



Creating Transparency

Connecting young people with farming, food production and climate protection.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Lower Saxony / Bremen, Germany

Programming period: 2014-2020

Focus Area: Lifelong learning & vocational training

Measures: M16 - Cooperation

Funding:	Total budget	7 800 000 (EUR)
	EAFRD	6 240 000 (EUR)
	National/Regional	1 560 000 (EUR)
	Private/Own funds	0 (EUR)

Timeframe: 2016 to 2023

Project promoter: Bildungs- und Tagungszentrum Ostheide

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Summary

The project supported a farm education network in Lower Saxony and Bremen, with the aim of encouraging farmers to offer agriculture-related learning events on their farms and give young people the opportunity to learn about agriculture, food production, nutrition and related sustainable development issues.

The central coordinating officer promoted the entire project, advising regional coordinators, carrying out networking activities and training, and developing innovative teaching methods.

The regional coordinators organised a local network of extra-curricular learning places such as farms, associated facilities of the upstream and downstream sector (e.g. processors such as mills and bakeries, and retailers) and educational institutions.

The network grew considerably on all levels, with some 80 000 people a year taking part in the educational programmes. Many farmers and other actors generated additional income and gained new farm educational skills, while thousands of young people gained on-site experience in today's agriculture and food production and learned about sustainable options for personal consumption and nutrition choices.

Project results

- The number of Regional Coordinators (RCs) increased from 43 in 2016 to 55 by 2023
- The number of Extracurricular Learning Places increased from 400 in 2016 to 650 in 2023
- 4 500 learning events were held every year, involving 80 000 participants and helping farmers and educators to generate additional income
- Many farmers, mostly young women, gained / improved skills in conducting learning events for sustainable development
- Many farms diversified their activities
- Thousands of young people gained on-site experience in today's agriculture and food production and learned about sustainable options for their personal consumption and nutrition choices
- There was an increase in the mutual understanding and appreciation of farmers and consumers thanks to direct contact and exchanges about their wishes, needs and constraints
- RCs shared best practice educational concepts and held regular networking meetings with local partners to ensure a constant flow of information



Key lessons and recommendations

- Have an institution that keeps track of the entire project and all activities and serves as an interface for all stakeholders (including public funding bodies)
- In such a broad network with a great diversity of stakeholders, it is imperative to know about different needs, wishes and requirements and to be in constant dialogue with the stakeholders
- A good overview and knowledge of networking and the content of the network is crucial, along with organisational and coordinating skills
- Learning from similar existing initiatives is a good starting point

Context

The structural changes in agriculture throughout the past century have dramatically changed the entire agrarian sector. With rapid developments in agricultural engineering and production, many farmers have changed their enterprises towards the large-scale production of a reduced number of agricultural commodities. The introduction of synthetic chemical fertilisers and pesticides has led to a rapid growth in average yields and vastly intensified crop production. As a consequence of mechanisation, specialisation and intensification, the whole sector has become much more productive.

This development has, however, had a significant impact on social and environmental aspects. Over the last 100 years, the proportion of the German working population involved in agriculture has shrunk from almost 40% to 2%. In Germany, the overall number of agricultural enterprises has decreased from more than 5.6 million in 1950 to less than 300 000 today. Many agricultural production processes now lack transparency due to technical applications and are no longer visible from the outside. For these reasons, large parts of society have very little contact with agriculture and food production.

These historical changes have caused manifold environmental problems and agriculture today is closely interconnected with the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. It plays an increasingly important role in achieving sustainable development goals but, at the same time, consumers have little understanding of the implications.

As such, farm education is a potentially crucial approach to re-connecting people with agriculture and food production and to bringing farmers and consumers closer to each other.

Objectives

'Creating Transparency - from the shop counter to the producer' is designed to give young people the opportunity to get in touch with farming, food production and processing as well as climate protection and biodiversity. It is a coordinating, networking and educational project aimed at enabling dialogue between farmers and consumers and getting them to see each other's perspectives on food production and sustainable development.

