

EU CAP Network seminar

'On-farm demonstrations for peer-to-peer learning & innovation'

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Background document



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Disclaimer

This background document has been developed within the framework of the EU CAP Network seminar 'On-farm demonstrations for peer-to-peer learning' with the purpose of providing input to the seminar discussions and final report.

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This document serves as a background paper for the EU CAP Network seminar 'On-farm demonstrations for peer-to-peer learning', organised on 17–18 June 2025 by the EU CAP Network in Mestre, Venice, Italy. The seminar focuses on innovation and knowledge exchange, including EIP-AGRI. Its purpose is to create a shared understanding of the seminar's topic and key concepts that will be used during the sessions.

- section 1 explains the role of peer-to-peer learning and on-farm demonstrations in farmers' capacity building. It introduces key concepts such as peer-to-peer learning, on-farm demonstrations, demonstration farms and multi-actor processes
- section 2 focusses on the practical aspects of organising demonstration events, emphasising how effective organisation and facilitation can enhance their impact
- section 3 discusses structural aspects related to organising demonstration events. It outlines the roles of different actors involved, explores the larger structures or networks in which some demonstrations are embedded, and reviews resources and funding mechanisms for on-farm demonstrations
- section 4 examines the role of on-farm demonstrations in EIP-AGRI and EU projects, providing examples of how various initiatives have incorporated these demonstrations
- section 5 summarises some conclusions of this document

The seminar sessions are designed to draw on participants' experiences and deepen our understanding of inspiring practices around facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges and engaging with the farm environment during demonstration events. Additionally, the sessions will explore structural support for creating an enabling environment that gives a more prominent role to on-farm demonstrations within the AKIS. Furthermore, we aim to encourage participants to consider what they can do as actor groups to harness the full potential of demonstration farms in EU projects, such as EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and Horizon projects.

1. The role of peer-to-peer learning and on-farm demonstrations in farmers' capacity building

From a top-down to a bottom-up perspective on farm advice

The traditional linear model of technology transfer follows a top-down approach, viewing farmers primarily as passive recipients or adopters of knowledge produced by researchers and delivered through advisory and extension services (Moschitz et al.,



2015; Triste, 2018). However, this perspective overlooks the diversity of farming contexts and styles (Klerkx, van Mierlo, & Leeuwis, 2012; Triste, 2018) and, importantly, disregards the knowledge that farmers themselves possess. In response, participatory and bottom-up advisory approaches—such as farmer-to-farmer learning and on-farm demonstrations—are gaining traction (Sutherland & Marchand, 2021). These methods better accommodate the complex realities farmers face and enable knowledge to be developed and shared in ways that resonate with their lived experience and language (Lox, 2024). Such approaches are linked to higher adoption rates, greater changes in practice, improved yields, increased income and well-being, enhanced knowledge and skills, and stronger peer support (Cooreman et al., 2018).

The potential of peer-to-peer learning

Most farmers prefer to learn from their peers. Peer-to-peer learning involves the mutual sharing and creation of knowledge among individuals considered 'peers'—those equal in status, experience, or competencies (Cooreman, 2021). This learning can occur informally through spontaneous exchanges or formally via organised activities. Unlike traditional top-down learning models, where a 'teacher' (e.g., a researcher or advisor) directs the content and flow of learning with minimal participant input, peer learning emphasises learner initiative, active participation, and engagement in shaping the learning experience (Cooper, 2002; in Cooreman, 2021). A key feature of peer learning is its reciprocity: individuals can simultaneously act as both 'teacher' and 'learner,' with roles shifting throughout the learning process (Cooreman et al., 2018).

