Skills and lifelong learning for agricultural advisory and training service providers

Seminar Report

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1. Introduction

To speed up the twin green and digital transition in agriculture and, simultaneously, ensure that it is socially fair and just, it is crucial to have a more skilled and qualified agricultural community. Farmers, advisors and other members of the diverse agricultural workforce must be supported to learn and acquire new skills in the course of their careers.

Increasing the level of skills and developing new ones is a key outcome of a well-functioning Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS). New CAP strategic plans provide several tools through various interventions to foster knowledge exchange and training. Nevertheless, there is an ongoing need for improving interactive and effective approaches to address skills shortages in the agricultural sector through policies that support AKIS, notably the CAP and the EU Research & Innovation (R&I) programme Horizon Europe. There are currently several EU-level initiatives being designed to support skills-development and lifelong learning. Supported by the European Commission, stakeholders of the agriculture and food industry have established a large-scale skills partnership under the EU Pact for Skills. While 2022 was the European Year of Youth, 2023 marked the start of the European Year of Skills, which continued into 2024.

Moreover, under the new CAP, advisors have an increasingly important place in AKIS with their roles in fostering the exchange of knowledge and innovation, capturing farmers' needs, acting as innovation brokers, and participating in and sharing results from EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs), Horizon Europe and other R&I projects. Additionally, their expertise is expected to expand to broader environmental, social and economic topics. Therefore, advisors need training and upskilling to support their expanding roles within AKIS.

For all the above reasons, the EU CAP Network together with the European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), organised this seminar on skills and lifelong learning for advisory and training service providers in the agriculture sector with a focus on skills and training delivery.

1.1. Objectives

The main objective of this seminar, which took place in Vienna from 21–22 February 2024, was to exchange knowledge and identify good practices for training and advisory services to support lifelong learning AKIS-wide.

The specific objectives of the seminar were to:

- take stock of the existing skills needs which have been identified as important for farmers and farm workers related to the green and digital transitions;
- identify effective and new training methods and tools for advisors and others to deliver the required skills for the agricultural sector;
- improve the quality and attractiveness of training to agriculture actors including those directly interacting with advisors and training providers (i.e. farmers, farm workers etc.);
- build connections between stakeholders and EU instruments/ projects tackling skills development for agricultural actors (advisors, VET, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+ etc.);
- support EU Member States in delivering knowledge to farmers and maximising the impact of CAP Strategic Plan in delivering skills to farmers, i.e. discussing how to use EIP-AGRI Operational Groups as a tool for learning and improving skills of farmers and farm workers;
- brainstorm research and innovation needs for delivering skills to agricultural actors.

1.2. Participants

The seminar was attended by 135 participants from 26 EU Member States and North Macedonia. This seminar specifically focused on advisors and training providers, including representatives from vocational education and training organisations. Other participants included representatives of Managing Authorities whose work revolves around agricultural advisory and training, representatives of National CAP Networks, innovation brokers, representatives of farmer and forester organisations, researchers as well as representatives of EU-funded projects dealing with the theme of the seminar.

2. Setting the scene

Highlighting the importance of 2023-2024, the European Year of Skills, a scene-setting speech was delivered by Roberto Berutti, Member of Cabinet of the Commissioner for Agriculture, European Commission. The European Year of Skills recognises the increasing demand for highly skilled workers, projected skill shortages undermining the competitiveness of the agriculture sector and the need to strengthen European farmers' capacity to benefit from the twin digital and sustainability transition. The EU Year of Skills aims to address these challenges. The new Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) provides several tools through various interventions to enhance knowledge and skills among farmers and their advisors. With the CAP Strategic Plans, there are fit-for-purpose frameworks and diverse sets of tools, however they must be used to their best advantage. Approaches to knowledge exchange and learning in agriculture are evolving rapidly. Traditional top-down linear models of knowledge transfer are considered outdated in twenty-first century agriculture.

Knowledge does not flow one way from researchers, trainers and technical experts. Direct peer-to-peer learning between farmers and other key actors is increasingly important and diversified forms of media and Information Technology (IT) provide new possibilities for collaboration and knowledge exchange among stakeholders. Engaging in learning and upskilling requires farmers to dedicate time from their busy schedule. Therefore, it is crucial that the advice and training they receive are of the highest quality possible. A key quality attribute of effective advice and training is its holistic nature, demonstrating relevance to specific topics and problems. Traditional advisory services will always continue, but the advisor must be more listening-oriented, acting as an impartial knowledge broker, and demonstrating capability at tailoring advice and knowledge to farmers' circumstances. The role of advisor is becoming strongly oriented to coaching, brokering and facilitating innovation. New techniques for effectively achieving this role must be incorporated in the training and upskilling of advisors.

Beyond the CAP, a range of EU policies and tools provide a framework to support re-skilling in agriculture. For example, Erasmus+ provides opportunities for upgrading skills curricula and cross-border exchange of practices. Stakeholder-led initiatives are particularly valuable, including those involving social partners. Events such as this EU CAP Network seminar seek to facilitate interaction among all stakeholders to exchange knowledge, culminating in a valuable learning resource. The EU CAP Network's website, which profiles events and resources focused on knowledge exchange, is an important repository for all actors in agriculture and rural development.

A second scene-setting presentation by Áine Macken-Walsh, coordinating expert of the seminar, focused on the range of skills required for the agriculture sector to achieve the twin transition in an inclusive way. In considering how to respond to the challenge of achieving the twin transition through skills and lifelong learning,

it is important to address the questions of what (the skills), who (the learners) and how (the strategies and dimensions of lifelong learning). It is predicted that one-third of all new jobs will be technology-related by 2030, and technology is gradually becoming more embedded in everyday social and working lives. Change is occurring continuously and incrementally, as people of all walks of life increasingly use technology and data to make decisions and enhance their decision-making to make sustainable choices.

The successful embedding of technology in society for achieving the twin transition depends on the user-friendliness of technology and the extent to which it responds to end-users' preferences and needs. In some cases, technology becomes widely embedded in society simply due to older technologies (such as phones) being replaced by newer ones with smart functions. In other cases, however, such as with specialised technology that is job-specific or sector-specific, dedicated interventions are often required to successfully embed the technology. Success in this regard depends on learning and training initiatives that introduce technology to end-users in community and social settings, such as peer groups. In such contexts, end-users discover the usefulness of the technology and how it benefits them and society. The process of embedding technology in society is a two-way process: end-users' perspectives and evaluations of technology, as well as their ideas on how to improve it, are equally important as the technical design of technological applications.

For the agricultural sector, it is critically important to support the end-users of the technology to engage with the applications, evaluate them and contribute to their development and ultimately their use. In this regard, the skills applied are those of 'active listening', 'social perceptiveness' and 'negotiation', all part of a sectoral skill shortage as identified by the OECD in 2023. Skills development and addressing changing skill needs are part of a social and cultural process. What are typically called 'soft' skills underpin successful advisory roles in facilitation, brokering and coaching. They create the necessary dynamics in which social and cultural learning successfully occur. Learning does not just develop technical ability, it has transformative potential at the level of values (hearts) and priorities (minds). Only when this transformation occurs, new or adapted behaviour and practices become authentic and lasting and effectively address societal challenges. Change for enhanced sustainability must be embraced rather than imposed; in this regard, advisory skills in understanding social settings, as well as coaching and mentoring in a tailored way within those settings, are crucial.

Diversity and inclusivity are vital considerations in how skills development in agriculture must be delivered. A diverse workforce brings diverse forms of knowledge and skills. A live poll conducted with participants in the seminar revealed that the majority of learners engaged by learning providers are farm advisors (77% of seminar participants providing learning); family-owner operators (61% of participants); youth (60% of participants) and farm managers (57% of participants). Approximately half (54%) of participants providing learning engaged with women. Learners who engaged the least with learning providers participating in the seminar were transient workers (3% of participants); casual employees (5% of participants); indigenous peoples (7% of participants); unremunerated workers (family/local) (12% of participants); seasonal workers (14% of participants); and hired workers from local regions (15% of participants). The complete poll results are presented in Annex 1. The needs and circumstances of diverse cohorts of actual and potential workers in agriculture must be considered. Agriculture must become a highly attractive sector in which to work, for those who are highly qualified and highly skilled, for those who own and do not own land, and for those who seek relatively low-skilled positions. A diversity of labour types is required for the future sustainability of agriculture, and the operating rules of policies supporting skills and lifelong learning must seek to support the diversity of actual and potential workers in the sector.

Informal, as well as formal, learning opportunities are now widespread throughout the AKIS, and these opportunities provide vast potential to engage with diverse learners. A range of informal opportunities for learning exist throughout the diverse project-based initiatives supported by both EU and national agriculture and rural development instruments. Diverse enabling environments for lifelong learning can be optimised by considering the interplay between three main issues: the skills (what); the people (who); and the processes (how) concerning skills-development and lifelong learning. This EU CAP Network seminar considered these three questions in dedicated thematic sessions that dealt with:

- sharing existing and new methods for the delivery of skills
- increasing the attractiveness of lifelong learning
- leveraging possibilities from the CAP and beyond

3. Interactive Session 1: Existing and new methods and tools for effective training and provision of skills

The aim of Interactive Session 1 was to focus on existing and new methods and tools for effective training and provision of skills.

