

eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION



EIP-AGRI Workshop: Small is smart

Innovative solutions for small agricultural and forestry holdings

FINAL REPORT
MAY 2020



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1. Introduction

The EIP-AGRI workshop 'Small is Smart – innovative solutions for small agriculture and forestry holdings' took place in Bucharest, Romania on 29-30 October 2019. It was developed in recognition of the integral part which these small-scale holdings play within Europe's countryside. They help to preserve landscape diversity whilst providing a livelihood for millions of people who nurture and protect the countryside, rural traditions and customs, as well as biodiversity and the environment as a whole. The workshop also contributed to the broader body of work being



2. The process

Small farms and forestry holdings exist throughout the EU, and are often run at a family level over many generations. Broadly they can be characterised by lower efficiency and a higher diversity of production. Owners are often older or may not have had the opportunity to participate in higher education, so implementing innovations and new technologies can sometimes be challenging. There has also been a growth in small holdings owned and run by part-time farmers. They face similar challenges, exacerbated by even greater limits on their time to undertake training, through peer-to-peer exchanges or by making use of advisers. Part time farmers certainly have less opportunity to discover, explore and implement innovative solutions.

The overall aim of the workshop was to 'promote networking among people and projects dealing with innovation and adoption of new technologies in small farm and forestry holdings.' This enabled the workshop to focus on learning more about each other, exploring common issues, identifying collaboration opportunities and exchanging knowledge. The specific objectives of the workshop were:

- ▶ identifying common challenges and exploring potential solutions,
- ▶ exchanging good practice,
- ▶ connecting participating projects to promote further co-operation, and;
- ▶ understanding the elements required to improve the innovation support environment.

Consequently the workshop was developed to share examples of where innovative solutions had been successfully adopted by small farm and forestry holdings, to better understand how farmers could be supported to adopt innovations and what activities might best enable this, and to learn which areas of the support environment could be strengthened to improve uptake of innovations and best practice.

Nearly 100 participants from 17 different countries attended the workshop and this included farmers, foresters, partners of Operational Groups (OGs), multi-actor projects under Horizon 2020 (H2020), advisers, researchers and innovation specialists.

3. Setting the scene

After an engaging welcome to Bucharest and an overview of the Romanian commitment to supporting innovation in small farms and forestry holdings from **Daniel-Eugeniu Crunțeanu, State Secretary for Agriculture; Dana Rebegea, Deputy Director General**, looked forward to the afternoon field trip to the Romanian Horticultural Institute.

Liviu Popescu, Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, provided participants with a detailed overview of how small and medium farms in Romania were being supported through the 2014-2020 National Rural Development Programme. He outlined the different policies available, how support could be accessed and the numbers of small farms supported so far. A particular focus was also given on opportunities for supporting the development of producer groups and cooperative activity for establishing short supply chains.



Inge Van Oost from DG AGRI then also provided some opening words from the European Commission, briefly outlining the work already taking place in this area and their commitment to develop and support small farms across the EU.

After a short ice breaker to enable participants to get to know each other a little more, a series of presentations were delivered highlighting examples of successful innovation activities. **Leanne Townsend from the James Hutton Institute** opened the session by posing the question, 'How can small farms benefit from digital innovations?' Providing an overview of the nature of small farms across the EU and the main challenges they face in adopting digital technologies, she then highlighted a series of projects taking place that were using different approaches to support innovation on small farms.



Stephane Diard from FN Cuma (National Federation of CUMA) in France provided an overview of the "CUMA", a system with a long history which interconnects over 10,000 machinery rings in France. FN Cuma brings together 400 agencies at the national level, 225,000 farmers, and 350 employees. Stephane explained how his own farm machinery co-operative is run on a daily basis, saving a lot of machinery costs by sharing and co-owning the equipment. Over 45% of French farmers are members of CUMA, collectively investing and jointly using machinery, buildings and contract workers. He explored how this enabled greater access to innovation because the cooperation model provides access to up-to-date machinery thanks to quicker re-investment options, helps to share the risk, and also provides many opportunities for peer to peer support

and knowledge sharing. Typically, machinery rings for small farms could become a real game changer in the digital age. At the EIP-AGRI **'Agri-Innovation Summit'** in Lisieux (France), one of the field visits looked at innovation in a CUMA, where new machinery had been tested to harvest and dry protein crops, with a view to become self-sufficient in proteins and less dependent on imported soy bean.

More information: www.cuma.fr/content/les-cuma-et-leur-reseau-travers-lhistoire

Bavo Verwimp, an organic farmer from Belgium presented his experience of utilising direct selling as an instrument to improve profitability in his small farm. Having run a small, traditional dairy unit on only 30ha, Bavo explained that during the milk crisis in 2008, his income significantly decreased. He couldn't increase his farm size, so he had no option but to look for new ways to add value. He moved from traditional sales routes into direct selling. He detailed the key elements which supported this transition: (1) structural changes to the farm to increase diversity of production and ensure year round availability of produce, (2) marketing elements to engage with and understand the end consumer, including an attractive website: www.dekijelaar.be, and (3) building local community support for the farm.

Razvan Popa from the Adept Foundation in Romania explored how innovation could be combined with tradition to improve the economic viability of Romania's small-scale farms. He highlighted that small farms are more productive, more agile and use farming techniques which are more likely to provide substantive public goods. He then detailed the types of initiatives which Adept initiated. These included farm advisory services, using SMS messaging to reach farmers with relevant and timely information, supporting farmers to develop associations and then helping them to maintain common areas through access to subsidies, creating shared production and processing equipment and facilities, creating a brand for the area and linking food to the tourism market.

More information: fundatia-adept.org

James Gaffey from the Institute of Technology in Ireland provided an overview of the growing and significant importance of the bioeconomy sector and posed the question 'how do we integrate farmers within our future bioeconomy?'. He focused on co-operative biorefineries using an Operational Group Biorefinery Glas as a case study of a successful farmer-led approach. This Irish Operational Group is producing and validating multiple products from grass through to biorefining, including an improved fodder press-cake fibre for cattle, protein concentrate feed for monogastrics, high value prebiotic sugars (for the food and feed markets) and recovery of nutrients for use as fertiliser. This mobile small-scale biorefinery is demonstrated to farmers, its business model is evaluated and various models for adoption are proposed. The Operational Group is promoting this farm-to-farm bioeconomy symbiosis and new business models, facilitating several bioeconomy knowledge exchange activities among Irish farmers, and delivering an extensive dissemination package, including digital storytelling, with farmers playing a central role.