Peer-to-peer exchanges—such as farmer discussions and on-farm visits—are frequently cited as some of the most effective and preferred methods for sharing knowledge within the farming community (Cooreman et al., 2021). Farmers are especially influenced by witnessing successful practices demonstrated by other farmers (Cooreman et al., 2018). Learning takes place not only through direct instruction but also via observation and informal conversations (Sutherland & Marchand, 2021). Moreover, many valuable agricultural practices remain tacit—deeply embedded in local contexts and difficult to codify—making them less likely to spread widely across regions or countries (Cooreman et al., 2018). Peer learning is particularly effective in transferring this kind of experiential, place-based knowledge, often communicated through non-verbal cues during interactions (Sutherland & Marchand, 2021).

However, relying solely on spontaneous peer exchanges without structured support is unlikely to result in broad or systematic adoption of innovations (Cooreman et al.,



2018). There is significant potential to improve the design of peer-to-peer learning processes (Emerick et al., 2016). One promising approach is the intentional integration of peer learning strategies into on-farm demonstration events. Since these events are usually planned and structured in advance, they offer an ideal setting to incorporate peer learning principles and enhance their impact (Cooreman et al., 2018).

The role of on-farm demonstration events as interactive spaces for peer-to-peer learning

When well organised, on-farm demonstration events provide excellent opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. The Oxford Dictionary defines a demonstration as: (1) the act or process of showing the existence or truth of something by providing proof or evidence; and (2) a practical exhibition and explanation of how something works or is performed. On-farm demonstrations create an authentic learning environment where farmers and other stakeholders collaboratively explore and discuss agricultural practices in a setting that is both socially and physically embedded in the farm context (Cooreman, 2021).

Demonstration farms and on-farm demonstration events play a key role in sharing scientific findings, showcasing innovative practices, and promoting new farming approaches within the agricultural community. They are consistently cited as a preferred method for farmers to access, and ideally share information (Cooreman, 2021). While demonstration events may also take place at fairs, conferences, or online, these alternative formats do not provide the same in-situ learning environment unique to the farm setting and, as such, are therefore not the focus of this seminar.

When peer-to-peer learning activities and strong facilitation are incorporated into demonstration events, participants tend to perceive them as more impactful (Marchand et al., 2021). Creating a welcoming and open learning atmosphere, where participants feel comfortable asking questions, engaging in discussion, and interacting with both the physical environment and each other, is essential to support meaningful learning (Alexopoulos et al., 2021). Additionally, incorporating reflection on the material elements and sensory experiences of the farm (i.e., what participants see, hear, touch, and smell) enhances learning and encourages deeper engagement, inquiry and discussion (Cooreman et al., 2021; Sutherland & Marchand, 2021).

Beyond fostering peer learning, on-farm demonstrations provide valuable opportunities for farmers to engage with other actors, such as researchers, advisors, policymakers, and industry representatives (Marchand et al., 2021). These events serve as platforms for integrating diverse knowledge forms and encouraging critical reflection through



negotiation, dialogue, debate, questioning, and joint reflection (Alexopoulos et al., 2021). Unlike peer-to-peer learning, these multi-actor processes emphasise co-creation and the knowledge exchange among individuals with complementary expertise. They are designed to ensure innovation is truly demand-driven by involving all relevant actors throughout the entire innovation process, from planning and experimentation to dissemination and demonstration.

Learning on the farm: Demonstration Farms as Hubs of Knowledge Exchange and Innovation

Demonstration farms can be defined as 'educational centres for experience-based learning that promote the practical viability of new or improved farm management practices and technologies through seeing and discussing. They place particular focus on understanding innovation within a working farm context, within a local setting and across the different stakeholder groups involved. While they focus on demonstrating of known 'best' or 'good' practices, experimental work may also be conducted, particularly in a learning-by-experiment context' (Burton, 2017).

In this sense, demonstration farms serve as hubs where on-farm trials are conducted, new practices tested, tools and solutions co-designed and implemented, and advisory services provided (Pappa et al., 2018). They play a crucial role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, innovations, and good practices. Importantly, they contribute to the generation of practical, applicable knowledge that farmers can adopt directly on their own farms, thereby accelerating the uptake of new innovations (Pappa et al., 2018).