The session began with three inspiring examples from EU Member States, i.e. Austria, Estonia and Malta.

3.1. Inspiring examples: Existing and new methods and tools for effective training and provision of skills

A presentation from Florian Herzog, Austrian Chamber of Agriculture, described success factors of its advisory and training services, of which all farmers and foresters are compulsory members. Training is provided through the Austrian Chamber's own Rural Further Training Institute, which engages more than 150 000 learners per year in online and in-person training activities. The topics for skills-development and learning are diverse, ranging from digitalisation and new media to animal husbandry, plant production and diversification. A unique attribute of the Austrian approach is that its Annual Training Programme is co-created by representatives of advisory services and continuing education, research institutions, public administration and policy-makers. The programme is then implemented in collaboration with experts in different fields. Advisors are required to engage in a minimum of 25 hours of training and skills development per year.

The second inspiring example was provided by Hanna Tamsalu, Maaelu Teadmuskeskus (METK) in Estonia. A primary emphasis was on the importance of occupational identity for advisors – 'what is it to be a rural advisor?'. This question is particularly relevant to the shift from linear knowledge transfer approaches to more interactive approaches where advisors must ask introspective questions to understand their professions and their roles. Internships were identified as a potentially promising approach, where interns can immerse themselves in future roles they aspire to hold. The internship is structured according to topics and a specific methodology and set for a specific duration. Activities include observation, teamwork, seminars, independent time and formulating written advice. Important caveats for success were highlighted in the context of measures fostering learning in the CAP Strategic Plan. These include the need for stability, cooperation, co-creation and fostering an 'AKIS mindset' with room for 'free actors' to stimulate innovation.

The third inspiring example was provided by Donald Aquilina from Agrinnova Malta Ltd, who described the process of establishing advisory services 'from scratch'. In a context where there was no history of Farm Advisory Services (FAS) or any training courses for advisors or farmers to build on while the agricultural sector was in 'fast decline', it proved a challenge to create a baseline assessment of the learning needs. This challenge was met by conducting a series of focus group meetings with potential learners and learning providers: advisors, farmers, training institutions, food business operators and other bodies active in agriculture and rural development. Surveys were also conducted with farmers, new advisors, and training institutions and facilities (labs, equipment, testing fields, etc.). This thorough approach of engaging with diverse stakeholders was undertaken with the philosophy that *'you don't know what you don't know'* (by Socrates). There was an emphasis on discovering real farming and industry requirements and on the importance of performing a 'reality check' for advisors. The first training programme of its kind was established based on a menu of anticipated advisory services linked to EU funding opportunities. The training programme has compulsory modules on soft skills, reflecting the outcomes of the initial process of group meetings. A range of technical modules are offered, delivered by specialists who nurture networking and knowledge, as well as practice exchange. Significant emphasis was also placed on empowering advisors to embrace a continuous learning process and on maintaining motivation to pursue lifelong learning.Overall, the three inspiring examples provided different yet complementary insights to existing and new methods and tools for effective training and provision of skills. The co-creation approach of Austria's Chamber of Agriculture supports relevance, comprehensiveness and impact of training and skills development content. Wisdom from the experience of METK, which recommended maintaining spaces for AKIS diversification and reinforcement, and fostering free actors with AKISs, pointed to the importance of an innovative, creative and responsive learning ecosystem. The inspiring story of the establishment of new skills development and training infrastructure and content highlighted the importance of responding to the real needs of farmers and industry and of placing soft skills, networking and practice exchange at the core of developing an empowered and highly skilled advisory community.

3.2. Exchange of good practices: existing and new methods and tools for effective training and provision of skills

Following the inspiring examples, participants in Interactive Session 1 engaged in 'case-clinics' to share their experiences and ideas for good practices regarding existing and new methods and tools for effective training and provision of skills. They iteratively developed and expanded on the good practices they identified, taking a team-based approach where participants had different roles, i.a. as the storyteller of the good practice, as the interviewer (of the storyteller), the observer (who listened) and the time-keeper.

As shown in Figure 1, a framework was completed for each good practice, with the following information:

- how to name good practices
- the methods that are used in your good practice
- what methods and tools to use and for whose benefit
- proven success factors
- improvements to existing tools and good practices
- observations by the observers

The finalised good practices – a total of 112 – were displayed on an inspirational wall, where participants could peruse them and indicate (using blue dots) the relevance of the practices in addressing the challenges and opportunities they contend with. The good practices were analysed and illustrative themes were chosen to represent the diversity of the topics. Examples of good practices under each theme were blended and summarised into single case examples, as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Examples of good practices

Good practice
The Cover Crops Field Trials – farmer-led

Which methods and tools are used in your good practice?

- field trials where farmers select the tools and methods
- long-testing in actual fields
- building 'dialogue skills' – farmers interacting with researchers, scientists, industry through ongoing processes of experimentation
- Collection of continuous data and uploading it to online/social media: interactive content, through farmers' eyes, videos, blogs, vlogs, pictures, rough diagrams and illustrations. Performance metrics such as growth and yields are included. Farmers conduct interviews with researchers, field technicians, scientists and industry actors regarding crop specifications. Advisors are interviewed about factors contributing to the success of the process, focusing on a farmer-led approach.

What do the methods and tools deliver?

- 'real' guidelines on how to grow crops!
- field days and information days in the field for non-participants
- new government policies, projects and also good practices for learning and expansion

And for whom?

- farmers and growers
- advisors
- decision-makers and policy-makers
- industry

What are the success factors?

- farmers as authentic leaders, calling in other actors (science, industry) when they need them
- advisors moderate and mediate, providing advice and enhancing awareness of the different types of knowledge that can be integrated into the process
- interaction with the real environment – the actual fields! Everything grounded.

What could be improved in the good practice or existing tools?

- greater advisory stewardship and soft skills are crucial for opening up farmers to and generating their acceptance or appreciation of new knowledge outside their immediate group – knowing when to call for help is key!
- the farmers' overall leadership of the process must not be interfered with – this is the most important aspect to protect

Observer's comments

Really solved farmers' problems. Then, the approach had wide reach to farmers who were not participating but monitoring the situation from afar. A very open-minded spirit between researchers and advisors.

Source: EU CAP Network

Good practice
CECRA Soft Skills Training

Which methods and tools are used in your good practice?

- role-playing and game-playing for learning
- small-group work facilitation
- interactive work facilitation and co-creation methods
- peer learning between advisors
- practical methods for advisors to build trust with farmers

What do the methods and tools deliver?

- improved soft skills that are practical to implement
- improved communication and presentation skills

And for whom?

- advisors, but ultimately benefit farmers also as they learn the soft skill approaches within groups etc.

What are the success factors?

- repeating and practicing the skills within the training one-to-one, then a group of two, then a group of three and so forth
- excellent trainers who are knowledgeable and experienced
- active participation in the training at all times
- plenty of breaks, networking lunch

What could be improved in the good practice or existing tools?

- incorporation of more digital approaches/tools in the processes
- mixing generations and diverse types of advisors participating in the course (women, people of different nationalities, international training, incorporation of Global South advisors)

Observer's comments

The training was financially supported by EU funds. Such soft-skills training should be offered in a more widespread way to advisors, possibly incorporated as an element of all other training

Good practice
The 'Inspirational Bus'

Which methods and tools are used in your good practice?

- bus trip – virtual or physical – with different stops of interest to passengers!
- the bus stops along the way, taking on new passengers/participants who want to join the journey
- the bus decides its route according to the interests of the passengers/participants – grouped according to location, or to theme
- a very good tour guide, to identify stops and what/how to learn about the places at the stops
- plenty of enjoyment and looking at all the sights/topics/technologies of interest
- new people to meet and chat on the bus – productive conversations
- can easily be an international tour bus for cross-visits

What do the methods and tools deliver?

- more knowledge to passengers on the journey
- more experience – having seen all the sights from the bus and getting off at the stops
- seeing practices 'over the fence'
- excellence in 'tour guiding' skills – advisors on field-trips and cross-visits

And for whom?

- farmers
- advisors
- policy-makers
- industry
- research farms and demo farms
- OGs
- any locations in rural areas that are seeking new visitors/customers

What are the success factors?

- bringing people with different perspectives on the bus, to share experiences and widen the mindset
- bringing people on the bus with shared experiences and common challenges – they are on a mission to find new solutions
- people who are excellent hosts experienced at welcoming people – they have excellent facilities and know how to time things
- more random choices of stops on different paths – new and rare settings!

What could be improved in the good practice or existing tools?