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The conclusions from these presentations included:

- ▶ The importance of utilising a participatory, multi-actor approach from the start of any project or policy.
- ▶ Including small farms in research and innovation projects to develop adapted innovations to the scale of their farms.
- ▶ Being prepared to innovate in broader organisational structures and processes as well as in changes on-farm. No one model fits all, but countries can learn very much from each other.
- ▶ Carry out robust assessments of the farm to understand how innovation can shape production and improve profitability.
- ▶ Collaborate at all levels and develop a specific co-ordinated policy approach with a focus on small farms, based on information and networking.
- ▶ Use innovation to maintain and improve the economic benefits of traditional systems, by finding adapted business models instead of trying to simply copy the bigger type of farm.

These presentations can be found on the workshop event page at <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-workshop-small-smart-innovative-solutions>



4. Sharing experience: What actions could a small farmer take to introduce innovation or good practice?





The first breakout session asked participants to explore what small-scale farmers and foresters need to create and implement innovative solutions. Participants worked across four rooms, with each room hosting a different topic that had been explored during the earlier presentations:

1. [Collaboration in production and processing](#)
2. [Land stewardship for eco-system services and biodiversity](#)
3. [Short supply chains](#)
4. [Bioeconomy initiatives](#)

The session consisted of four rounds and each participant was asked to visit every room once to enable them to provide input into all the topics. Within each topic the participants were supported to develop mini tool kits for farmers, going through a four-stage process with a new stage at every round.

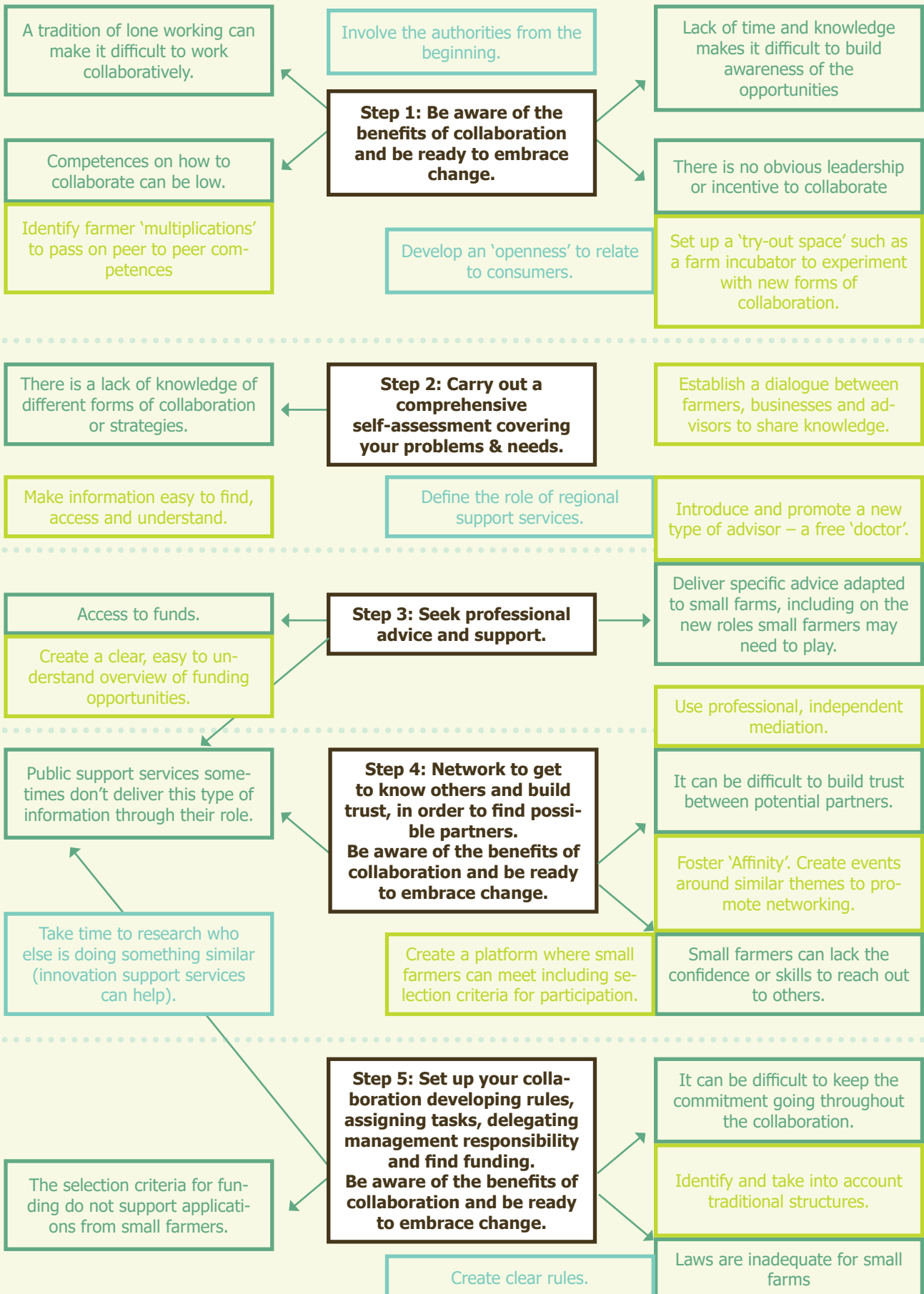
During the first round, participants were assisted to identify the steps they would need to take to introduce innovation or good practice on farm for their chosen theme. All the participants then changed rooms to a new topic to review the steps identified and add in any obstacles or challenges they felt a farmer might encounter whilst implementing those steps. The participants then moved to another new room to review the steps and challenges identified for that topic and suggest solutions to overcome those challenges. In the final round, participants then acted as critical friends, reviewing the work of the previous three rounds and amending or adding in anything they felt was missing.