Ultimately, the project should achieve a greater reciprocal understanding and appreciation between farmers and consumers, increase the number of farmers opening their farm gates and offering educational programmes, foster the teaching and communication skills of farmers on educational farms and steer existing farm educational learning events to focus more on sustainable development.



Activities

The project promotes a farm education network in Lower Saxony and Bremen on three operational levels: one Central Coordination Office (CCO), 55 Regional Coordinators (RCs), such as associations, farms, environmental centres and others, which work with approximately 650 Extracurricular Learning Places (ELPs), offering farm educational activities. The network structure provides a constant flow of information throughout the three levels in reciprocal directions and fosters learning for all participants.

The CCO promotes the entire project and has an advisory role for the RCs, as well as regularly organising networking activities and training for them and for the people carrying out the farm education programmes, with methodological courses on topics such as 'Global learning', 'Agriculture and climate change', 'Food processing with kids' and 'How to deal with conflicts'.



The CCO also implements measures to increase public awareness for the entire project and to bring together requests for and supply of farm education activities (for instance through educational fairs and conferences). Finally, they develop innovative teaching methods that can be used by RCs and ELPs, in this case a booklet on methods tackling the topic of ‘Agriculture and climate change’ in educational settings, a mobile escape game that can be borrowed by RCs and ELPs and a handout on how education for sustainable development can be implemented in farm education.

Meanwhile, the RCs coordinate a local network of ELPs such as farms and associated facilities from the upstream and downstream sectors (for example processors and retailers) and educational institutions (mainly schools and kindergartens). They pass on all information gained at CCO meetings to the members of their local network and hold local network meetings on a regular basis to foster networking and mutual learning processes among the ELPs.



The ELPs carry out a broad spectrum of different learning events for a wide range of target groups (from kindergarten to senior citizens). A range of themes are covered in the various learning events: participants can retrace the whole value chain of a product back to the primary production processes (‘from bread to grain’ or ‘from milk to pasture’). Many learning events tackle the interconnectedness of agriculture with sustainable development topics such as climate change and biodiversity.

Within the scope of this project, all of these activities took place in rural areas throughout the entire funding period and were funded by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Main results

The project delivered rapid and quantifiable results, with the number of RCs increasing from 43 in 2016 to 55 by 2023, and ELPs from 400 to 650. Many of the farmers and educators involved generated additional income by running learning events, 4 500 of which were held every year involving 80 000 participants.

Many farmers, most of them young women, gained or improved their skills in running learning events for sustainable development and many farms were able to diversify their activities. Thousands of young people gained on-site experience of today’s agriculture and food production and learned about sustainable options for their personal consumption and nutrition choices (for example, consumption of regional and seasonal products, reducing food waste, skills in food processing and preparation, and diets that reduce greenhouse gas emissions). Meanwhile, mutual comprehension and appreciation of farmers and consumers increased thanks to direct contact and exchange about their wishes, needs and constraints.

The CCO held two-day meetings twice a year for participants of all RCs, who shared their best practice educational concepts while external experts presented recent innovations and developments in farm education. The RCs also carried out regular networking meetings with their local partners to ensure a constant flow of information.

Key lessons and recommendations

‘Creating Transparency – from the shop counter to the producer’ emphasised the importance of a centralised institution that keeps track of the entire project and all activities to serve as an interface for all stakeholders (including public funding bodies). The CCO learned a lot about building a network and working together with many different actors. This enabled them to advise other (European) initiatives planning to build a similar network structure.

In such a broad network with a great diversity of stakeholders, each of them with different needs, wishes and requirements, it is imperative to know about these differences and to be in constant dialogue with the stakeholders.

The CCO must therefore have a good overview and expertise in both networking in general and the content of the network (in this case, farm education) as well as organisational and coordinating skills. Getting in touch with and learning from similar existing initiatives is always a good starting point.

Additional information:

Creating transparency website: <https://www.transparenz-schaffen.de>

Image gallery: <https://www.transparenz-schaffen.de/bildergalerie>



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