- planning is very important – who would be on the bus, what skills or stops would interest them and how (i.e. what are the learning mechanisms)
- it can be expensive
- virtual buses are an option and can be integrated with occasional in-person bus tours
- produce and feature real-life clips from stops/tours for communications – drawing in a wider audience/community

Observer's comments

Focus on and emphasise personal relations on the bus. It's exciting to see what happens when you put interested people on a bus for a duration of time. It's all about the vibe – excitement – feature some comedy, speeches from 'real-life', potentially some music! A good vibe leads to lots of exchange of views.

Good practice
The 'Farm Incubator' for young farmers

Which methods and tools are used in your good practice?

- placement of young, agriculturally inexperienced youth on farms to learn about farming and develop skills, aiming to become farmers/farm workers in the future
- some cross-over with the social farming model, potentially engaging with disadvantaged and uneducated youth with a primary emphasis on skills development for careers in agriculture
- partnership with industry, where relevant, in trials of new technology on farms (e.g. greenhouse equipment, animal health equipment, robotics)
- in the United States, a two-year, full-time placement is offered to successful applicants, funded by the government

What do the methods and tools deliver?

- a future career in agriculture to young people – highly employable
- highly developed skills in agriculture – 'skills of the future'
- new blood, new perspectives
- young participants entering agriculture after their placement – a high proportion from US experiences

And for whom?

- young people
- the agriculture and farming sector
- family farms without an heir
- industry seeking technology users/experts in the field

What are the success factors?

- new relationships on farms – embracing of new people
- flexible arrangements on farms – accommodating of new ideas, perspectives and preferences
- mentors to support youth and also the 'host' farms
- industry and government funding

What could be improved in the good practice or existing tools?

- have different actors involved in programme design: learning providers, advisors, policy-makers or industry and farming representatives
- prevent participants from being viewed as 'free labour'!
- ensure dedicated time for learning is built-in
- mentorship to co-design and lead learning pathways
- keep a focus on skills-development and autonomy of the young person on the farm

Observer's comments

Very interesting and possible transformative approach – for young people and for agriculture – but needs a lot of money and the participants need support!

Good practice
The 'Stable School'

Which methods and tools are used in your good practice?

- a 'farmer first' approach, with the methods and tools decided by farmers with input when necessary or when requested by facilitator/s
- farmers identify and define the problem or challenge and then set about addressing it and finding a solution
- open the group continuously to new members (farmer and others) who bring knowledge, as well as gain knowledge
- Develop a schedule for tackling problems/challenges that the group should work on by setting a timeline, to be updated regularly and revised when necessary, as well as reranked in terms of priority. As the group gains new knowledge, priorities, interests and needs will change.
- The learning venue is at the stables or any on-farm location. The stables can rotate between farms of members, corresponding to the learning focus/needs

What do the methods and tools deliver?

- highly relevant farm-oriented knowledge which is directly implementable
- a farmer-first learning approach, in response to farmers' needs and interests
- learning solutions in the farmers' language and by using farm infrastructure (often using existing resources, so not requiring new ones)

And for whom?

- farmers and their families and farm workers
- advisors and coaches who become involved, they see what is involved in a 'farmer first' learning approach
- benefits to society – greater farm sustainability
- policy-makers – greater learning in the AKIS

What are the success factors?

- an atmosphere of trust
- willingness of participants
- the experienced facilitator contributing to the building of trust
- working together/experimenting in the fields
- a sense of enjoyment
- curiosity about seeing other farms
- a sense of comfort by using the stables as a meeting place that represents a non-formal learning environment
- peer-to-peer relationships
- good organisation of each event, flexible but also with a plan
- an integrated plan, connections between the events and the learning challenges and solutions

What could be improved in the good practice or existing tools?

- the approach should be applied across the board to become a common approach in learning support
- incorporate this approach alongside traditional advisory activities
- international collaboration – connect with other farmers, potentially using social media and cross-visits
- incorporate a soft-skills, 'farmer-first' school for advisors

Observer's comments

Good communication and conversation are essential. Different groups of farmers have different challenges, or a different perspective on challenges, and this can be accommodated. When selecting challenges, avoid situations where it is like comparing apples to pears. Focus on common practices.

Good practice
Mediation between family partners: 'cards on the table'

Which methods and tools are used in your good practice?

- questions/discussion points written in brief on cards by family members/farm workers
- cards left on the table and the participants, whether family members or farm workers, choose one that they have not written to address
- all cards to be addressed in turn, although not all necessarily in one session
- the cards can be revised or amended
- participants engage in active listening
- advisors mediate by:
  - focusing on the mental attitude of participants
  - paraphrasing
  - posing the right follow-up questions or discussion points

What do the methods and tools deliver?

- open up a discussion, conversation and dialogue on roles, skills, competencies and interests on the farm/in the farming business
- carefully mediated by the facilitator, so the discussion is 'safe' and constructive
- revised roles on farms and agreement of all participants in relation to the roles
- sets trajectories and goals for lifelong learning and skills development to conform with the designated roles
- complementary roles are identified
- more fulfilment from farm work for participants

And for whom?

- farmers, their families and farm workers
- the sustainability of the farm by having workers achieving fulfilment in their roles and a greater pool of skills
- vital for the continuation of farming and relevant to successors in particular

What are the success factors?

- an atmosphere of safety
- a highly experienced facilitator, who is perhaps knowledgeable about mediation and counselling
- confidential – the facilitator emphasises this
- emotional understanding/empathy
- a focus on the topics/questions, rather than on the individuals
- a focus on the needs of the farm, not only the individuals

What could be improved in the good practice or existing tools?

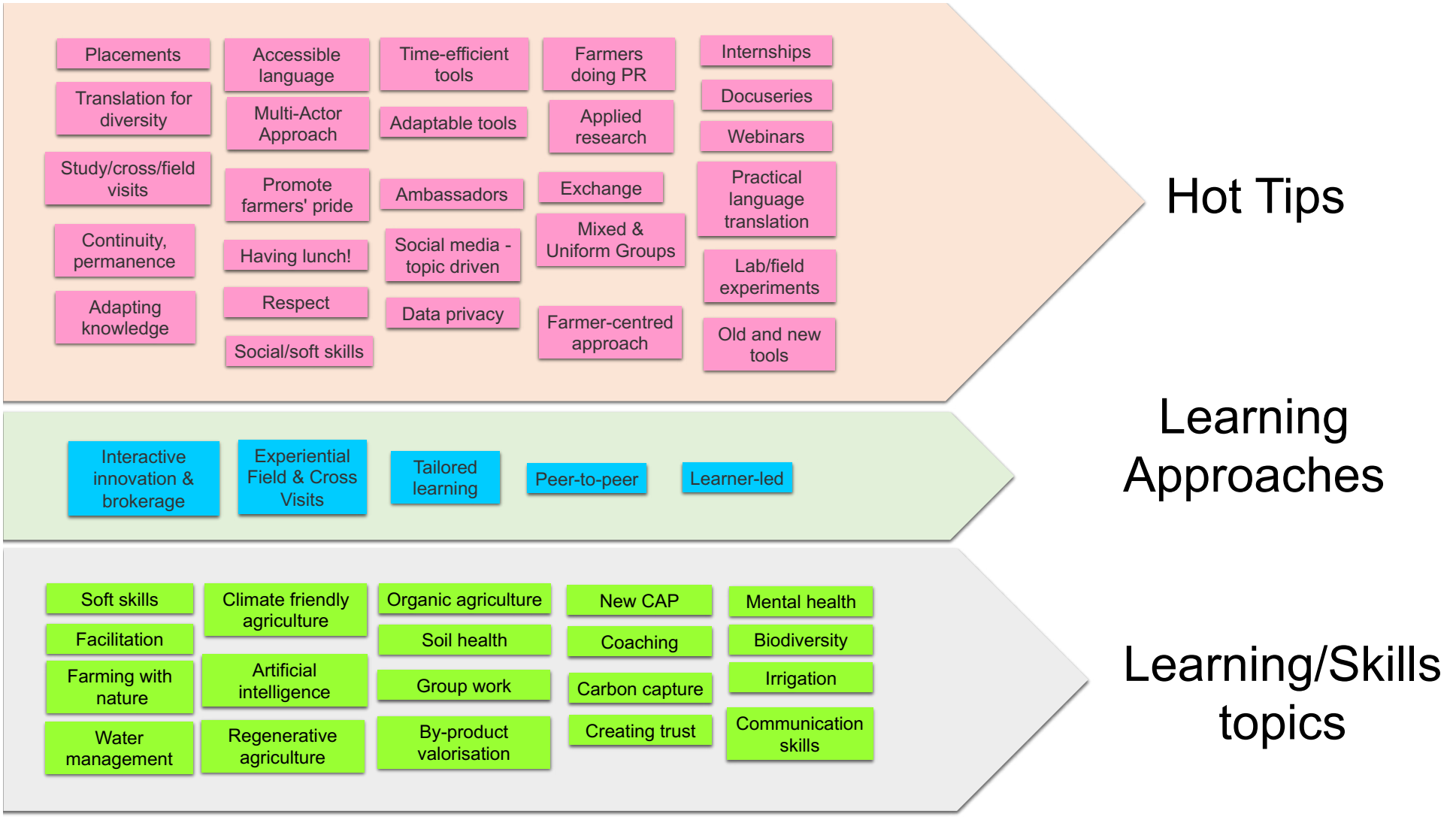
- get more people involved
- show case-studies of other farm families
- show how solutions were found in other families
- bring these issues (family issues) into the competencies and roles of the traditional advisor

Observer's comments

When a participant picks a card, the discussion should be opened up to include other participants and not just the participant who chose the card.