Not all farms that host demonstration events are formally designated as demonstration farms (Pappa et al., 2018). Some farms may only open their operations occasionally for such events. This broader interpretation expands the range of farm types suitable for hosting demonstration activities. In various EU projects, these are often referred to as commercial farms (or pilot demonstration farms), experimental farms, or lighthouse farms, depending on their role and context. The diversity of farms involved in on-farm demonstrations can be attributed to several factors (Koutsouris et al., 2017):

- **main economic activities or interests:** farms may be commercial, research-oriented, educational (e.g., school farms), or affiliated with public institutions. However, these distinctions blur as many demonstration farms connected to public bodies (e.g., universities or government institutions) also engage in commercial activities and must manage operational costs. Likewise, some commercial farms may have financial incentives tied to the demonstration activities themselves



- **frequency of demonstration events:** some farms host demonstration activities sporadically, while others incorporate them regularly as part of their core mission
- **involvement in projects or networks:** some farms are actively engaged in EU projects or regional/national networks (such as lighthouse farms or national demonstration networks), receiving support to organise demonstration events. Others operate independently and may bear the costs of organising such activities themselves
- **nature of the activities demonstrated:** demonstrations may focus on short-term or seasonal practices or involve longer-term experimental trials
- **other factors:** additional variables include geographic location, sector, and infrastructure

2. Organisation and facilitation of on-farm demonstration events

Demonstration events have huge potential for spreading good practices and innovative farming approaches within the farming community. However, when poorly organised, they can hinder the learning process and even discourage farmers from adopting new practices (Marchand et al., 2021).

Marchand et al. (2021), as part of a collaboration between three Horizon 2020 projects (AgriDemo-F2F, PLAID, and NEFERTITI), investigated how key structural aspects of demonstration events influence their perceived effectiveness. These aspects include the role of the demonstrator, facilitation strategies, participant characteristics, event structure, and the nature of the host farm. Their findings are consolidated in an online training kit for farm demonstration organisers, available in 24 EU languages: <https://trainingkit.farmdemo.eu/>.

The Demonstration Design Guide included in this training kit outlines six key steps for organising effective on-farm demonstration events:

1. define demonstration objectives and target groups
2. choose a demonstration farm
3. think about the demonstration event set-up



4. promote the event
5. facilitate interactions and use a diversity of learning methods during the demonstration event
6. evaluate and follow-up on the demonstration event afterwards

Research shows that facilitation and the inclusion of facilitated discussions are key success factors for learning during on-farm demonstrations (Cooreman et al., 2021). Considering the seminars objective and its focus on peer-to-peer learning during on-farm demonstrations, step 5 will be one of the main themes of the seminar: how to effectively facilitate interactions and peer-to-peer learning during a demonstration event. Multiple aspects can impact how interaction and peer-to-peer exchanges are or could be facilitated, such as:

- the characteristics of and role given to the host farmer
- the topic of the demonstration
- the way the farm environment is used
- participants-related aspects: e.g., group size, whether participants meet regularly or whether they share the same background or language

During the seminar, practices will be exchanged on how to facilitate interaction taking these different aspects into account.

Making the best use of the host farmer

Demonstration events are more effective when the host farmer plays a central role. The greatest impact tends to occur when the host is perceived by participants as experienced, actively engaged in commercial farming, having a good reputation, strong communication skills, and reflecting the image of a 'typical' farmer operating under 'typical' conditions (Koutsouris et al., 2017). Host farmers can support peer learning by actively engaging in interviews and discussions during the event.

Demonstrating a whole farm (Holistic) approach

The topic of the demonstration influences how the event is set up. Depending on the event's objectives, the focus can be on a single practice (e.g., using a weeding robot) or on a holistic view of the farm. Single-practice demonstrations are often easier to organise than those aiming to provide participants with insights into a whole farm approach. However, a demonstration set-up, such as guiding participants through a



farm walk with stops at key locations, can provide valuable insights into the interconnections between various components of the farm.

