

eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Participatory approaches for agricultural innovation



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Commission



The agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) works to foster competitive and sustainable farming and forestry that achieves more and better from less. It focuses on forming partnerships and linking people through different types of activities across the EU.

The EIP-AGRI promotes the setting-up of Operational Groups funded through the Rural Development programmes. An Operational Group is a group of people (and organisations) who decide to work together on a specific innovation project. Members may include farmers, researchers, advisors, businesses and people from NGOs. They receive funding to work on concrete, practical solutions to a problem or innovative opportunity together that can also benefit others in the EU.

Setting up these groups, finding partners and working with people from other professions or sectors can sometimes be a challenge. Participatory approaches can help to bring different types of people together to develop new projects and solutions.

This document highlights and explains some of these approaches which have already been used in agricultural initiatives in Europe. If you have any more examples of similar initiatives, please let us know! Send us any resources you may have- articles, videos, websites etc. to servicepoint@eip-agri.eu.

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► Innovation through participation, conditions for success

A Europe-wide EU-funded project which has recently been looking in depth into this issue is the **SOLINSA project**. The consortium of 11 partners from 8 countries aimed to find ways to support the development of groups they call 'LINSAs' (Learning and Innovation Networks for sustainable agriculture). These are mixed groups of farmers, researchers and other people working together to achieve an innovative and sustainable agriculture. They carried out field research across Europe to find out what types of methods are already used, to test participatory approaches within groups and to qualify how different people interact in agricultural projects. "We took lessons from these practices and worked on spreading them across Europe more widely" says Nigel Curry (University of the West England, Bristol). SOLINSA has produced a number of publications and a training course for innovation brokers (see page 6 of this brochure).

"Working in groups can foster innovation"

Gianluca Brunori (University of Pisa)

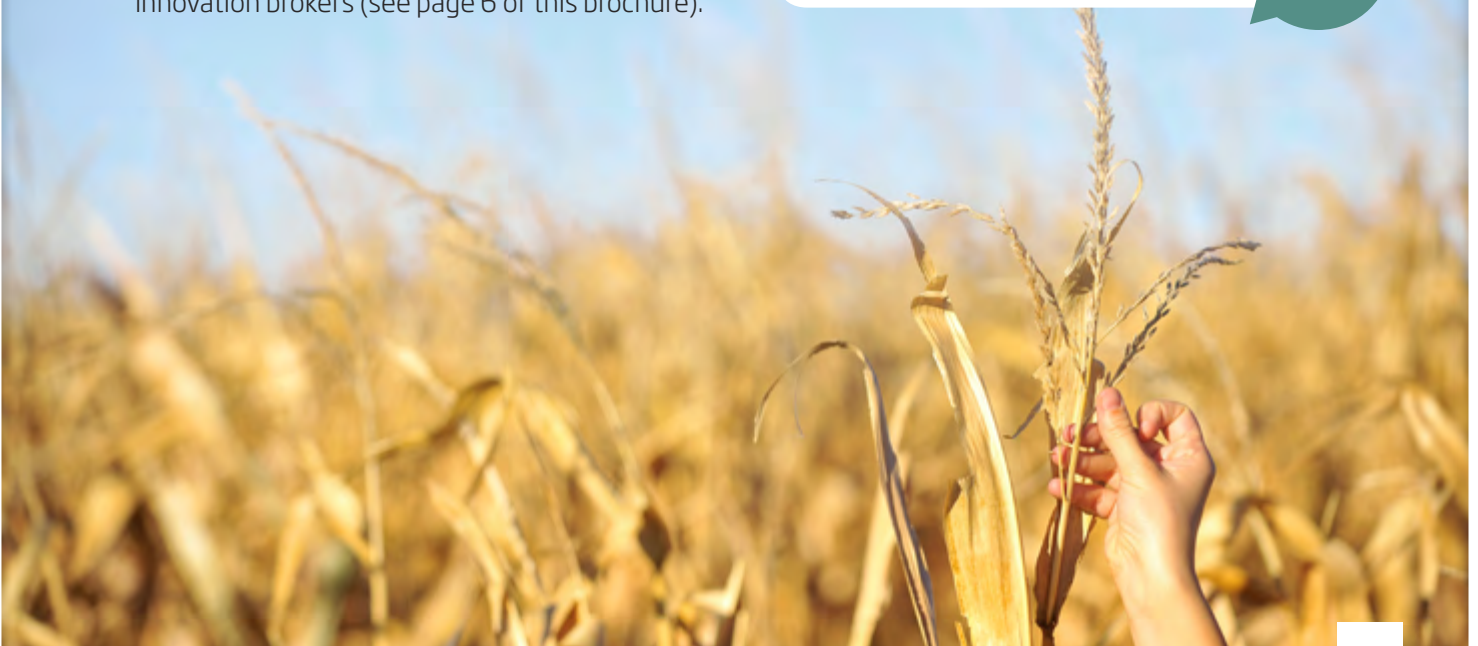
"We work with participatory methodologies and ... we enjoy it!"