Across the full collection of good practices developed collaboratively by the participants, a number of trends were apparent. Figure 2 summarises key learning skills/topics, learning approaches and 'hot tips' for supporting these learning approaches that were identified by the participants.

Figure 2. Learning skills/topics, learning approaches and 'hot tips' for implementation: key trends in the collection of good practices



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4. Interactive Session 2: Enhancing the attractiveness of lifelong learning for advisors, trainers, farmers and foresters

Interactive Session 2 focused on enhancing the attractiveness of lifelong learning for advisors, trainers, farmers and foresters. The session was introduced by two inspiring examples, from both Belgium and Germany.

4.1. Inspiring examples: Enhancing the attractiveness of lifelong learning for advisors, trainers, farmers and foresters

A presentation from Patrick Pasgang, Boerenbond Projects vzw in Belgium addressed how field trips can improve knowledge in lifelong learning. Boerenbond Projects vzw is a partner in Horizon Europe's COREnet advisory network and field trips are emerging as a key instrument for learning within the project, aiming at upskilling advisors to support short food supply chains (SFSCs). The field trip is used as an instrument to contextualise an advisory journey (and the skills deployed) in a particular case. It highlights the value of advice from the perspectives of multiple family members involved in the case and clarifies the nature of the impact of the advice on the case. A 'traffic light' template is completed by the farmer/farming family to assess the influence of the advice, as well as for providing feedback to advisors on their effectiveness. A timeline, which compiles an inventory of the results of the 'traffic light' template over time, provides further insights regarding the effectiveness and impacts of the advisory journey and the transitions that occurred on the farm or in the company. The experience of Boerenbond Projects vzw is that the 'traffic light' approach illuminates long-term trajectories, generates continuous feedback, produces better outcomes and enhances lifelong learning for the advisor. The fundamental philosophy is that the better an advisor knows their client, and the better the nature of the advisory impacts are understood, the more relevant and effective becomes the knowledge exchange for innovation.

The second inspiring example was from Carola Ketelhodt, Chamber of Agriculture in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. A primary focus was on the shift from 'frontal teaching' or knowledge transfer with mostly 'no eye-level relationships' to working more interactively with actors on the ground (e.g. with farmers and consumers and using regional farmers' groups). A change in emphasis arising from this shift was determining the learning needs of clients' and using interactive events such as stables and field schools to support the learning approach. New, innovative and practical solutions emerged from an increased atmosphere of trust and openness shaping the learning environment. This was linked directly to higher quality and better experiences of the learning process for clients. EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs) and projects incorporating the multi-actor approach were identified as significant opportunities for learning. Such projects allow advisors to encounter new subjects and topics and they can learn about how to address new challenges and explore new ways of finding solutions. The *AcTivate* and *TriggeR ACTors* to deepen the function of the Innovation Support Services (*ATTRACTISS*) project were highlighted as a good example of how projects can interest and motivate advisors, provide education in soft skills, methods and tools, open up a network for exchange between colleagues, offer a view 'over the fence' into the other sectors/settings and evoke a sense of curiosity.

4.2. The challenge of making lifelong learning attractive

In Interactive Session 2, participants worked in six breakout groups, each themed according to different topics pertaining to the overall challenge of increasing the attractiveness of skills-development and lifelong learning.

Figure 3. The MakeIt behavioural framework

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The topics were derived from the MakeIt toolkit (Ingenta, 2016), which provides a framework, set according to a social marketing approach, of the various ways in which any product or service can be made more attractive. The full range of strategy types contained in the framework is presented in Figure 3. Specific types, particularly relevant to enhancing the attractiveness of skills-development and lifelong learning, were selected for the interactive session. Participants first interrogated the meaning of the strategy that their group focused on and then applied it to skills-development and lifelong learning taking a 'how to' approach. They also identified potential challenges and barriers to achieving the strategy. Participants shared their knowledge and experience and wrote their findings on post-it notes, which are summarised in storyboard form in Figure 4. The discussions are then expanded further in longer narrative form.

Figure 4. Storyboard summary of interactive session 2 discussions - copyright: EU CAP Network

How to make lifelong learning more attractive?
Emilio, a farm advisor, really has an appetite for learning. It invigorates him, his ambition, and his belief of what he can achieve! He wonders how to make lifelong learning more attractive for others... In an EU-level workshop, he and his colleagues share knowledge about how to address the challenge

Make it... achievable and easy
Alex describes how learning must have customised learning goals, that are achievable - in steps - for different learners. Different learners can want to achieve different things from the same learning initiative! The learning process must be attuned to different needs, goals, and the different benefits that people can gain! Support and substantiate for learners that their time is well spent.

Make it... intriguing and unexpected
Conor agrees, and shares his experience of using gaming approaches to create a sense of intrigue... He encourages learners to develop a futuristic timeline or story with twists and turns of experiences of failure and success. The story describes how learners might apply new knowledge in real life - on their farm or in their business. The stories are complete with characters and interesting personalities! Other learners contribute to the story by - 'what if...' interventions

Make it... timely
Agnes loves the idea, and she describes the relationship between lifelong learning and new beginnings! At a time of great transformation, learning can underpin a sense of learners' confidence in how to effectively respond to new challenges. She believes that strongly connecting the dots between new challenges and the types of (new and old) skills needed to address them is important in illustrating the value of learning. It is armour for current challenges and for the future!

Make it... meaningful and immersive
Christina shares her experience that learning is very personal... She argues that it has to be personal for new skills to be meaningful and applied in learners' daily lives! She emphasised the importance of embedding learning in the context of each participant's life story. Stories - different ones from different learners - are very compelling as a learning tool. Because they are personal, they are credible. A story is key, it is impactful and builds a sense of compromise and community.

Make it... empowering
Owen emphasised that people need to feel they can do it! The learning goals need to be achievable, as Alex had described, and people gradually build their confidence and their belief in what they can achieve! People need to feel heard in the learning process, and by being heard, perspectives widen. It is often said that knowledge is power, and it is true! Aftercare and coaching after participating in learning can be hugely empowering, supporting translation from knowledge to practice to confidence & empowerment!

Make it... social
A sense of fun and enjoyment was emphasised by Marco. People in a group on the learning journey can build social bonds that support them to continue. Excellent soft skills can build trust, solidarity and a sense of fearlessness in a group with it comes to learning. Social enjoyment can be the glue that keeps people on the lifelong learning journey. A sense of positive competitiveness within the group, safeguarded by ground rules can also stimulate learning.

We made it... attractive!
Together, the group of experienced colleagues shared knowledge and wisdom in meeting the challenge of making lifelong learning attractive. The highly relational aspects of learning were emphasised across all discussions - it's all about how people feel! Generating passion for learning by making learning processes interactive, personal and relevant to the achievement of benefits valued by learners were key lessons shared.

4.2.1. Make it Achievable, Make it Easy

The MakeIt framework aims to enhance the attractiveness of skills-development. Lifelong learning can be more attractive by making it achievable and making it easy. It advises setting **specific goals** that outline the new capabilities and achievements individuals can attain in the short, medium and long terms. To support goal attainment, the framework recommends offering clear pathways for success, such as through peer-to-peer learning sessions, online guidebooks and practical field experiences.

A pivotal aspect of the strategy involves building to **set people up for success**. An important part of the strategy is to **emphasise and create anticipation** as participants approach their goals, utilising customised milestones to mark progress. Simultaneously, the framework includes **'friction points'** to pre-empt potential errors, such as providing lists of common mistakes or failure factors to avoid.

Pertinent questions to consider are: What specific benefits will the learning provide to participants in terms of profitability or enhanced performance in metrics? It is crucial to guide learners in selecting learning modules and initiatives based on benefits that align with their priorities and objectives. This approach not only helps in establishing clear motivation but also ensures that the learning process remains relevant and impactful to their needs and goals.

Participants identified practical actions and strategies to make learning achievable and easy. They highlighted the importance of co-establishing a clear **vision with learners** for what is to be achieved. This is vital for creating **ownership**. In addition to co-creating vision, it is essential that learning objectives are co-created with participating farmers, advisors and learners. This ensures that programmes have objectives in language that are specifically tailored and practically focused in terms of the benefits delivered by programmes.