The effect of group size

Smaller groups are generally more effective for encouraging reflection, knowledge exchange, and peer-to-peer interaction (Marchand et al., 2021). For events with many attendees, dividing participants into smaller groups helps foster active participation and better engagement.

Series of events/ events embedded in networks

Demonstration events that are part of a series or embedded in networks, organised by the same facilitators and targeting the same audience, are often considered more effective ([Design guide for on-farm demonstrations](#)), because:

- › participants get to know and trust each other, which reduces reluctance to share knowledge
- › multiple events can address different stages in the adoption process
- › they can reflect seasonal variation and changes over time
- › more farmers and diverse stakeholders can be reached and involved
- › organisers can build on the reputation of earlier events
- › each event can be improved using feedback from previous ones

Facilitating interaction in one-off events

Unlike ongoing series, one-off events do not benefit from pre-established participant familiarity. Therefore, facilitators must adopt techniques that quickly build trust and encourage engagement to stimulate peer-to-peer learning, such as icebreakers, small group activities, and interactive facilitation methods.

Using Props and the Farm Environment: Making the Invisible Visible

Props are physical objects used to convey key messages during demonstrations. These might include information boards, soil or feed samples, machinery, or even animals. Props should be simple, tangible, and designed to make complex or abstract ideas easier to grasp. They are especially useful when explaining 'invisible' topics such as financial returns, climate impacts, or long-term effects.

Facilitating cross-visits

Cross-visits are widely used in EU-funded projects as a powerful tool for knowledge exchange and innovation dissemination. They offer participants an immersive



experience that helps them understand how an innovation works within a real-life farming context and how it might apply to their own situation. A key challenge with cross-visits is language. Strategies to address this include:

- › providing translated summaries of the host country's agricultural context before the visit
- › sharing translated handouts of presentations
- › offering simultaneous translation where possible
- › summarising and translating key messages during the event

3. Structural aspects supporting on-farm demonstrations

Beyond the organisational aspects of delivering a demonstration event, certain structural characteristics also contribute to creating an enabling environment for effective demonstrations. In the following paragraphs, we explore in more detail the key actors involved in organising demonstration events, the networks and governance structures that support them, and the resources and incentives that facilitate their implementation.

3.1. Actors and their roles

Initiators, Organisers and Funders

The initiators, organisers and funders can be very diverse: e.g. farmers, farmer organisations, private or commercial supply chain companies, NGOs, extension or advisory services, research institutes, public authorities. Often a partnership is developed between these entities to organise (a series of) demonstration events, often as part of regional, national or EU projects.

Host farm

Host farms are farms that host on-farm demonstration events. They may be part of a wider (permanent) network or collaboration, or they may act only as an occasional demonstration site. There are several types of demonstration farms referred to in the EU:

- › **private commercial farms** are 'regular farms' whose main business is to profit from their agricultural activities and that organise a demonstration event from time to time. They may be part of a (temporary) network of demonstration farms



- **public farms** are owned by governments, schools or universities and usually have a research or educational purpose. Commercial viability is less important, although they may operate on the market and generate income from production. Their activities are motivated by testing innovative techniques, teaching students and/or promoting farmer-to-farmer learning
- **experimental farms** have as their core activity carrying out experiments for research or extension purposes
- **lighthouse farms**, according to the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe', are 'key places for demonstration of solutions, training and communication that are exemplary in their performance in terms of soil health improvement. They are individual, local sites (one farm, one forest exploitation, one industrial site, one urban city green area, etc.) that can be included in a living lab area or be located outside a living lab area'. According to the Global Lighthouse Farm Network they are 'exemplars of specific aspects of sustainable production and can serve as real-life experimental farms to advance our scientific understanding of the principles and practices of sustainable production in contrasting environments. Together, they create a global outdoor classroom and laboratory for tomorrow's farms and foodscapes' (Global network of lighthouse farms;2025)
- **monitor farms** are dedicated to monitoring effects of innovation within a benchmarked environment (Burton, N.D.) and are often part of a wider network. They can organise series of demonstration events to showcase the results of long-term trials or practices