Gusztav Nemes (Institute of Economics - Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

"Fostering needs-based, diverse, participatory learning forms can lead to mutuality and exchanges among people who might otherwise not meet, and to innovation in agriculture!"

Dominique Barjolle (FiBL)

Quotes from SOLINSA partners





▶ Getting started, building a group and meeting people

Here are a few examples of ways to set up new working groups and spark interaction:

▶ Innov'Action: Farm open days

The Chambers of Agriculture in France hold a national annual event called Innov'Action. This event promotes innovative farming practices that improve the economic, social and environmental performance of farms. Over the course of one month (usually May/June) a selection of innovative farmers open their farm doors and showcase their innovative tools, technologies, methods and on-farm research. The information is also spread as widely as possible through guides, buzz videos and national press, and social media are involved. In 2014 the initiative proved its popularity when 250 farms opened their doors to more than 20 000 visitors.



Invite people to the farm. Show innovative practices in action!

www.innovaction-agriculture.fr

▶ Rede INOVAR: Brokerage events

Rede INOVAR is a Portuguese innovation network based on technology and knowledge transfer in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors. In November 2014 at the national fair Portugal AGRO, Rede INOVAR organised a 'B2B brokerage event' in collaboration with the Portuguese National Rural Network. The objective was to lay the foundations

for future innovation projects by providing an opportunity for businesses, associations, research institutions and other professionals in agriculture and food production to meet. Prior to the event, participants could access a database of ideas for research projects involving different actors such as farmers, researchers, advisors and agribusiness, identify the ones which were relevant to them and make an appointment with the contact person. Therefore on the day, the participants were guided to people who were of particular interest to their own work, which resulted in the establishment of many new contacts and project consortia.



Before an event, identify the common ground between the different participants to make sure they meet

www.redeinovar.pt

[Portuguese NRN](#)

[Innovation projects catalogue used for scheduling meetings](#)



► Foodlinks: Communities of practice

Foodlinks is a European project about knowledge brokerage to promote sustainable food consumption and production. Working on a number of case studies, the project set up 'Communities of Practice', meaning a group of people with a common interest or problem in the context of sustainable food systems who work on the possible solutions. The Communities of Practice have to include scientists, policymakers and representatives from civil society organisations. These Communities of Practice are informal groups which prosper when their members actively share information and experiences. Facilitators may support the start of the Communities of Practice by encouraging collaboration and interaction through participatory knowledge brokerage tools in on-line and face-to-face meetings.

According to their publication Knowledge Brokerage in Communities of Practice - Hands on Recommendations, "Building a Community of Practice is actually a process of cultivation: the community has to be developed and to grow and this requires a considerable amount of care, attention and proper facilitation."



Formal regular meetings within a community (and beyond) run by facilitators using a variety of participatory methods.

www.foodlinkscommunity.net
[Knowledge Brokerage in Communities of Practice - Hands on Recommendations](#)
[Brochure of tools for knowledge brokerage](#)



► FarmCafe: Online meeting place

FarmCafe is a new Flemish non-profit cooperation platform which allows 'unexpected' partners that would normally rarely meet to find each other and begin to work together. Agricultural entrepreneurs can meet experts (technical, financial), together they can ask specific questions or guidance, begin to plan projects and take action. These same experts also provide the platform with practical videos and articles which are available to anyone who visits the platform.



Digital platforms can create opportunities for people to meet who may not otherwise meet

www.farmcafe.be

The EIP-AGRI website Meeting Point is another platform where you can search for other people and projects working on similar topics as you. Register as a user [here](#).

The EIP-AGRI Service Point has set up a [LinkedIn Group](#) where you can find potential partners for Horizon 2020.





▶ Practices for working together

There are many methods which can be used to foster innovation once a group with a common interest has been identified. Below are two of many European projects which have developed such methods.