To ensure that skills-development and lifelong learning are both achievable and accessible, it is crucial to conduct these activities in accessible, on-site settings such as farms or other practice-oriented locations. Farmers and learners themselves should be involved, where possible, in delivering the training to make it easy and achievable. Where feasible, making it easy is highly enhanced by '**taking the training to the trainees**'. Local branches of advisory services and/or other 'non-bureaucratic entities' are important intermediaries in engaging and attracting learners in skills-development and lifelong learning.

For advisors, the real value of training is clarified by specifying how it will simplify and improve the life and work of an advisor and how the learning gained will become part of their work. Skills-development and lifelong learning must be **hands-on and practical** and the **practical and immediate impact** must be emphasised at all times possible. Practical, detailed cases are helpful in this regard; aspects of real-life cases that can be applied to other contexts should be brought to the learners' attention for brainstorming sessions.

It's important to offer **flexible attendance options in terms of** either physical settings or online or recorded learning session that are tailored to suit learners' schedules and their pace. Skills-development and lifelong learning options must also be **affordable** for targeted cohorts of learners to encourage uptake.

Participants proceeded to identify the challenges in making skills-development and lifelong learning achievable and easy. In addition to the strategies identified above the participants offered some solutions to those challenges. Standardised communications which are not targeted according to particular learner cohorts, who have different backgrounds and levels of knowledge, are likely to be ineffective. Issues relating to trust and motivation need to be addressed and a lack of investment in the required time into the learning agenda for building an **atmosphere of trust** jeopardises learning possibilities.

Learners are often under **time-pressure**, heightening the importance of the question of '**what's in it for me?**'. A significant challenge is to create a perspective of '**time well-spent**'. Effectiveness of the learned technique at the regional/local level (by the learners themselves) must be demonstrated in order to generate confidence and trust among target learners. This approach forms the foundation for scaling up the learned techniques effectively.

4.2.2. Make it Intriguing, Make it Unexpected

The MakeIt framework guides how skills-development and lifelong learning can be more attractive by making it intriguing and making it unexpected. It is important to '**emphasise novelty'**, i.e. that skills-development and lifelong learning can provide information and experiences that are either new or different, representing something learners haven't come across before and introducing an element of **prestige**. Skills-development and lifelong learning provide a mechanism to enable people to predict and foresee learning outcomes (e.g. through technology or an application). Participation may be encouraged by highlighting tangible benefits or the practical application of learning outcomes, throughout the process. OGs are particularly relevant as they often showcase a new, transformed way of doing things. Skills-development and lifelong learning can provide '**unexpected micro-moments of surprise'** e.g. interaction or animation (role play, 'speed dating' etc.) incorporating novelty and excitement. Technology may be emphasised, specifically new and novel technology showing future-oriented or forward-thinking aspects of the learning initiative. Gaming activities could be included in the learning approach to make it more exciting.

Participants identified a range of techniques to catch the attention of learners. Asking learners lead-up questions (based on problems and challenges experienced, for example) in a process to steer conversation towards a learning topic was proposed as a method for introducing a topic (as distinct from a top-down approach where a topic is introduced by the trainer, educator or advisor). Introducing a story from a completely different sector experiencing related challenges is likely to be intriguing to participants. Such **stories from other sectors** have particular potential to introduce new ways of identifying unexpected energy resources or unexpected new technology to use resources sustainably. A balance can be found between surfacing and sharing learners' existing knowledge and experience. For example, they can be assigned a task where they use their existing knowledge but build on it with knowledge outside of their comfort zones. Learners can be facilitated to contextualise a new learning topic and make it more personal by linking their current and future needs to their learning topic and to identify gaps that may limit embracing a new skill in practice. Videos and vlogs can be incorporated to a competition, where learners vote on the various aspects of the knowledge or technology shown in the videos from their own perspectives (including their relevance, credibility, feasibility, novelty and innovativeness).

An alternative to providing fixed and detailed programmes (e.g. learning objectives) for learning modules is to use intriguing titles and adopt a more experimental approach inspired by projects like i2Connect. Another idea was offering an award to participants, in the context of a field test for example, where participants create a story or plan of how they would test the skills or technology in the context of their own environment. The arts can be introduced to learning activities to stimulate creative thinking, envision the future and thereby enrich learning processes, for example by the use of drama, visual arts installations and by filming. Similarly, the 'Disney' method can be used to structure creative and inclusive learning processes, specifically for problem analysis, ideas generation and evaluation, and to co-create a plan of action using different ways of reasoning.

Games and entertainment can be incorporated into lessons to add a level of novelty, excitement and creativity. Participants can be invited to adopt a particular dress-code or costume (it can be as simple as 'wearing a hat and telling a story'or 'something old, something new'). Moments of surprise can be introduced throughout, such as the 'soil your undies' challenge – an interactive experiment in learning about soil health.

Challenges to achieving intriguing and unexpected learning outcomes were identified by participants. The standard skill sets of educators, trainers and advisors may include more creative approaches that require didactic tool kits that respond to diverse learning styles. In some cases, perhaps the 'insecurity of the boss' needs to be overcome, where learning providers are resistant to **experiencing vulnerability** and are resistant to the risk which can accompany experimentation. Learning providers need to be prepared for continuous learning and ready to fail and try again, just as learners should be.

4.2.3. Make it Timely

The MakeIt framework guides how skills-development and lifelong learning can be presented as more attractive by making it timely. Skills-development and lifelong learning relates to and responds to challenges in periods of transition (such as the twin transition). Skills-development and lifelong learning can relate to the creation of new beginnings, such as transforming farm enterprises (or farm advice) to adopt a new approach which is more sustainable. This is attractive to people who wish to adapt to necessary change or engage in more transformative action for the digital transition or to enhance sustainability or who aim at starting over and doing something completely different.

Participants identified that particularly careful preparation is required for timely skills-development. Change should be planned for and announced in advance, when based on adequate resources and advance design and scheduling. Learning modules should be proposed in advance to coordinators of learning providers or advisory services. Some experimental modules could be piloted annually to allow for the introduction of new topics. Focusing on a single sector as a lead case example may facilitate the preparation and piloting work. This may help to prepare much of the groundwork required before rolling out the scheme to other sectors.

In promoting the new topics to prospective learners, a 'helpdesk' approach to answer queries and explain new skills in the context of current and future challenges may be helpful.The aim is to promote awareness around new topics so they become popular with the learners. Communication tools, based on practical examples or possible future topics, could be effective, if built on the presentation of a range of cases which resonate with different cohorts of learners.

Other activities can be used to set new topics and learning initiatives on the agenda. The stakeholders, both learners and trainers, can be provided with insights on changes to regulations and laws before they are enacted. Advisors' future needs can be identified using tracking tools and then re-assessed once they are outlined. New skill needs can be identified by staying up-to-date with the market and particular sectoral needs. Usually, regular updates of training needs for advisors can help design and develop skills development options on a yearly basis. Skills-development and lifelong learning should, in general, be described not only as supporting the stakeholders in adapting to current challenges, but also in coping with future challenges (particularly in relation to issues such as climate and biodiversity). If the provision of timely formal training offerings is difficult to design and deliver 'on time', there are plenty of flexible, informal learning options.

The participants took part in identifying challenges to achieving timely skills-development and lifelong learning. Regarding planning and logistics, courses need to reach a minimum critical mass, and ideally be scalable. If courses take too long to fill up, participants who have to wait too long may drop out.

Identifying advantageous entry points for new topics in skills-development is vital. All existing programmes could incorporate an experimental module focused on the future of the countryside. Additionally, it is essential to pinpoint key moments in the life-cycle of a farm enterprise or company (e.g. the take-over, consolidation and the phasing-in or phasing-out), as new skills may be required at those stages. It is crucial to focus on generational renewal and on developing a diverse agricultural workforce with a view to 'feeding the new generation now'. Therefore, more diverse learners than landowners alone are important to target and engage.

To overcome lack of diversity in topics, there is potential to create short supply chains of knowledge, where advisory services, farmers, smart technology and IT providers/developers, innovation projects and other AKIS actors are joined together to learn from each other. Within the knowledge chain, stakeholders can share knowledge and their vision for the future. Different people learn in different ways, which must be accommodated across the knowledge chain by expert facilitators. To facilitate access to training, no formal registration should be required as it would encourage informal learning, which is an area that carries huge potential for timely learning.

4.2.4. Make it Meaningful, Make it Immersive

The MakeIt framework guides how skills-development and lifelong learning can be more attractive by making it more meaningful and immersive. It is important to present information regarding learning opportunities in the form of a story that provides context and establishes links to the real world for the learner in a meaningful way. In some ways, field visits to a farm provide an opportunity to do this as learners learn from the story or the case of a farmer on their farm in their own language and by using a narrative that is often more relevant and relatable to farmers as learners. When imparting new information, it can help to focus on contextualising information focused on a person, rather than vaguely defined groups, as this makes the information more personal, relatable and credible. Case studies and blogs or vlogs are good examples. It is important to demonstrate the purpose of everyday actions for the learner to understand their meaning and impact.