Demonstrator/ specialist

The demonstrator role can be taken up by multiple actor types, such as farmers, researchers, advisors, private sector employees or students (Pappa et al., 2018). Preferably, they have a deep local orientation, interpersonal relationships with the farming community, and understand and respect farmers' lifestyle, goals and values. Farmer-led demonstrations (whether or not with the support of an advisor or researchers) are perceived as more effective, because the message will be more trusted by the participants. Often, farmers value the combination of a farmer demonstrator and an advisor or researcher who can provide additional background information or explain results from research related to the demonstrated practice.



Facilitators

Facilitators are crucial actors to increase the effectiveness of peer-to-peer exchange during a demo event. A facilitator takes a neutral position, has good social and communication skills, and is a good listener. The facilitator prepares facilitation methods to stimulate peer-to-peer exchanges, respects the host farmer and actively involves participants during the event (Greaney et al., 2023).

3.2. Network structure and governance

Bottom-up versus top-down approaches

Demonstration farms can be integrated into larger structures such as networks or living labs. They may arise from either bottom-up approaches, which are initiated informally by farmers, or top-down approaches, developed by organisations as part of formal and coordinated programmes (Pappa et al., 2018). These networks can vary in size, sectoral coverage (either sector-specific or multi-sectoral), geographic reach, the diversity of actors (multi-actor or single-actor), and the intensity of their connections (Koutsouris et al., 2017). Demonstration events organised within these network contexts tend to be more effective due to the social connections and exchanges they facilitate. Recently, these bottom-up approaches have gained further attention with the emergence of Living Labs in EU funding programmes. In the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe,' Living Labs are defined as 'user-centred, place-based and transdisciplinary research and innovation ecosystems. They are understood as collaborative initiatives between multiple partners to co-create, test, monitor and evaluate solutions to a common problem. A living lab consists of about 10–20 individual sites, which can also include lighthouse farms.'

Governance

The structure of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in EU Member States differs greatly, ranging from very centralised to very fragmented. The role and impact of on-farm demonstrations thus vary significantly across regions and countries. Consequently, the structural support for demonstration farms and events needs to be understood within this context. Traditionally, demonstrations have been associated with more centralised and publicly supported advisory systems; but, with the recent transformations of advisory systems towards more diverse actors, structures, and increased privatisation, the organisation of demonstrations and demonstration programmes has become much more pluralistic (Ingram et al., 2021). There is a diversity of organisational arrangements for coordinating, managing, delivering, and



funding demonstration programmes. Demonstration programmes can be more or less embedded in existing formalised structures, working within fixed networks of actors. Ingram et al. (2021) found a correlation between the dominant type of agricultural organisation and the integration of demonstration programmes. In countries with strong public organisations, such as Ireland or Poland, or with strong farmer organisations, like the chambers of agriculture in France or Austria, these programmes tend to be more integrated into existing formalised structures and networks, exhibiting a high degree of coordination and hierarchy (Ingram et al., 2021). In contrast, in countries with more pluralistic advisory services (such as The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden), demonstration programmes seem to be more adaptive because of changing interactive collaborations, partnerships, and networks between private sector actors and NGOs. Through this collaborative culture, they become effective at working synergistically with other partners to create new programmes and achieve common goals, secure funds, tap into different resources, and utilise local organisations' trusted relationships (Ingram et al., 2021). However, this makes it harder to develop long-term relationships and accumulate knowledge due to the lack of continuity. Both types of governance have their own merits and downsides, which are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of benefits and downsides related to demonstration programmes embedded in formalised structures versus demonstration programmes that adapt to pluralistic advisory systems (Based on Ingram et al. 2021)