▶ SOLINSA: Groups supported by innovation brokers

SOLINSA, an EU-funded research project, developed a method to support groups working on agricultural innovation. It consists of bringing in a supporting person, an 'innovation broker' to guide the group using participatory methods. This innovation broker leads interviews, study trips, strategic games and more (see textbox) to enable the group to innovate. Depending on the group, he/she may act as facilitator, 'traditional' advisor, expert or technical support and this may change over time. He/she should have a

profound understanding of agriculture and good communication and facilitation skills. Innovation brokers connect farmers, researchers and others to set up innovative projects including Operational Groups.

Solinsa has developed a training programme for these innovation brokers.

www.solinsa.org

[Solinsa training programme](#)



Supporting persons guide a mixed group to reach their objectives. Participatory methods are the key:

- ▶ **Interviews:** Innovation Broker discusses issues one-on-one with each member of the group.
- ▶ **Study trips:** Travelling in group, to visit other groups or projects. Taking a step back, applying knowledge to something new. Discovering other ways of functioning. Opening your mind by discovering what other people do differently.
- ▶ **Strategic games:** playful icebreakers, energisers, tension easing exercises to ensure group cohesion and a comfortable atmosphere.
- ▶ **World café:** Collaborative dialogue in large groups. Participants are divided into small groups, they begin to put ideas on paper. Each group gradually moves on to discover and add to each paper in the room.
- ▶ **Participatory video:** a group creates their own film. Making a video is easy and accessible, and is a great way of bringing people together to explore issues, voice concerns or simply to be creative and tell stories.

Many more can be found in detail in their publication [Synthesis of the Learning Process](#)



► Engage2020: Collaboration between society and science

Engage 2020 is another EU-funded research project about solving societal challenges through the collaboration between society and science. It aimed to explore how members of society are involved in research, innovation and other related activities. The project has looked into ways to establish this collaboration, allowing scientific systems to open up and ask society in which direction do we all want to work?

This is also central to the work of Operational Groups and other multi-actor projects which bridge the gap between science and farming practice. The project screened useful public engagement methods and tools. Their report guides you through the different methods depending on what you want to achieve, followed by a factsheet for each of these methods (see textbox). engage2020.eu



Community-based research

The community is involved in all stages of the research process, from setting the questions, to framing and doing the research, interpreting the results and communication. Research therefore is focused on better understanding and then improving a certain situation.

Participatory Design

This is about designing systems for users. The starting point is consultation with individuals and community organisations. This is followed by an interactive design process which includes field tests with the users of the developed technologies and devices.

Deep Democracy-The Lewis Method

Deep Democracy is used primarily to access and bring out the wisdom already within a group, and particularly to release the creative potential that results from conflict. In traditional democracy, people vote and the decision goes with the majority. In Deep Democracy, a facilitator encourages the minority voice to be expressed.

Deliberative Workshops

Deliberative Workshops are a form of facilitated group discussions that provide participants with the opportunity to consider an issue in depth, challenge each other's opinions and develop views and arguments to reach an informed position.

Many more can be found in detail in their publication [Public Engagement Methods and Tools](#)



► Examples from regional projects

*How can you use the methods mentioned above in your region to innovate?
See a few examples below:*



► Stakeholder involvement in Varna, Bulgaria

As part of the F:ACTS! Project, an interactive design workshop was held in a village in Varna, Bulgaria to involve local people in an important water study. For this event, they use the Sketchmatch method, a collective way of finding 'future scenarios' meaning solutions or new systems to improve a given current situation. The process began by discussing all of the aspects of the problem in detail. Technical planners worked together with different local and regional stakeholders to develop future scenarios, while visualising these on sketched maps. Everyone was able to give their ideas and concerns about each suggested solution. The participants were then divided into 3 teams and each had to discuss the problem, propose solution and come up with the 'best' future scenario. According to their report, the method proved to be effective because the engineers received valuable information about the natural processes in this village which had never been measured but which the local people were familiar with.