Participants highlighted how it can be powerful to use a real-life example to introduce new ways of thinking. The story should have meaningful attributes with a sense of purpose, or as participants said, it should be impactful to have an impact, and it should build on compromise and a sense of community. These are all key components of a good story.

A story can also be combined with conventional or top-down education and training approaches by providing sufficient time and space for participants to reflect on new skills and knowledge. By translating lessons learnt into their own personal stories, they can incorporate their individual situations, values and priorities into support for their everyday work.

Trainings should be based on the contexts, needs, and challenges of the learners that arise in their personal stories, which can be used as inspiration for choosing topics. Localised, contextualised training sessions are likely more meaningful for the learner, as it brings the training provider closer to the farmer. Heroes' journeys, farmers' kitchen discussions and life stories are likely to be meaningful to learners.

Personal relations between skills providers and learners are vital, as both parties should show how vulnerable they are in the learning process.

Participants identified challenges arising from providers' and learners' attitudes, mindsets and their sense of initiative. Initiatives vary, depending on whether learners get involved on a mandatory or voluntary basis. Challenges were also identified in relation to motivation, regarding continuity of attendance, when learners don't yet fully acknowledge their needs, and when they encounter the unexpected. While there is always uncertainty, there is a need to continuously find opportunities for gaining clarity throughout the learning process.

Regarding target groups, even learners within defined groups can have different starting points and different needs and interests. Also, actors are likely to have different expectations, and may come to learning processes with different preferences and also prejudices. These need to be surfaced and negotiated, using the appropriate soft skills.

A significant challenge which can limit learning processes are skills deficits in facilitation. Soft skills, mediation skills, active listening and social perceptiveness are needed for learning providers to lead the learning process and respond to different learners' needs, preferences and also learning approaches. Differences among learners can fuel the group learning process if mediated optimally – with learners learning from each other! Such soft skills are also vital in the process of technology design in order to create engaging and user-friendly interfaces. In the context of the proliferation of online training, such interfaces are vital for achieving the full potential that online training mechanisms offer.

4.2.5. Make it Empowering

The MakeIt framework guides how skills-development and lifelong learning can be perceived as empowering. Learning providers must reflectively ask themselves what the personal or individual-level rewards to be gained from learners engaging in skills-development and lifelong learning are. The framework guides how the learning process could be personalised, i.e. by empowering learners to achieve their own gains and address their own needs. Learners must be encouraged to be creative; by thinking 'outside of the box' and asking themselves 'what if' and 'how if' questions, they build confidence in their own abilities and do not rely solely on generic solutions.

Participants identified examples of ways in which this may be achieved. As a starting point, it is important to demystify what 'empowerment' is. Learners can be facilitated to create their own definition. Put simply, empowerment through learning can mean building the confidence and sense of competency of the trainee, so that when the learning process has concluded, they feel they 'can do it' in their own environment.

Outcomes and knowledge from skills development can be translated to empower learners (they 'can do it') through one-to-one clinics or meetings with learning providers and other experts, such as their peers and technology developers. At the level of the individual learner, each participant must feel that they are not only one in a group, but that they are part of a process that is dedicated to them, i.e. that it responds to their needs and they can use the skills and knowledge gained in their own environment. People need to feel they are 'heard' in the learning process, and by people being receptive to each other, their perspectives can be widened.

'After care' was recommended by participants, involving follow-up in the form of possible coaching to assist the application of new skills and knowledge in practice, where necessary, but also through the creation of a collaborative network where learners continue to be connected via, for example, a peer-to-peer group, an online platform or simply a phone-based messaging group.

Challenges to making learning processes empowering were identified by participants. Trainings can be 'too sophisticated' and inadequately connected to learners' realities. As a result, learners can feel excluded. Additionally, a lack of soft skills among trainers, educators and advisors was emphasised as a possible challenge. Both providers and learners may feel uncomfortable about participating in 'games' and participatory approaches in general. It can take time to gradually introduce such approaches and to widen the comfort zones of learners.

Other practical challenges concern the availability of social and cultural information and data regarding target learning cohorts – regarding their preferences, values, finances, traditions and working realities etc. Such data are important for evidence-based approaches to tailoring skills-development and lifelong learning for different learners' needs and preferences. A second important practical challenge concerns creating a single learning environment for diverse people. Possible responses to this challenge could be creating 'pods' of learners with similar needs and interests, 'buddy' systems where complementary learners are paired, and one-to-one clinics where learning approaches can be tailored though dialogue.

4.2.6. Make it Social

The MakeIt framework guides skills-development and lifelong learning to be more attractive by making it social. Learning processes can endeavour to create a sense of community peer-to-peer by fostering a collective sense of purpose in pursuing shared goals. A common example is a farmers' discussion group. To proactively ensure that this sense of community develops, strategies can be used to develop a sense of common purpose within a group by encouraging participating members to be open about their experience. Techniques can promote peer-to-peer support in building social relationships within a group that support more 'bold' discussions about new knowledge and exploring how to apply it in practice.

The natural desire that people have for feeling a sense of personal and team achievement can be leveraged. A sense of achievement at group level can be rooted in gains from individual learners, which are shared and celebrated within the group. Members can be encouraged to help and mentor each other, sharing knowledge to solve individual problems, as in the saying that 'a rising tide lifts all boats'. Through the experimental implementation of new skills, knowledge and technology on individual farms, projects or companies, all members can learn. Sharing knowledge means `multiplying knowledge', arising from adding one's own knowledge to the knowledge of others and benefiting from it.

Territorial relevance can be the 'glue' that can hold groups together, as can interest-based relevance. Familiar relationships and common interests can be developed to gain a sense of trust within a team. Existing groups can be diversified to focus on new topics, and certification of the learning of groups (rather than individuals within groups) can support the building of a sense of pride in their collective achievements as they collectively progress through various milestones.

Participants identified challenges in fostering a more social environment for skills-development and lifelong learning. Participants can have a sense of fear in disclosing to other learners the challenges they experience and the nature of their knowledge gaps. The group can achieve a dynamic of trust and openness by establishing 'ground rules' for their interaction and revise those if necessary. Creating an atmosphere of fun, enjoyment and relaxed sharing is also crucial. Social events, such as informal outings, field trips, dinners or casual gatherings over a 'cup of tea and a chat' can be effective in building a sense of friendship, trust, openness and finding common ground among participants.

Competition can arise between learners and although it can be leveraged to create a sense of fun and positive competitiveness, it can also be destructive to learners' confidence and willingness to share. Diversity in the group, in this respect, can increase such dynamics and must be carefully mediated. If differences prevail in the learning process, learners can experience a disconnect with each other. If mediated, however, differences can provide a sense of security arising from the belief that everyone is unique and has different knowledge and experiences – therefore people should feel that they can be themselves.

Across all six break-out groups, the importance of relationships between learning providers and learners and between learners within groups, was emphasised. Creating a sense of trust, collegiality, fun, excitement was identified as necessary for putting in place learning conditions that promote experimentation, adventurousness, confidence and a sense of achievement. These conditions are vital for the authentic inclusion of diverse learners in lifelong learning, and in turn, vital for innovation. All break-out groups agreed that when the trainers excel in soft skills, they achieve learning processes are successfully mediated and optimised for better outcomes.

5. Interactive Session 3: Opportunities, enablers and support: inspiring 'how to' examples from CAP and beyond

Interactive Session 3 was focused on identifying opportunities, enablers and support from the CAP and beyond. The session was introduced by a scene-setting introduction from DG AGRI to EU measures for supporting advisory and training services. This introduction was followed by four inspiring examples from Italy, the Netherlands, Bulgaria and Greece.

The scene-setting presentation from Inge Van Oost (Unit D.1) and Natalia Brzezina (Unit F.2) of **DG AGRI** began with the premise that 'knowledge and innovation are key for farmers, foresters and rural communities'. Therefore, the CAP has a cross-cutting objective to support knowledge exchange and innovation. Furthermore, through the CAP direct support for AKIS, there are further measures aimed at developing learning opportunities.

Specifically, Articles 77 and 78 of the regulation for CAP Strategic Plans provide support for innovation and knowledge co-creation, advice, training and knowledge-exchange. The following innovative and inspirational examples of activities are directly supported: vouchers for demand driven knowledge actions (advice, training, etc.); knowledge reservoirs focusing on practice-oriented outputs; public back-offices (thematic 'knowledge hubs') with advisors specialised in a theme closely interacting with relevant scientists and aiming to collect all practice-oriented information in that theme; national advisory networks; mobility budgets for cross-visits abroad; face-to-face thematic events; on-farm demonstrations, as well as e-learning, podcasts, etc. Article 15 sets out the specific requirements and obligations for advisors, whereas the arrangements for funding advisors are presented in Article 78. Article 15 also clarifies that advisors' advice must be impartial and that there is a requirement for them to engage in obligatory and regular training. Advisors, and the nature of their specialisations, should be evident for both farmers and the general public. A database on the Ministry's website with all available advisors, including details of their education, expertise and experience, such as the projects they have done, helps farmers choose in a transparent way the advisor who is most suitable for them, enabling them free and well-informed choice. Such an advisory database also facilitates the identification of synergies, for instance for connecting with OGs from different regions or EU Member States and with Horizon project consortia.