| | Benefits | Downsides |
|---|--|--|
| Demonstration programmes embedded in formalised structures and networks in centralised advisory systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Access to resources and continuity of funding which allow longer term programmes > Tapping into national, regional and local structures and institutions (including research and adviser support) > Building on accumulated knowledge > Close working relationships between farmers, research institutes and public advisory services > Ability to leverage other AKIS actors and mechanisms to extend research and impact > Trust and recognition of farmers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > More restrictive rules regarding topic and host selection, which might constrain innovation and farmers' choice > Demonstration programmes can have limited influence |



| | | |
|---|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Established governance mechanisms for farmer representation | |
| Adaptive demonstration programmes in pluralistic advisory systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Effective development of synergies between multiple partner organisations for developing programmes ➤ Working with local groups and networks adds to the effectiveness of the demonstration events ➤ They are more adaptive to achieving immediate goals ➤ Customer-led | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Limited ability to develop long-term relationships and accumulated knowledge ➤ Programmes reflect private sector interests, which risks narrowing down options, as farmers have limited awareness of new innovations ➤ Limited ability to build up stable networks and sustainable programmes |

Note that these two types of governance approaches, can be seen as two extremes on a spectrum, on which multiple combinations of both approaches exist. Both types of governance approaches show the value of engaging farmers in the decision-making structures of demonstrations programmes: either in a formal, structured way or by referring to local networks or being led by customer-perspectives. The engagement of farmers in the decision-making structures developing demonstration programmes contributes to more effective demonstration programmes (Koutsouris et al. 2017).

Role of on-Farm demonstrations in the AKIS

Demonstration activities should not be seen as an activity for their own sake but play a supporting role in the wider AKIS by linking existing knowledge and other knowledge provisioning services to demonstration programmes (Ingram et al. 2021). Within the broader AKIS, they can serve as a central point for the flow of information and practices; they can engage, inform, and inspire farmers; and they can act as networking moments (Ingram et al. 2021).

Organisers of demonstrations recognise the importance of coordinating these events as part of a wider package of advice and continued engagement with participants, although this is not frequently adopted as a practice (Ingram et al. 2021). Demonstrations should be seen as a complementary activity to individual advice and



can, as a result of a demonstration event, even increase the demand for it. Developing such an integrated approach towards farm advice and education is probably easier to establish in countries with a more centralized organisation through public bodies or farmer organisations (Ingram et al. 2021).

The impact of different AKIS structures on the effectiveness of demonstration events was studied by Alexopoulos et al. (2021). Although, they only found a limited impact, they mentioned that, demonstration events can play different roles in strong versus weaker AKISs. In strong AKISs, they can further enhance knowledge exchange, while in weaker AKISs, demonstration events can function as a tool for strengthening the AKIS by providing multi-actor meeting places (Alexopoulos et al., 2021).

The effectiveness of demonstration activities can be increased if their participants are part of larger networks, as they can then disseminate the knowledge gained during the event to a wider audience through their established connections.

3.3. Resources, finances and incentives

Capacity and capability

The quality of demonstration activities often depends on the availability of appropriate infrastructure and skilled personnel. Having appropriate infrastructure depends on the presence of suitable and accessible farms in the vicinity that possess access to or experience with new technologies or innovations. This is also related to the characteristics of the agroecosystem and the local AKIS. The presence of skilled personnel depends on the connections initiators of demonstration events have with skilled key actors, such as host farmers, specialists in specific technologies or innovations, and facilitators. This is often linked to the education available for professionals to develop their technical, organisational, facilitation, or communication skills. As mentioned in section 3.2, countries in which demonstration programmes are embedded in existing structures and networks provide a better environment for building up the required expertise for organising demonstration events by providing continuity through long-term programmes and plans.

Finances

On-farm demonstration events can be fully or partially funded. Ideally, the budget should cover all costs related to the event, including organisation, facilitation, materials, transport, and communication. Funding sources vary widely and can include public programmes (e.g., CAP), project funding, industry sponsorship, or participant



contributions. Sustainable funding models often combine several sources to ensure continuity and quality.

