



**Thematic Group on
Nurturing Skills
for a Thriving and Sustainable
Agricultural Sector**

**1st TG meeting
09/10/2023**

Topic 1

Farm development and diversification



1. What skills are essential to successfully enhance farm development and diversify income streams?

Concerning farm development and diversification, in the first round participants discussed on the essential skills to successfully enhance farm development and diversify income streams.

Several driving factors were identified, including climate change, the bioeconomy, artificial intelligence, and the importance of farmers owning their supply chain. Additionally, participants emphasised the need for strategic thinking, such as horizon scanning, defining business goals for the upcoming year and assessing the specific needs of their businesses. When addressing skills analysis and gaps, they concentrated on self-assessment, evaluating their existing capabilities and considering their potential for innovation, entrepreneurship and marketing communication. It is crucial to determine whether they possess the necessary skills to bring their ideas to fruition and understand what steps are needed for progress.

Furthermore, the discussion touched on the support required by farmers and the agricultural workforce to facilitate diversification. This encompassed formal education, practical experiences, various forms of public sector support, and industry assistance in providing accessible and understandable materials and language to support farmers effectively. Participants briefly highlighted the importance of critical thinking to discern reliable information and stressed the need to understand the diverse skill sets necessary for various aspects of their business, recognising that multiple skills might be required for effective operation. Time management skills were unanimously recognised as a critical element in this context.

Some participants reminded the importance of skills such as emotional intelligence, resilience, creativity, networking, leadership, problem-solving, innovative thinking, and data-driven decision-making. Furthermore, expertise in communication, strategic planning, and digital technology for everyday interactions is crucial, especially in the context of the evolving landscape. It's vital to also cultivate business-related proficiencies encompassing business acumen, operations and management, risk assessment, financial acuity, political acumen, and the ability to influence outcomes through strategic planning.



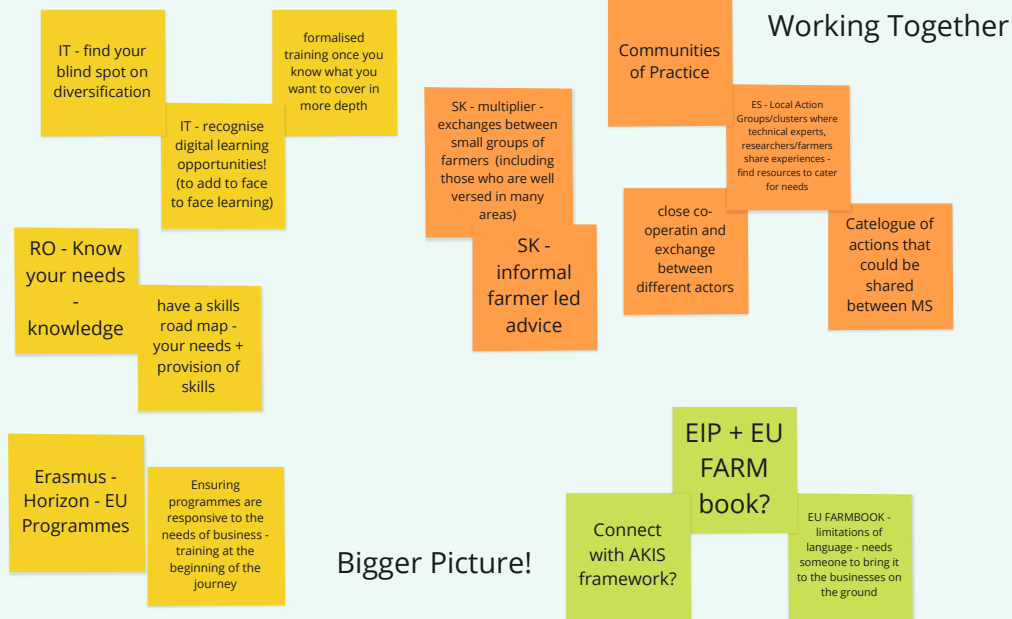
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Farm development and diversification



2. Where and how can agricultural professionals acquire, enhance and adapt the required skills?

The Journey



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The second round focused on the where and how agricultural professionals can acquire, enhance and adapt the required skills.

To begin with, we explored the 'journey' towards diversification, uncovering areas where businesses may have blind spots – understanding what they're not currently engaged in and how to seize diversification opportunities. This might entail an initial exploration of digital spaces to gather information and knowledge, followed by considering face-to-face interactions and the necessary training to transform ideas into tangible actions. It's crucial to identify specific needs and assess the skills required, creating a roadmap tailored to these requirements.

Participants also delved into the European landscape, with mentions of programmes like Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. The emphasis here was on ensuring that these programmes remain adaptable to the evolving needs of businesses, with a focus on offering training early in one's career, ensuring a continuous support pipeline throughout the diversification journey, regardless of the 'chosen destination'. Collaboration was a central theme, with discussions on informal advisory services where groups of farmers could assist each other and more structured arrangements involving clusters of technical experts and researchers, encouraging the expansion and deepening of collaboration where it makes sense.

This collaborative approach could encompass a range of actions shared among Member States, bridging the micro-to-macro scale, from individual farm businesses to national and EU-level cooperation. This interconnectedness was also examined in relation to the AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Information System) framework, the EIP, and the EU Farm Book, highlighting the need for these macro initiatives to inform and enhance on-the-ground business activities, facilitating diversification and growth.