The results for each topic are laid out on following pages:

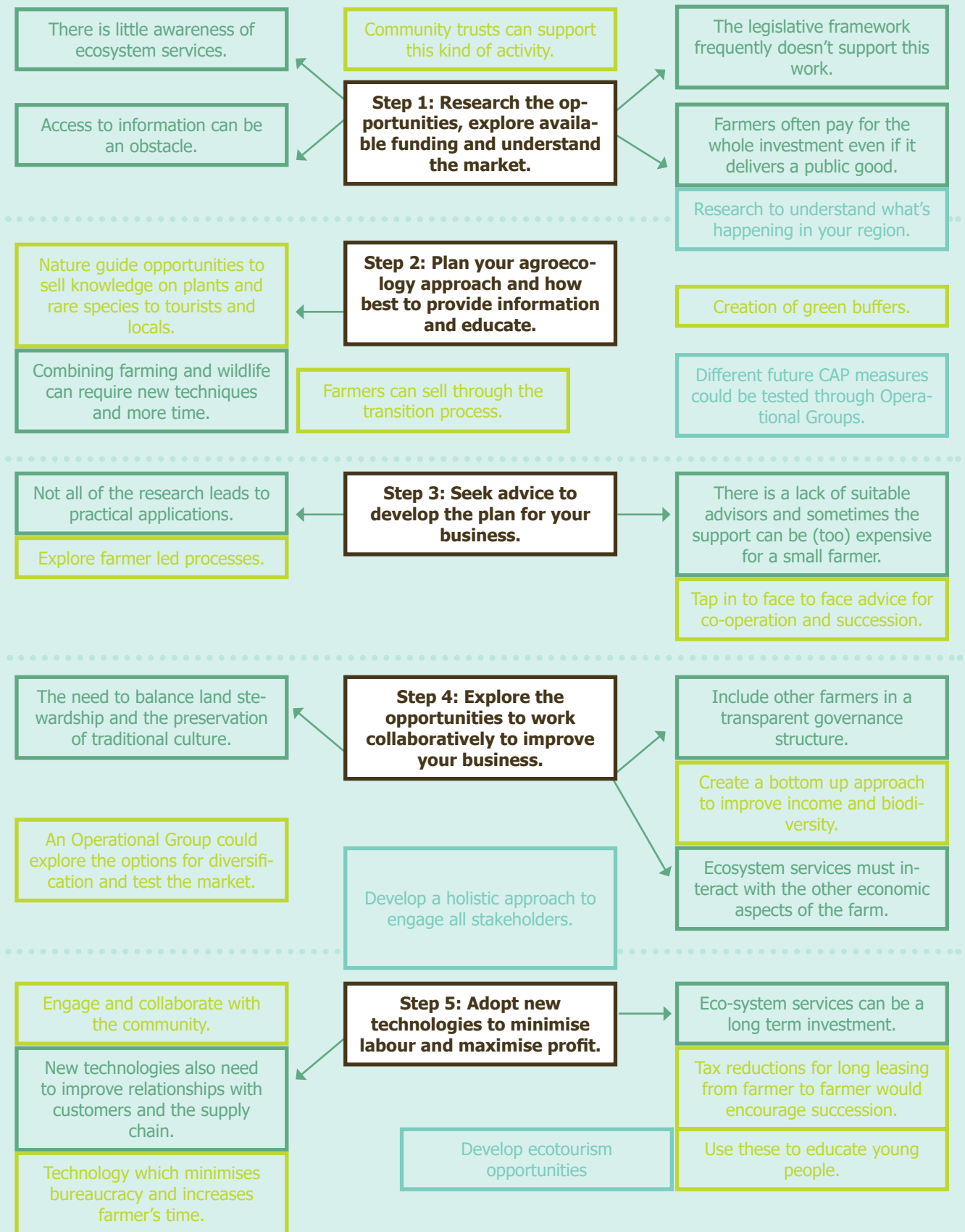
-  the steps identified in the first stage
-  the obstacles and challenges identified
-  the solutions identified in stage three
-  the additions made by the critical friends in the final round



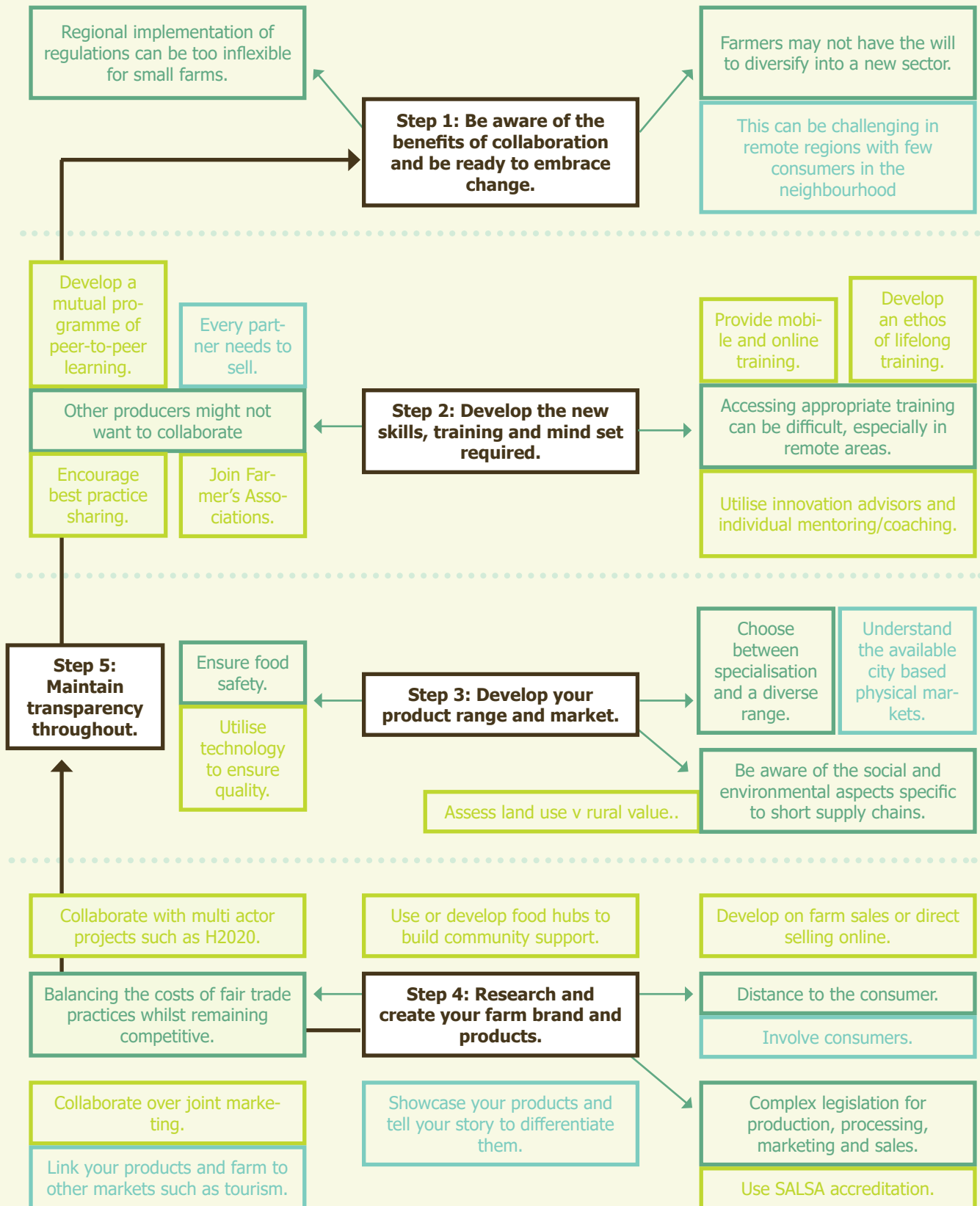
1. What actions could a small farmer take to introduce innovation or good practices in collaboration in production and processing?