Regarding policy, at the EU level, on-farm demonstrations can be supported by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), although there is no specific reference to them in the Regulation 2021/2115. In the CAP 2023–2027, fostering knowledge exchange and innovation is a cross-cutting objective contributing to all other CAP specific objectives. The CAP supports the development of a well-functioning AKIS in Member States and foresees support for:

- knowledge exchange, advice, and information (Art. 78)
- the development of impartial advisory services embedded in the AKIS (Art. 15)
- cooperation, and more specifically the preparation and implementation of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (Art. 77 and Art. 127)
- the development of CAP networks fostering networking between national networks, organisations, and administrations across the EU to foster innovation and support peer-to-peer learning and interaction between all stakeholders in the knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building process (Art 126)

All Member States prepared their national CAP Strategic Plans, which include description of the organisational set-up of the AKIS as well as planned funding for knowledge exchange and innovation interventions showing significant diversity in how support mechanisms for on-farm demonstrations are implemented. In some Member States, stand-alone interventions for on-farm demonstrations are programmed, while in other Member States demonstration activities may be part of the knowledge exchange intervention on training.

For example, in Flanders, Belgium, the concept of so-called demonstration projects has been introduced to stimulate innovation and knowledge exchange. A call for two-year demonstration projects was launched by the regional department of agriculture. Eligible topics are defined based on reported knowledge needs from practice. The projects focus on communicating and disseminating innovations and practices and do not include a research component. The selection of demonstration farms is proposed through project submissions. Additionally, the regional department of agriculture provides structural support for two demonstration farms over five years, which are not topic-specific but demonstrate a more holistic approach.



Poland offers longer-term structural support through a national network of 200 demonstration farms. These farms demonstrate on-farm experiments and research outcomes. Providing a platform for peer-to-peer exchanges among farmers, EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, and representatives of Horizon projects. Some demonstration farmers within these networks are active in Horizon projects and support the dissemination of practical and theoretical knowledge across the country.

Beyond the CAP, the concept of demonstration is also well-established in the Horizon Europe programme. Examples include the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' (which involves setting up a Lighthouse Farm network), the European Partnership on Agroecology, living labs and research infrastructures, and the funding of the ClimateFarmDemo network through the development of an EU-wide network of demonstration farms.

Another example of national public support for on-farm demonstrations, is the German animal welfare network, 'Fokus Tierwohl' (<http://www.fokus-tierwohl.de/>), which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL). In this initiative, they managed to set up a network of demonstration farms across all federal states for the first time. The demonstration farms are pioneers in their profession with innovative and sustainable animal welfare concepts that they present during trade fairs and events. They are connected to each other, visit each other's farms, and travel abroad to exchange knowledge. They also discuss with members of the Bundestag, associations, and consultants (Brase: 2025).

4. On-Farm Demonstrations within EU projects and EIP-AGRI

EU-funded projects use on-farm demonstrations for various purposes: raising awareness, disseminating innovations, promoting their uptake by farmers, exchanging experiences and interesting practices, providing in-situ training, and serving as platforms for knowledge co-creation. These functions can be achieved through either peer-to-peer exchanges or multi-actor processes, depending on the demonstration event's objectives.

The Horizon programme actively promotes the inclusion of demonstration activities in projects by issuing calls for demonstration projects and introducing the concept of lighthouse farms within the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe'. Several Horizon projects have been funded to improve understanding and capacity building around



organising farm demonstrations. The AgriDemo-F2F and PLAID projects focused on exploring the role of demonstrations and identifying good practices for their organisation. These insights were then applied in 10 thematic networks within the NEFERTITI project, which promoted the exchange of inspiring demonstration practices across the EU. Building on these insights, IPMWORKS (a demonstration network aimed at promoting integrated pest management- actively implemented them. Currently, ClimateFarmDemo and Organic Climate Net, are establishing networks of pilot demonstration farmers to boost the uptake of climate-smart farming practices across Europe. Beyond projects explicitly focused on demonstration activities, others also integrate demonstration as part of their dissemination strategies. The following examples illustrate the different roles of demonstrations and demonstration farms in Horizon projects:

- in ClimateFarmDemo (2022-2029): 1,500 pilot demonstration farms across 28 EU countries are engaged in implementing climate-smart practices with the support of Climate Farm Advisors and demonstrating them to their peers and other actors throughout the project. Additionally, a network of living labs is being established in 10 countries. The connection between these living labs and the pilot demonstration farm network is still evolving, often because the living labs being in the early stages of innovation process. Where connections exist, they often arise from pilot demonstration farm advisors being active within a living lab
- in IPMWORKS (2020 – 2025): networks of pilot demonstration farms are grouped in so-called hubs, each facilitated by a hub coach often a farm advisor. These hubs host frequent on-farm meetings, creating a safe space for experimenting, negotiating, and discussing integrated pest management (IPM) practices. Successful practices and interesting insights from these hubs were then demonstrated to wider audiences
- ClieNFarms (2022-2025): This project uses a demonstration approach called 'The Innovative Systemic Solution Space - I3S', which considers the farm and its surrounding ecosystem. Multiple actors test and disseminate co-designed innovative solutions tailored to specific farms to achieve climate-neutral farms

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs) are partnerships of people with complementary knowledge who co-create practical solutions for challenges or opportunities faced by farmers, foresters, or rural communities. These OG projects can include activities, such as field trials, co-creation sessions, testing new practices or technologies, producing knowledge materials, organising events, and cross-visits to exchange knowledge with other OGs. They are required to disseminate their results and should develop a



dissemination plan. ([EU CAP Network](#); 2025). According to the EU CAP Network's [project database](#), there are currently more than 3700 OG projects. While not all integrate demonstration activities, some of the nominees for the EIP-AGRI innovation awards [2024 for Operational Groups](#) clearly show how demonstration farms and events are integrated:

- in the Dutch OG 'Colorado Beetle Catcher: sustainable machine pest control' scheduled over 50 on-farm demonstrations across Europe to raise awareness about this machine's potential to reduce pesticide use in potato growing
- the Portuguese OG 'MoreSoil' established demonstration plots and conducted training and co-creation workshops with local farmers to monitor soil health improvements from a new biodiverse mix of legumes and grains used as cover crops
- the Spanish OG 'GO_PHYTODRON' used field demonstrations to raise awareness about protocols developed for the safe, sustainable, and effective use of aerial drones in agroforestry environments

Demonstration activities also play a central role in projects facilitating exchanges between OGs, such as Soil-X-Change project and TechCoach. These projects aim to connect OGs across borders to enhance farmers' ability to assess, adopt and integrate Smart Crop Farming technologies.

5. Conclusion

On-farm demonstrations are crucial for sparking peer-to-peer learning, sharing knowledge and driving innovation uptake within farming communities. Moving beyond traditional top-down advisory models, these demonstrations offer real, place-based learning that connects directly with farmers' everyday realities and needs. By actively involving participants, on-farm demonstrations create lively spaces where knowledge is co-created, shared, and tailored.

How demonstration events are organised and facilitated makes all the difference. Good facilitation, thoughtful design, and strong engagement with host farmers and attendees boost the impact and longevity of these activities. Embedding demonstrations within wider networks and governance structures backed by sufficient resources and funding-further extends their reach and effectiveness.

EU projects and initiatives such as EIP-AGRI have proven that integrating peer learning principles and multi-actor collaboration into on-farm demonstrations



significantly boosts innovation adoption and fosters lasting partnerships. To maximise their potential, continued investment in capacity building, facilitation skills, and supportive frameworks is key.

Ultimately, on-farm demonstrations represent a powerful approach to empower farmers, improve farming practices, and contribute to sustainable and resilient agri-food systems across Europe.

6. Literature

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