Furthermore, Article 126 of the CAP Strategic Plans regulation supports national CAP networking activities including events, databases and publications. Further examples include workshops, focus groups, cross-visits and brokerage events that are also organised at EU level by the EU CAP Network's EIP-AGRI Support Facility. These are activities that have been identified in interactive sessions of this seminar and they are vital in enabling access to effective approaches, methods and tools for skills-development and lifelong learning. The EU CAP Network's communication activities are also critical for in terms of their support for meeting the overall need to invest more in the sharing of knowledge and innovation. However, more engaged and strategic use of the support mechanisms and resources available is needed.

In addition to investments in the AKIS within CAP, there are also increased investments of the Horizon programme into R&I activities. Many Horizon projects are delivering new knowledge and innovations that are at the cutting edge of learning opportunities, but for them to be optimally effective, their activities must be channelled into interactive learning opportunities through a multi-actor approach (MAA) for projects and EIP-AGRI OGs. In addition, a new, targeted type of Horizon Europe projects, which includes an advisory network, is specifically dedicated to connecting advisors in an EU network with a view to share experiences on how to best tackle challenges and seize opportunities on farms, in forests and rural villages. Advisory networks represent new, EU-wide opportunities for learning, upskilling and innovation. Complementary to the advisory networks are the thematic networks, which focus on collecting existing knowledge and best practices on a given challenge or opportunity to make it available in easily understandable formats for end-users, such as farmers, foresters, advisors, consumers and others. Finally, there

is a range of other projects that can help advisors stay up-to-date with knowledge developments, e.g. the EU-FarmBook project and projects which support better integration of AKIS structures, i.e. the ModernAKIS project. Several posters were presented at the seminar, profiling Horizon-supported projects that are relevant for improving the skills of advisors and training providers:

- OrganicAdviceNetwork
- AdvisoryNetPEST
- NB Soil
- ClimateSmartAdvisors
- CoreNet
- EU4Advice
- ATTRACTISS
- EU FarmBook
- i2connect
- modernAKIS
- FAIRshare

5.1. Inspiring examples: Opportunities, enablers and support: inspiring 'how to' examples from CAP and beyond

Operationalising aspects of these EU policies at Member State level, the first of four inspiring examples came from Giorgio Trentin, Veneto region of **Italy**. In Italy, there is a regionally specific approach for the design and implementation of CAP measures, that supports different choices at the regional level concerning the type of measure selected. Each region has selected specific criteria and eligibility conditions for measures and their beneficiaries. In the Veneto region, one area that is interesting to focus on as far as skills development is concerned is the implementation of the measures to support OGs. The training body is one of the OG partners and the courses provided aim to attract farmers external to the OG who are interested in developing the innovation pioneered by the project. It allows farmers outside the OG to come into contact with researchers in the OG and it also facilitates peer-to-peer exchanges with farmers who are partners of the OG. A further focus of the training body within the OG is that it includes advisory bodies who can integrate the knowledge developed by linking it to the wider advisory activities across the AKIS.

An AKIS academy was established in Veneto in connection with the activity of the above training body within the OG, which focuses specifically on building advisors' soft skills. The academy aims to address topics outside of the advisors' 'comfort zones' and is hinged on the additional learning opportunities that the OG, as an innovative project, brings to the advisory services. Diverse communications and modes of learning are the main focus. Examples consist of building better relations between advisors and their clients (by earning trust and learning how to listen), enhancing farm demonstration activities (by simulation exercises for improved learning) and collaborative innovation by experimental and co-productive learning. These examples of learning initiatives often involve collaboration with and input from Horizon projects for added innovative knowledge.

The second inspiring example came from the **Netherlands**. Doreen Verbakel, Department of Strategy, Knowledge, and Innovation at the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality provided an interesting example of a tool that provides thematic knowledge regarding the targeting of different learner cohorts and responding to their learning needs and preferences. The main approach of the Department of Strategy, Knowledge and Innovation to deliver this is based on understanding the motivational drivers of the

target groups and adapting the 'learning offer' of training providers accordingly. There is an emphasis on the significance of recognising advisory services as a main entry point for skills development and lifelong learning. Persona groups (based on research with learner cohorts) were used and they identified the following main target groups: 'Sober – get your hands dirty', 'Goal oriented go-getter'; 'Conscious grower'; 'Ambitious career-maker'. Understanding each one's motivations, preferred learning approaches and needs of these key target groups allowed for the tailoring of suitable learning offers. The learning offers varied from formal learning on the job, short trainings in small groups and one-to-one coaching to more informal buddy systems and guided intervision.

The premise of a 'skills-tool for transition pathways' developed by the Department is that farmers already have many skills and that they can build on their skills by taking transition paths towards new farming practices. These new farming practices are likely to use many of the existing skills, but there are skills gaps, which can be bridged through learning. The skills-tool, which identifies these gaps and opportunities to bridge them (also taking into account learners' personal situations), can be used by farmers independently or with advisors. The Department's further activities focus on permanent education for advisors and lifelong learning investments that better connect the AKIS, offers of vouchers for advice, support to demonstration farms, as well as support for participating in Horizon Europe, Operational Groups and other EU initiatives.

The third inspiring example was offered by Dimitar Vanev of **Bulgaria**'s National Agricultural Advisory Service's (NAAS) involvement in Horizon projects, currently: ModernAKIS, ClimateFarmDemo and ClimateSmartAdvisors. A range of learning opportunities were identified from the engagement with both Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe projects, including networking opportunities to exchange experience, develop communities of practice, cross-visits and capacity-building camps and new learning materials and toolkits. Demonstration farms were specifically identified as a powerful learning tool. Experience has found that farmers and advisors prefer learning from and communicating with each other and that innovative knowledge made tacitly when visiting farms allows for the uptake of new skills, knowledge and technology in a more explicit and realistic way among participants. This learning dynamic facilitates quicker and more effective dissemination of innovations.

Benefits from participating in Horizon projects for lifelong learning were identified, with a particular focus on advisors. The development of advisors' soft skills (through projects such as I2Connect) was identified as a distinct advantage. NAAS has easier access to knowledge through the partner networks of existing projects, and also from networks established by previous projects. Furthermore, advisors now interact and cooperate with actors from research, education and farmers' organisations. The result is far greater cross-fertilisation of knowledge and enrichment of the Bulgarian AKIS. EIP-AGRI OGs and Erasmus+ were identified as offering greater future potential in this regard.

The fourth inspiring example came from Effie Lazaridou, New Agriculture, New Generation in **Greece**. Strengthening the AKIS took is key to this example, with a particular focus on how to use EU funding opportunities to integrate non-mainstream education and skills. Key areas of activity seek to create opportunities for entrepreneurship among youth, by building capacity, expanding advisory networks, nurturing innovation and encouraging collaboration and dialogue. Two core approaches that facilitate these activities are the use of farmers groups' and local networks as catalysts for learning and taking a 'farmer-to-farmer' approach to 'train-the-trainer'.

Non-mainstream activities such as Queen Bee Rearing involve older, more experienced rearers and prospective younger custodians exchanging knowledge to sustainably transform the bee-keeping industry. Another example of future-proofing concerns a Greek agri-food treasure – the mastic gum trees. In collaboration with university researchers and growers' cooperatives, a knowledge exchange programme is under way in 24 rural villages. Crucial to the success of the approach applied by New Agriculture, New Generation is to empower farmers through knowledge, adopting the farmer-to-farmer learning approach, the engagement of local actors for support and implementing EU funding.

5.2. Learners', providers' and EU support for skills-development and lifelong learning

In the Interactive Session 3, participants worked in break-out sessions, brainstorming the diverse categories of learners that must be targeted and engaged in lifelong learning and the diverse learning providers that exist throughout AKIS. Figure 5 presents the consolidated results from the break-out sessions, profiling the diverse learners (in yellow) and learning providers (in pink). The main EU support mechanisms that can be leveraged to enhance learning opportunities were also identified (in blue). The results presented in Figure 5 provide a useful guide in ensuring that a sufficiently diverse population of learners are targeted and matched with suitably diverse learning providers and initiatives.

Following the mapping (of learners and providers) exercise, participants collaboratively identified and discussed their top three instruments, projects and initiatives that carry most potential for skills development and lifelong learning in the context of the twin transition.

The top three activities selected by each of the twenty break-out groups were diverse, yet some main common themes emerged, which were aligned with the principal activities supported by Articles 77 and 78 of the CAP Strategic Plans Regulation.