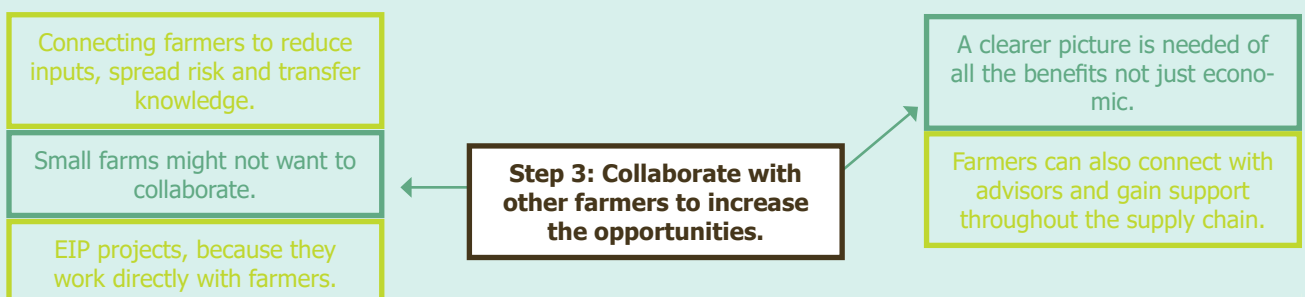
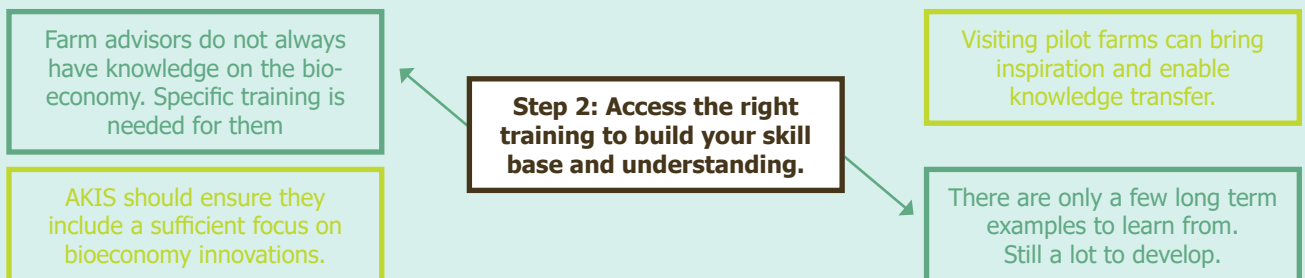
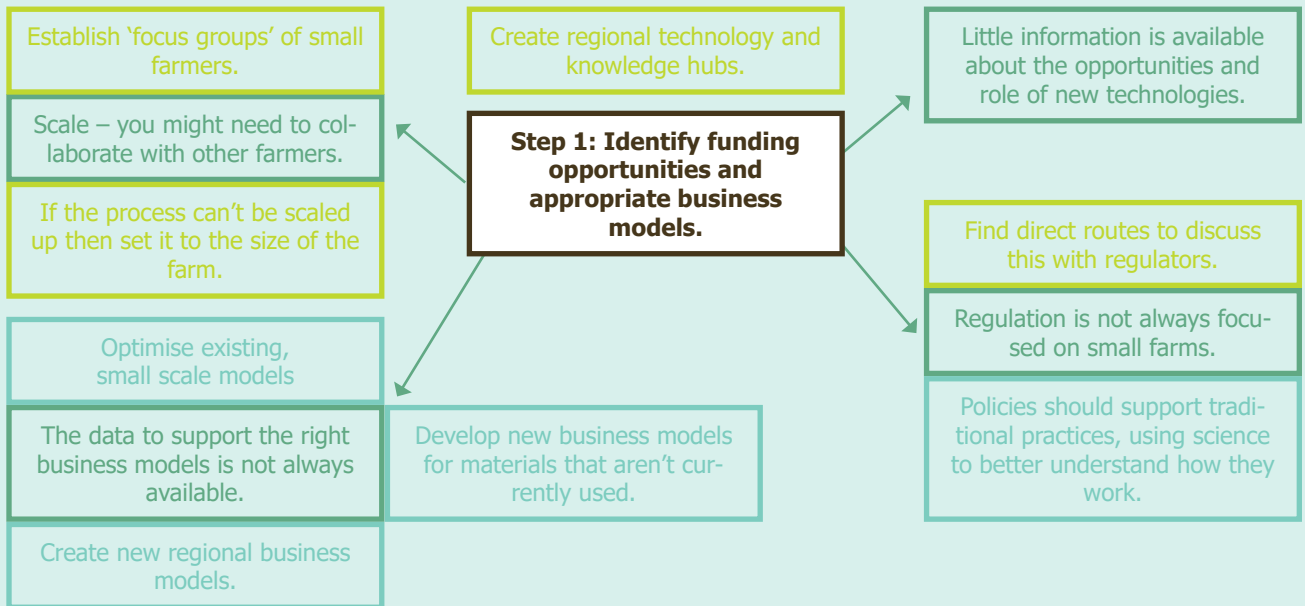
2. What actions could a small farmer take to introduce innovation or good practices in collaboration in Land stewardship for eco-system services and biodiversity?