'The Sketchmatch method':
Developing future solutions or systems collectively with many different people and groups affected by a specific need or problem.



www.factsproject.eu
F:ACTS! Handbook



► Agro-environmental cooperation in Wuustwezel, Belgium

Another method was tested in a different F:ACTS! project pilot area. This time in Wuustwezel, Belgium where farmers worked collectively to improve individual projects related to water management. In the north of Flanders, flooding and droughts are common. In 1999 many dams were installed to hold up water in small ditches on farmland. The municipality Wuustwezel noticed that 10 years later, the farmers needed more guidelines and support for putting the ditches to best use. To spark new enthusiasm, as well as provide more knowledge to the farmers involved, the farmers, with the help of agrobeheercentrum ECO² (a cooperation between the Flemish government and the farmers union) started a collective. By further involving nearby municipalities, more farmers joined to discuss new initiatives and receive personal guidance. Mathias Vanspringel From agrobeheercentrum Eco² says "The farmers have already noticed the added value of the measures and have acknowledged that the practice provides the best incentive for further cooperation."



Working collectively, sharing knowledge and experiences to improve individual projects which work towards a similar objective.

www.factsproject.eu
F:ACTS! Handbook





► Forming strong links between farmers and inhabitants in Saclay, France

Saclay is an area of farmland close to Paris (France) under pressure due to surrounding urbanisation. In 2013, the association Terre et Cité organised 2 Open Space Technology (see textbox) sessions on the topic of food in the area of Saclay. The aim was to forge strong links between farming and inhabitants of the nearby towns and to think about concrete projects concerning farming and natural areas. The two sessions gathered 200 people: farming institutions, citizens, local authorities, research enterprises, students. Two specific questions were asked “How to develop food quality and to boost local production?” and “How to build a vibrant and pleasant area together?”. These two meetings led to fruitful exchanges of views between stakeholders who had never worked together and to the creation of a Local Action Group. Thomas Joly, President of Terre et Cité said “These events played a very important role in actively involving all local stakeholders. Some projects have already been completed, and many more will be implemented with the help of LEADER.”

terreetcite.org

saclay.carte-ouverte.org

Open Space Technology (OST)



In OST, the trick is to begin without any formal agenda other than having identified the overall purpose or theme. A facilitator is present but only to ensure that it is the group itself which identifies what they want to discuss and how. Bulletin boards and break-out groups are used to make sure everyone is heard, and the key is ‘self-organisation’. OST is useful in almost any context including strategic orientation, visions for the future, conflict resolution, consultation with stakeholders etc.

► FarmPath: Pathways towards regional sustainability of agriculture in Europe

In Alentejo, Portugal, environmental organisations, farmers, land owners, businesses and local municipalities were all brought together to look into the maintenance of the regional agro-silvo-pastoral system (the 'Montado'). The Montado is very important to the local area and to local heritage, it combines agriculture, forestry and grazing, providing many products and services. Farmpath, an EU-funded research project, worked with the local people to construct visions for possible futures and to focus on the 'pathways' to get there. The Farmpath team (as facilitators) carried out individual interviews and led work in 4 groups according to type of stakeholder to produce visions for the future for the Montado in 2030. In a final workshop, including all participants and national stakeholders and researchers, possible pathways to achieve the visions were co-constructed and then analysed.

Teresa Pinto Correia, Farmpath project coordinator from the University of Évora, tells us: "One vision foresaw better technology, new rural identity, intensification of production and economic viability. The other emphasised a strong reinforcement of rural values and lifestyle, by creating a regional trademark, a new mind-set and cooperation within the rural communities and between rural and urban networks."

This method includes a participatory visioning process, where relevant different groups identify plans for the future, and the focus is set on how to get there. Individually, in groups and then collectively, they plan the right path for achieving this goal.

www.farmpath.eu

► A game to build new systems to adapt to a changing context (France)

The Sustainable Agriculture Network (RAD in French) gathers groups of farmers and promotes economic and ecological farming systems. It has recently been involved in the development of the Forage Rummy (Rami fourrager®) with INRA, Idele and other farmer groups. It is a strategic game which supports farmers' (and advisers' and other actors') reflections about the adaptation of livestock systems to new contextual challenges such as climate change. Farmers, researchers and advisors discuss together about the best adaptations of the grazing system and the choices to be made and using specific software, they co-design a new, innovative farm.

Forage Rummy: Strategic/serious game

This is used by agricultural consultants, researchers and small groups of 2 to 4 farmers. They address a shared problem situation by designing a livestock system with the help of a specially designed spreadsheet.

www.solinsa.net

[LINSIA Case Study Report: France](#)

[Institut de l'Élevage: 'Rami fourrager'](#)



Infographic- Participatory approaches in agricultural initiatives

