



## Aikaa On (Plenty of Time)

Supporting agricultural entrepreneurs' work planning and wellbeing.

### EAFRD-funded projects

**Location:** Finland (country-wide)

**Programming period:** 2014-2020

**Priority:** P1 - Knowledge transfer and innovation

P2 - Competitiveness

P3 - Food chain and risk management

**Focus Area:** Innovation and cooperation,  
Lifelong learning & vocational training,  
Farm performance, restructuring & modernisation,  
Risk prevention & management

**Measures:** M16 - Cooperation

**Funding:**

Total budget	849 400.00 (EUR)
EAFRD	285 398.40 (EUR)
National/Regional	394 121.60 (EUR)
Private/Own funds	169 880.00 (EUR)

**Timeframe:** 2018 to 2022

**Project promoter:** ProAgria Western Finland

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### Summary

The project aimed to enhance skills, collaboration and profitability in agriculture. Experts provided entrepreneurs with new insights and a discussion group model was developed, fostering sector-specific teamwork and leadership growth, resulting in improved farm productivity.

The project involved entrepreneurs from a wide range of production sectors, including cattle farmers, vegetable producers and berry farmers, as well as pig and poultry farmers. The positive changes differed from participant to participant, as they responded to the key development needs of each production sector.

However, they all included more efficient working practices and operating methods that resulted in better yields or crop quality.

Close monitoring of the results helped to find the best solutions in terms of financials.

The entrepreneurs learned to set clearer goals and monitor the results of their actions. When they had a better understanding of their situation, they were able to discover the right work processes and avoid unnecessary work, saving working time and increasing leisure time, and thus wellbeing.



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### Project results

- A total of 593 agricultural entrepreneurs took part in the project
- 80% of surveyed participants (99 respondents) made positive changes to their activities thanks to the discussion group activities
- Farms saved up to 20 hours of working time per week
- 51% reported an increase in general profitability
- 79% stated that practical observations on the farm are now much better
- 76% said that results are now being monitored and analysed better
- 65% reported that the quality of their work had improved
- Skills and profitability improved, thus ensuring Finland's food security in the long term
- There were positive effects on climate and the environment, including improved soil fertility and carbon sequestration



- More deep-rooted crops were added to the crop rotation, photosynthesis improved
- Crop yields increased, which makes production more environmentally friendly, as more food can be produced on the same acreage
- Participants gained international contacts, with knowledge and good practices shared between Finnish and other European farmers and adopted quickly

## Key lessons and recommendations

- Entrepreneurs learned to trust each other and learned about the benefits of sharing information and working together rather than competing or trying to do everything on their own
- It is important not to accept new information blindly – assess what is most useful for their business
- It is crucial to define the current state, targets and strategy of their business – this helps both immediately and in the future
- Split discussion group facilitators into pairs and set up a peer support group for facilitators: if facilitators are not motivated, it is impossible for them to inspire the group
- More efficient working practices and strong social networks are essential for wellbeing

## Context

Agricultural entrepreneurs often face long working days. Research advises keeping weekly work below 45-48 hours and daily hours below 12 during peak times, including breaks, to avoid negative health effects and accidents. In agricultural enterprises, the entrepreneur often works alone or with a small team, typically including family members, posing challenges as to how to manage the workload. Hiring additional staff to reduce the workload is not always possible. At the start of the project, many entrepreneurs felt that the workload in their business was excessive and the weekly working hours exceeded the limits that are considered appropriate in terms of wellbeing.

Agricultural entrepreneurs are often pragmatic in nature and have limited time for studying and development. Without peer support, learning new things can be challenging and slow. Old habits are no longer functional as the operating environment changes. In addition, language skills often limit the entrepreneur's ability to seek and apply information from outside Finland.

## Objectives

The project aimed to assist farmers in using their time more efficiently and to increase their profitability by boosting their competencies, including leadership, IT and time management skills. The project also featured a discussion group, with the objectives of the activities and peer learning being to provide the entrepreneurs with cooperation networks, new perspectives and peer support to help in planning their work.