3. What actions could a small farmer take to introduce innovation or good practices in collaboration in short supply chains?



4. What actions could a small farmer take to introduce innovation or good practices in collaboration in bioeconomy initiatives?





5. Field trip

The participants had the opportunity to visit the Romanian Horticultural Institute in Mărăcineni, Argeş county to learn more about the adoption and use of new technologies by small farms. Whilst travelling to the Institute, some participants kindly volunteered to contribute to a 'coach conversation', presenting their project over the coach microphone and so sharing experiences with the other participants during the journey. This included Carola Ketelhodt, Fedele Colantuono, Vlad Bauer and Peter Kuma.

Upon arrival at the Institute of Horticulture, the participants were welcomed by the Director of the Institute Mr. Mihai Coman and his team, who provided an extensive tour of the growing areas. Participants asked questions about the various crops being grown, the technologies used and how these results were then successfully disseminated to small farmers across Romania. The Director detailed a variety of knowledge sharing tools including the regular open days held at the Institute itself.

The participants were then welcomed into the Institute and convened in one of the lecture theatres. The Director provided further information on the role of the Horticultural Institutes, their locations across Romania and the value they add to small farms. He was then joined by a group of small farmers. Participants asked a series of questions, furthering their understanding of the value of the work being carried out.

6. Setting the scene for the second day

After a welcome and an opportunity for participants to share their experiences, learning and thoughts from the workshop so far, the scene was set for the second day with an opening presentation. Inge Van Oost, Policy Officer from DG AGRI presented an overview of how AKIS, farm advice and innovation networking would be supported through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2020. She detailed what AKIS is, who is involved, and how it sits at the heart of the agricultural innovation ecosystem. Providing an overview of the innovation role of EIP-AGRI she demonstrated how it brings together a range of policy strands and activities to ensure this increasing body of practice orientated knowledge on innovation is effectively shared. The presentation then detailed the added value of well-functioning AKISs in Member States and regions and the Commission's desire to use the next CAP to not only fund innovative projects but in particular to incentivise and interlink actors into the whole innovation ecosystem. This also includes a more modern approach to advisory: integrating all advisers into the AKIS in order to upscale their competences and bring them knowledge on innovative projects and outcomes, and involve them more in Operational Groups. The new CAP will also further encourage OGs - now also including cross-border OGs - to develop innovative solutions based on the interactive innovation model. OGs will now work on the full set of specific CAP objectives, and methods for ensuring that their outcomes are better taken up and shared into the AKIS should form part of the CAP AKIS strategies that Member States will need to develop. The current situation with the developing policy was discussed and Inge briefly presented the new AKIS publication from the Strategic Working Group on AKIS of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research.

More information: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/report-preparing-for-future-akis-in-europe_en.pdf



7. Sharing experience: How can best practice sharing, collaboration, digitalisation and knowledge transfer best support innovation in small farms?

Participants were asked to explore how the sharing of best practice, collaboration, digitalisation and knowledge transfer can best be utilised to support innovation in small farms. Working across three rooms, participants looked to answer one of the three following questions:

1. Which types of collaboration support small farmers to innovate and how?
2. How can small farmers be encouraged and supported to utilise digitalisation as a means to innovate?
3. Which methods of knowledge sharing work best for small farmers and how can these methods support innovation?

Each question had two parts to it with the results from each room laid out below; linking both sets of answers. The top insights participants identified from the group they worked within are also included.

1. What types of collaboration support small farmers to innovate, and how?

What types of collaboration support small farmers to innovate?	How?
The context	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a local ecosystem with local actors. • Collaboration within a broad environment – socio, economic, cultural and environmental, whilst recognising that farmers are the key players. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a common vision for the local area. • Organise local focus groups. • Develop bottom up initiatives to design the project. • Work in themed clusters.
The approach	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with the support of independent, trustworthy advisers. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmer to farmer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing knowledge and practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm to farm, with the support of advisory services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal and informal, identify common need and co-design common strategy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small farmer organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional or in a chain, providing technical and process information.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Machinery ring cooperation in a format specific for small farms. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Group collaborations including innovators, farmers, advisers and a facilitator. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with LAGs through to big corporations and the tourism sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product development, promoting the social value of farming to consumers and receiving feedback about the product and consumer needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with consumer associations focused on local, quality, carbon footprint, health and welfare, in a public private partnership which includes researchers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-create new technology and improve the general education of children, ensuring they are better informed and more able to collaborate to solve issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build collaboration between farmers and researchers, and farmers and schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency and traceability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create food chain clusters which integrate the agrifood chain, farm manufacturing and distribution. 	

The tools

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A need for dialogue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue builds confidence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an incubator, knowledge hub. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proving it works through dissemination, visits and demonstration.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create policy for remote areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance subsidies for mechanisation, manufacturing and technical support

Top insights

- The **farmer is the key player**, receiving but also providing innovation. So, focus on farmer to farmer and farm to farm collaboration, with the support of advisers and advisory services.
- Encourage the **use of small farmers' organisations**.
- **Collaborate and share** knowledge and practice, both in an informal and formal way.
- Do this **with the support of independent, trustworthy advisers**.
- **Operational Group collaboration** including innovators, farmers, advisers and a facilitator is a very good example of the above-mentioned insights, so is an **excellent approach**.
- Create dedicated, specific **clusters for small farmers** to join, e.g. IT, food, machinery rings.
- A **bottom up approach** and broad collaboration are always useful, with good dialogue between stakeholders to enable small farms to innovate: collaborate with all stakeholders **along the supply chain** and co-design.
- **Collaboration with consumers** and consumer organisations provides easier access to markets and feedback on consumer demands.

