opportunity to network with other farmers and actors, and to share best practices, new product and service solutions.

The initiative was so successful that it continued after the project ended in 2011 and is now called 'eliving Lab'.

Current KT&I support examples across the EU27

Lessons learnt:

- ⇒ Overall, technologies, processes and business operations in the agricultural and forestry sectors can be enhanced in close cooperation with the relevant industries, such as the mechanical engineering industry and agricultural input industry. Development efforts throughout cooperation within the supply chain can be a faster and more cost-effective.
- ⇒ Involving different stakeholders e.g. farmers/foresters and companies etc. in projects where they will all need to work together and combine their practices and schedules might be also challenging. Especially when high expectations do not correspond to feasible opportunities for action.
- ⇒ In terms of how a project is prepared and implemented, practices often vary from one area to another although instructions are the same everywhere. On the other hand, too much bureaucracy in the form of additional instructions and reporting is undesirable from the perspective of those implementing the project.
- ⇒ Offering a set of monitoring financial indicators for such projects can be very helpful.

For more information:

- <http://www.stoy.fi/>
- <http://frami.fi/agro-living-lab-ajankohtaista>

Information included in this fiche is primarily coming from the case studies carried out within the ENRD Focus Group on Knowledge Transfer & Innovation. The fiche is compiled by the ENRD Contact Point on the basis of the information collected in the EU Member States and Regions and takes into account views expressed at the European, national and regional level. This notwithstanding, the content does not necessarily reflect the official position of the EU institutions and national authorities.