Aikaa On also looked to assist farmers in examining and developing their work processes to become empowered, have more free time and improve their wellbeing.

Overall, the project was designed to support lifelong learning of Finnish farmers and help them to embrace change in a sustainable way.



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## Activities

The project assisted in the establishment of 32 discussion groups for a total of 593 agricultural entrepreneurs in Satakunta and south west Finland. The discussion groups have remained in operation for several years.

In the discussion groups, the participants compared the processes and practices of their farms with those of the other group members. Group activities were carried out in a variety of locations, including fields, barns and offices. To discover ways to save time, the entrepreneurs monitored their working hours and unnecessary work duties during specific weeks. Each group focused on developing the farm of one member and monitoring the results for one year at a time. During this time, the group worked together to develop solutions to the identified challenges. Through peer learning, everyone's practices and results evolved to meet the challenges of the current operating environment.





The project also supported lifelong learning in rural areas, as it reached entrepreneurs of all ages, providing each one of them with new knowledge and skills according to their needs. Meanwhile, this also strengthened the cooperation between the entrepreneurs and other parties involved in the project.

Five field trips to other regions in Finland and another ten to various European countries were organised between 2018 and 2022. Destinations included Czechia, Slovakia, Denmark, France, Germany, Wales and Spain, with the trips aiming to find new perspectives and scientific knowledge to support the peer learning in the discussion groups. At least one member of each discussion group attended each field trip to pass on what they learned and the new ideas they came across to the rest of their own discussion group.



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Insights from the field trips were also actively shared on blogs and social media, allowing people outside the groups to benefit and learn. The project manager and facilitators established contacts with facilitators in the other countries, which also promoted peer support and learning among the facilitators.

The discussion group approach was benchmarked against similar group work methods in other countries to create an ideal model for Finland, which was then also adopted in Norway, Iceland and in other Finnish regions. The project results were presented at seminars and events in several countries.

The closing event of Aikaa On was held on 9-10 November 2022 and included presentations on the results, best practices and experiences gained from the discussion groups.

## Main results

According to a survey of entrepreneurs who participated in the project, 80% of the respondents (99 people) had made positive changes to their activities thanks to the discussion groups, leading to the farms saving up to 20 hours of working time per week. In addition, 51% reported that the general profitability increased on their farms during the period of the project, even though it was carried out at a time when input for production increased and product prices decreased.

Skills, work quality and profitability improved, thus ensuring Finland's food security in the long term. 79% of survey respondents stated that self-reflection of their activities on the farm is now much better, 76% said that results are now being monitored and analysed better while 65% reported that the quality of their work had risen.

The sharing of experiences among farmers resulted in changes in working practices which had positive effects on the climate and environment, including improved soil fertility and carbon sequestration. More deep-rooted crops were added to the crop rotation and photosynthesis was improved. Crop yields also increased, which makes production more environmentally friendly, as more food can be produced on the same acreage in the future.

The participants also gained international contacts, with knowledge and good practices shared between Finnish and other European farmers and with several good practices being adopted quickly.

As a result of the skills acquired through the project, there was more time for training, to review new research data, and for the acquisition of new information to support the business by other means. There were also discussion groups for young agricultural entrepreneurs, where the young people could gain management experience.

## Key lessons and recommendations

The entrepreneurs learned to trust each other and discovered the benefits of sharing information and working together rather than competing with one another or trying to do everything on their own. They learned not to accept new information blindly but to assess what information would be most useful for them. Defining the current state, targets and strategy of their business is crucial, now and for the future.



Splitting discussion group facilitators into pairs and setting up a peer support group for facilitators was a good idea. If the facilitators are not motivated, it is impossible for them to inspire the group to come up with ideas and learn.

More efficient working practices and a strong social network are essential for wellbeing. The entrepreneurs got to know their own working style better through personality analyses carried out within the group, which helped to make them better leaders and reduce interpersonal conflicts on farms.

**Additional information:**

Aikaa website: <https://maaseutuverkosto.fi/hankkeet/aikaa-on>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/aikaaon>