2. How can small farmers be encouraged and supported to utilise digitalisation as a means to innovate?

How can you encourage small farmers to utilise digitalisation as a means to innovate?	How can you support small farmers to utilise digitalisation as a means to innovate?
Education and knowledge sharing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show them the benefits, particularly the economic ones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration and education. Provide co-financing through subsidies. Provide a tax reduction for users.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate good practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer-to-peer learning and sharing good practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop educational tools for all farmers. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide early engagement and training for future farmers. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find ways to reach older farmers, perhaps LEADER or National Rural Networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A special programme for digital learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support through advisers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong public and private advisory services that provide practical support. Advisers must have the technical knowledge to support small farmers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt the support to the characteristics of the farmer – age, existing ICT knowledge, personality, farm size and type of production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise training to develop advisers' capacity to support small farmers
Adoption	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt applications and technology to farmer's needs and make sure they are easy to use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide better access to high speed internet. Support affordable, small scale tech co-designed with small farmers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show simple ways of transferring to new technologies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing technology.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Correct and adjust the selection of technology for farmers to ensure it is compatible with their current production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support farmers to share tech resources or contractors as a way of overcoming the large initial investment barriers..
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote new market solutions through digital sales. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use visual aids e.g. soil sample maps. 	

Top insights

- Organise **training** to develop advisers' capacity to support small farmers: strong public and private advisory services that provide practical support are essential.
- **Peer-to-peer** learning and sharing good practice works well, a focus is needed on the **economic benefits**.
- Find **existing networks or channels** to reach older farmers.
- Education: develop **educational tools** and in particular provide early engagement and training for future small farmers.
- **Financial incentives** are needed, such as subsidies for collaboration and education, support for specific advisers, tax reduction etc., e.g. to co-design affordable small scale tech with small farmers.
- The **type of farmer** will have a significant impact on the support required, so the benefits demonstrated must be relevant for their situation. This could be supported through practical, personalised advice.
- All **technology must be tailored to the specific small farmer** or groups of farmers, co-created and with co-financing of the investment.
- **Specific advice might be required** for small and in particular older farmers who are less experienced with technology, e.g. maps and visual information, making advisers with tech knowledge very important.
- **Internet access in rural areas must be improved.**



3. Which methods of knowledge sharing work best for small farmers and how can these support innovation?

Which methods of knowledge sharing work best for small farmers?	How do they support innovation?
Peer-to-peer sharing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use culturally appropriate methods that build trust among farmers and advisers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt to the individual cultural context to open minds to change farmers' approaches.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and support pioneers and early adapters. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold events on real farms – finding local “heroes” and sharing their best practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivate others over new ideas, and prove they work.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practice farmer meetings – regular small meetings where farmers choose the topic, advisers and researchers are involved and accurate information is shared. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information, exchange of experience, stimulation of ideas and nudging farmers to innovate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use participatory models for meetings to enable community-based knowledge sharing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and promote pioneers who have created innovative techniques - “innovation leaders”.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trigger interest in new ideas to encourage questions from farmers which lead to knowledge exchange. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erasmus exchanges and farmer twinning. • Community seed banks. • Share failed practices as a learning tool too. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New breeding varieties for climate change.
Co-creation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include farmers from the beginning (idea creation) for research projects and to solve farmers problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems get innovative solutions and - if this happens in a co-creative mode - move quickly into farmers' everyday practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory, on-farm research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers lead the process and give feedback to researchers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise different knowledge generators, do not rely on researchers alone but co-create with actors who have complementary knowledge (practical, organisational, etc.). 	

Dissemination

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-to-one with advisers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored know-how and information.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use trusted community networks like local farmer newspapers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respects the existing community networks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a mixed method for knowledge sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt traditional training and move it to innovation training.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper documents for older farmers and web pages for younger farmers. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story telling videos. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flash messages and good storytelling.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the right type of language to communicate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated programs on radio, TV, YouTube.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology including dedicated apps free for all and easy to use. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create stories for farmers to read, hear and see, which fit the context of their farm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical support tailored to need - the right info in the right place at the right time.

Top insights

- **Regular, small meetings where farmers choose the topic**, advisers and researchers are involved.
- **Include farmers from the beginning** (idea creation) for research projects and to solve farmers problems through participatory, on-farm research.
- **Adapt to the individual cultural context** to change farmers' approaches and open their minds
- Trigger knowledge exchange and interest in new ideas by **encouraging questions from farmers**.
- **Use one-to-ones with advisers, tailoring** know-how and information to the small farmer.
- **Open days** on farm – joint meeting, **farmers leading the process** and giving feedback to researchers.
- **Find leaders among farmers** in the community who are pioneering, have developed innovative techniques and are willing to share knowledge and new ideas. Early adapters will then follow.
- Use the **appropriate method of communication**, e.g. paper documents for older farmers and web pages for younger farmers, and spreading broader info through trusted community networks like local farmer newspapers.



A FOCUS ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING FOR SMALL FARMERS

As well as the above outcomes, this group identified areas which they felt were essential to enabling knowledge sharing as a means of supporting the development of innovation on small farms.

“Best practice” farmers meetings: creating a ‘best practice’ approach to farmers meetings could ensure they are effective as a knowledge sharing tool. This could be illustrated by the Austrian model which includes a maximum of 20 people who meet regularly to discuss a topic chosen due to its relevance and potential interest for farmers. Advisers and researchers also take part, bringing innovative knowledge and solutions to problems identified by farmers. The Austrian meetings are based on data analysis and knowledge sharing with external experts. The extra value for farmers is that their own data is used for the analysis and so is more relevant to their farm. Note that this model will not work in all Member States and that each country will need to find its own best practices according to local contexts.

Appropriate cultural context: the context of knowledge sharing has to be adapted to farmers and respond directly to their questions to be relevant. However, knowing how to trigger these questions can be difficult. For this to happen there has to be trust, as trust opens minds. Experienced advisers have dedicated methods for building trust between farmers and advisers. Successful knowledge sharing needs the right information to be delivered in the right place, at the right time.

Farm open days: these open days are a huge incentive for different actors to meet on the farm and can involve farmers, researchers, facilitators and advisers sharing a day of knowledge exchange, adapted to the host farm. Again, trust plays an important role in these meetings.

Knowledge must be adapted to farmers’ needs: crucial questions for this topic are, how can we best present and communicate knowledge, and how can we encourage farmers to access it? Relevance to farmers needs is key and experience suggests demonstration farms, on spot research adapted to farmers’ needs, free advisory services on farm, free workshops for farmers with representatives of local authorities, and Erasmus for farmers could be the best vehicles. In order to engage farmers however, it is necessary to show them the benefits of knowledge exchange such as increased revenue.

8. Sharing experience: How could the innovation support environment for small farmers be improved at a regional, national and European level?

Next, the participants were asked to assess the innovation support environment at all levels and identify ways in which it could be improved. They were once again split across four rooms with one of these being a farmer and farmer representatives only group, established to provide an opportunity for these participants to explore the questions within a peer to peer setting. The remaining participants were mixed. The participants were then asked to discuss and answer the followings questions:

1. What type of advisory services best support small farmers?
2. What type of innovation support would best help?
3. How can networking help small farmers?
4. What areas of research are important for small farmers?

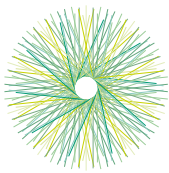
Each room then explored the answers to these four questions at an EU policy, national strategy, and regional activity level, considering what would be needed at each of these levels to improve the support environment. The results of these are laid out below with the responses from the farmer and farmer representatives group highlighted in green.

1. What type of advisory services best support small farmers?

EU policy

- Make it compulsory for Member States to adopt advisory measures in their Rural Development Programmes (RDP).
- Continue RDP measures for creating advisory service roles in rural areas.
- Provide support to farm advisory services.
- Provide small farm advice for free.
- Ensure advisory services provide technical and financial advice which is impartial.
- Provide good practice guidelines.
- Connect advisers with researchers.
- Create a network for knowledge exchange.





National strategy

- Educate farmers on how to learn from advisers and understand their impartiality.
- Showcase best practice examples.
- Develop demonstration plots for small farms.
- Create farmer specific, targeted information.
- Continue to educate and motivate advisers.
- Connect agriculture to other sectors and developments in society.
- Raise awareness of farming and make it attractive.
- Ensure advisory services are introduced in countries/regions where they do not exist.
- Provide state funded, functional, 100% free advice which is integrated and impartial.
- Make private, non-profit advice accessible via projects.
- Enable farmers to better understand the advisory landscape.
- Improve adviser training to help them to take up the role of network facilitators.
- Provide more environmentally orientated advisers.
- Educate advisers to include soft skills.
- Provide robust, quality monitoring of advisory services.
- Create more demonstration farms and fields.
- Consider potentially more effective alternatives before making additional regulation.
- Encourage civil servants to be more pro-active in solving small farmer issues.

Regional actions

- Develop innovation advisers.
- Promote farmers' associations to improve networking.
- Create and support active local advisers who provide face to face contact.
- Facilitate the integration of new partnerships including farmers, researchers, farmer's unions and the market.
- Build strong connections between advisers and researchers.
- Encourage networkers and moderators as well as advisers in such roles.
- Disseminate models of cooperation to farmers.
- Establish demonstration fields.
- Hold more exchange trips.
- Provide experts on tailor made digital tools for small farms.
- Ensure continuity in the relationship with advisers.
- Improve and grow the role of advisers as intermediaries between farmers and researchers.
- Provide advice on legal frameworks.
- Create a national/regional thematic network using the example of the EU thematic networks.
- Funding to support the creation of grants and initiatives focused on innovation themes and knowledge sharing.

2. What type of innovation support would best help small farmers?

EU policy

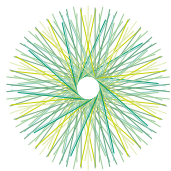
- Provide financial support to enable farmers to implement smart technology.
- Enable access to innovation funds for small farmers.
- Include seed money for developing innovative ideas.
- Ensure continuity of innovation support.
- Target the CAP on small farms and new entrants.
- Provide financial instruments – bank and RDP.
- Explore an innovation policy which enables access to land.
- Do not just focus on 'more with less' and allow failure.
- Differentiate policies for large and small farms.
- Exchange good practice with and between Member States.

National strategy

- Provide education on new technologies.
- Create a framework to connect different sectors to develop innovation on farm through events, training etc.
- Create an appropriate legal framework to promote innovation and smart tech.
- Be aware of local obstacles.
- Support the exchange of experience for innovation support services, OGs and Managing Authorities.
- Use bottom-up approaches for policy development.
- Ensure continuity of knowledge and expertise.
- Create an open platform to discuss and develop innovation.
- Create a database of good examples.
- Better dissemination of project results and innovation solutions.
- Establish a 'risk capital' government fund.
- Create 'innovation awards' to celebrate success.

Regional actions

- Showcase success stories to inspire farmers.
- Utilise peer-to-peer support and compensate farmers for their time.
- Develop farmer discussion groups for mutual support.
- Develop farmer hubs as a way of testing new innovations and technology.
- Provide tools to facilitate the demonstration of innovation solutions.
- Establish innovation support services outside the managing authority for best support for OGs and innovation.
- Translate innovation into practical advice with a focus on improving farm incomes.
- Train advisers on innovation and digital tools.
- Monitor farm programmes to better position innovation support.
- Develop a regional innovation strategy.
- Provide regional innovation support and funding.



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3. How can networking help small farmers?

EU policy

- Further support EIP-AGRI.
- Provide funding for innovation mediators.
- Empower, strengthen and broaden EIP-AGRI to include more farmers.
- Create EU networks for small farmers.
- Bring together researchers and farmers.
- Provide policy for bringing whole rural communities together so they can thrive.
- Ensure networks are functional and effective, and are accessible to small farmers, small food businesses and consumers.
- Balance equitable development across Member States.
- Reinforce eco-region networks.
- Place EU officers in charge of regional areas to enable direct contact with farmers.
- Support peer to peer learning.
- More support for translation of project outputs.

National strategy

- Disseminate knowledge made available through EIP-AGRI.
- Create innovation project databases.
- Support new alliances.
- Incorporate networking actions in National RDPs.
- Create new tools for National Networks related to innovation networking.
- Develop EIP-AGRI exchanges at national level.
- Connect researchers, advisers and farmers more strongly.
- Cluster groups of consumers and producers with researchers and innovation.
- Match research with local needs.
- Dialogue between nature conservation (Natura 2000), farmers and the public.
- Use national knowledge to influence EU policy.
- Implement initiatives to better link farmers, advisers and researchers.
- Hold local focus groups to better understand regional and local needs.
- Improve traditional communications with farmers.
- Simplify language, and funding criteria & objectives.
- Improve AKIS.
- Support peer to peer learning

Regional actions

- Disseminate support knowledge made available through EIP-AGRI.
- Focus on support to overcome practical obstacles e.g. transport, language.
- Develop a coherent and clear vision for using EU funds for local development.
- Develop the EIP-AGRI methodology for LAGs.
- Provide dedicated advisers to support small farm networking.
- Support researchers to learn more about the needs of farmers.
- Utilise community facilities where farmers can network and share, train and swap.
- Enable community participation in developing innovative solutions.
- Connect consumers with farmers.
- Develop direct contact between regional groups and the EU.
- Support cross regional cooperation and exchanges.
- Develop local, rural platforms.
- Simplify policy and regulatory systems to implement OGs and similar networks.
- Provide starting capital to support local farmer's initiatives.
- Develop demonstration farms.
- Encourage the multi actor approach.

4. What areas of research are important for small farmers?

EU policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further support EIP-AGRI. • Ensure there are research opportunities to explore social behaviours. • Facilitate farmer involvement in EU projects, using incentives. • Small farm research as a funding priority. • Co-create research policy with farmers. • Carry out a SWOT analysis for future evolution of the sector. • Explore the scale of solutions adapted to small farms. • Co-create policy from the bottom up. • Fair distribution of funding and increased east – west partnerships.
National strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide full time mediators to bring together farmers and researchers to address ideas and challenges. • Support publicly funded research with results available for all. • Support project leaders to work with private sector partners including legal advice, pricing. • Support co-created research on partnership structures and simple business tools. • Establish a specific strategy for small farms. • National calls and funding opportunities should be more open to demonstration activities and innovation transfer. • Conduct a SWOT to explore the potential of small farms. • Ensure research can be applied and is practical and affordable. • Use the results in innovation training programmes. • Value researchers' contributions to small farms. • Develop new dissemination tools. • Keep things simple.
Regional actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the dissemination of research project results. • Increase availability of funding at a regional level. • Support farmers to inform researchers of their needs. • Fund practical research projects at a regional level which are tailored to local needs. • Co-design research processes. • Create research activity on farm. • Engage young students/researchers to work with small farms. • Build awareness of innovation on small farms for the next generation of researchers. • Communicate on running projects and disseminate outcomes to farmers. • Representation by and for local farmers. • Improve access to information through thematic meetings and group training. • Provide farmers with easy outputs with research and innovation solutions on farm. • Co-create multi actor approach projects.



A FOCUS ON THE FARMER'S PEER GROUP CONCLUSIONS

The farmer peer group explored how the innovation support environment could be improved at a regional, national and European level. As well as the outputs above, their round table discussions highlighted different areas of particular interest to them.

Advisory services: They felt that there needed to be a better understanding of the needs of small, eco-regions with farming at the centre to avoid farmers being pushed into fragmented thinking, and it was hoped this would foster integration from the local level through to the European. Much also needs to be done at the EU level to recognise the needs of young farmers, encourage greater innovation in the sector and promote farming as an innovative industry.

Farmers need to know how to reach advisers and how to make the best use of their support, whilst advisers need educating and motivating to engage with small farms to ensure they act as facilitators: coordinating, rather than imposing ideas. As farmers can sometimes be bombarded with information, targeted communication and an innovation adviser who is with them through the whole process would help them access relevant knowledge in a timely fashion. A good adviser acts as a generalist practitioner, targeting all kinds of farm needs in a coherent, holistic manner. Such advisers are not specialists in one field. If need be, they are able to find others to help them on more specific issues, bring that info to the farmer and help to apply it in the farm's context. It should also not be forgotten that farmers like to talk face-to-face or on the phone.

Innovation Support: There was no distinction made between the different policy levels when discussing this issue. They felt that the support they receive has to be free or affordable and financial assistance is needed to pilot innovation. The group felt that EU legislation is needed to improve transparency and traceability, but also to compensate farmers for their time at meetings to ensure innovation support was affordable for more of them.

Networking: They felt that very few farmers take the time to come to the classical networking meetings, so there is a need to develop new types of networks, new alliances, and more innovative ways of involving farmers. It was suggested that local farmers could be used as innovation agents, disseminating information and supporting other farmers.

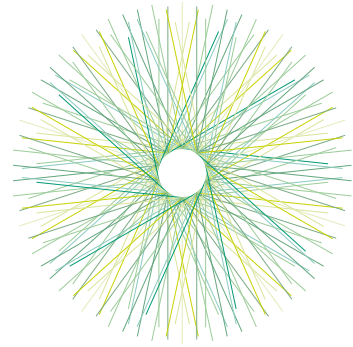
Research: There needs to be key contacts, perhaps in farmers' associations or through advisers, who collect research needs from farmers and communicate these to researchers. Farmers have to co-design the research questions, so that the answers are practical and researchers need to better understand the value of on-farm research. More research is needed on social behaviour and its influence on the innovation process and farmers need information on how to run their business, including very simple tools and support on data collection.

9. Reflecting on the workshop outcomes

On returning to the main hall, rather than a traditional feedback session the participants were asked to share their experiences together. They paired with someone they had not yet spoken to and discussed the insights and learning they had gained during the workshop. The pairs then joined to make groups of four to discuss further and then joining again to form groups of eight. These groups then selected their most significant learning and shared that with the whole workshop. Many of the remarks can be found in the sections above.

All presentations, background documents, project posters and other results of this seminar are available on the EIP-AGRI website: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-seminar-operational-group-to-impact>





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The European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) is one of five EIPs launched by the European Commission in a bid to promote rapid modernisation by stepping up innovation efforts.

The **EIP-AGRI** aims to catalyse the innovation process in the **agricultural and forestry sectors** by bringing **research and practice closer together** – in research and innovation projects as well as through the EIP-AGRI network.

EIPs aim to streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives and complement them with actions where necessary. Two specific funding sources are particularly important for the EIP-AGRI:

- the EU Research and Innovation framework, Horizon 2020,
- the EU Rural Development Policy.



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Join the EIP-AGRI Network & Register via www.eip-agri.eu

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