The first theme related to the valuable opportunities for learning that come with **cross-visits** transnationally in Member States. Opportunities offered by EIP-AGRI OGs for rich and diverse cross-visits were flagged, as well as the opportunities offered by Erasmus to build 'alliances for innovation' across Europe through education, training, youth and sports initiatives. **Brokerage events** connected to cross-visits were recommended, and co-hosting arrangements involving farmers and other 'on the ground' practitioners together with universities were identified as a promising approach. Cross-visits that showcase wide-ranging expertise and forms of knowledge (for example from technology installers and suppliers, as well as users) on demonstration farms were identified as highly promising.

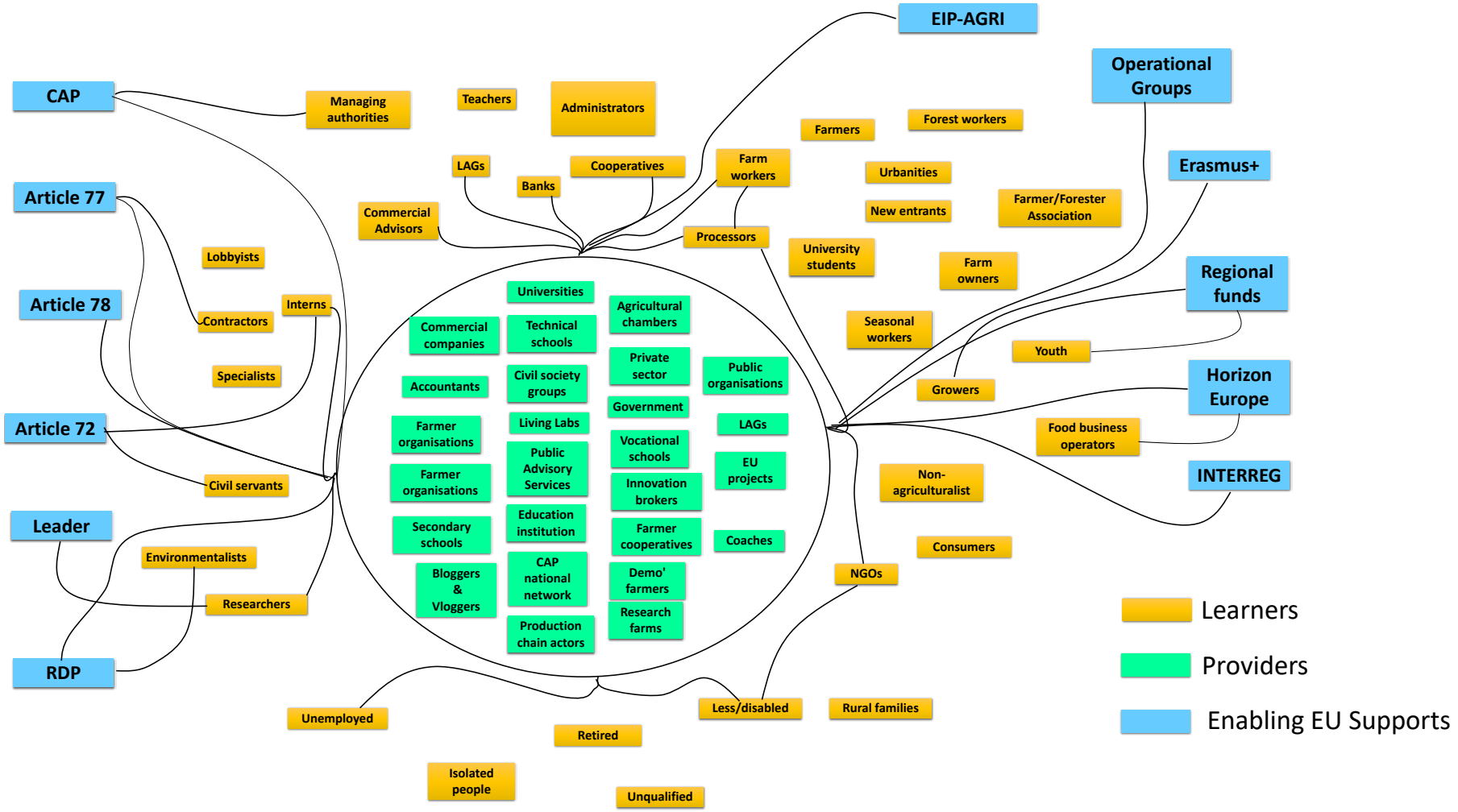
Opportunities to organise **cross-sectoral activities** were identified, where agriculture is 'opened up' to the experiences and innovations of non-agricultural sectors. EIP-AGRI OGs were identified as a locus for potentially facilitating partnerships and collaboration with non-agricultural sectors and actors. Diversity was a theme that consistently emerged in the break-out groups, particularly in relation to the range of learners that initiatives should ideally engage: new entrants, those changing career paths, the unemployed, female farmers, seasonal workers and consumers of rural products. The usefulness of the **voucher system** for demand-driven knowledge actions (in terms of advice, training etc.) was emphasised across groups, as a mechanism to access diverse and new forms of knowledge.

The transformative power of **peer-to-peer learning** was emphasised in addition to the **multi-actor approach** (MAA) where advisors and other educators are trained to deploy the highest standards of soft skills to enrich learning and make it more accessible, intuitive and experiential for farmers and other learners. A '**train the trainer**' approach for advisors to enhance their skills in this regard was identified, as was the potential for advisors to acquire '**micro-credentials**' in their lifelong learning journey. E-learning, podcasts and vlogs or blogs were identified as sufficiently flexible to be of use in busy working environments. This theme intersected with the potential of cross-visits and other experience-oriented learning activities that create a sense of excitement and interest among learners as they come into contact with new settings and cases. This theme also relates to the outcomes of Interactive Session 2 on enhancing the attractiveness of learning initiatives by creating a sense of anticipation and enjoyment in the context of field trips and cross-visits.

Horizon Europe projects were identified as a valuable source of learning, by addressing practical and diverse topics that are crucial for achieving the twin transition. Involving farmers in the design of projects was identified as an opportunity to enhance the readiness of applying the knowledge generated by Horizon Europe in practice. The integration of national advisory networks particularly through networks established under Horizon Europe was highlighted as a promising area of new activity. These initiatives aim to upskill advisors to enhance their impact in supporting skills development and lifelong learning of farmer clients. Specific Horizon projects were identified as having significant potential, i.a. the EUFarmBook, I2Connect, ModernAKIS, Attractiss, CORENet and the EU4Advice were among the numerous projects identified. The results from such projects should be learner-oriented and easy to interpret. This approach aims to value the reservoirs of knowledge developed to ensure greater impact on the ground.

Interactive Session 3 was summed up by using an online poll, where participants identified the concrete actions, tools and methods that farmers would use when returning home. The results of all polls conducted at the seminar are presented in Annex 1.

Figure 5. Amalgamated results of the brainstorming of learners (yellow), providers (green) and EU-level supports (blue)



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6. Conclusion

The focus of this seminar was on skills development and lifelong learning in the context of the challenge of the twin green and digital transition in agriculture and, simultaneously, making sure the transition is socially fair and just. In this regard, the important questions of *what* (the skills), *who* (the people) and *how* (learning processes) were mainstreamed throughout the seminar's three main interactive sessions. The sessions were themed according to key challenges; the enhanced delivery mechanisms of skills development and lifelong learning, the increased attractiveness of skills-development and lifelong learning and embedding skills development and lifelong learning in policy and practice.

The Common Agricultural Policy offers various interventions to deliver better knowledge and skills to farmers and their advisors, but it also offers a fit-for-purpose framework to advance skills development and lifelong learning, which should be put to the best possible use. There is enormous opportunity from informal learning opportunities within AKIS – grounded in enhanced and expanded opportunities in project-based learning and knowledge exchange activities – as well as from more traditional formal learning opportunities that are also expanding in terms of their variety and reach. Both informal and formal learning opportunities were central themes across all three sessions of the seminar.

Interactive Session 1 focused on existing and new methods and tools for effective training and provision of skills and generated a significant knowledge base of good practices that show great variety but also an approach that is consistent to some degree. In the context of delivering skills for the twin transition – identified as mainly oriented towards soft skills and skills necessary to address climate change and biodiversity loss – five main learning approaches were identified as particularly effective. Participants identified customised approaches that are tailored to diverse learner cohorts that foster learner-led and peer-to-peer learning and incorporate interactive innovation as highly effective. Furthermore, across these approaches, the potential of experimental learning, particularly through cross-visits, emerged as very promising.

The question of increasing the attractiveness of skills development and lifelong learning was the focus of Interactive Session 2. Participants applied the MakeIt framework to develop diverse and creative practices to make learning more meaningful i.e. social, empowering, immersive, achievable, easy, timely, intriguing and unexpected. Across all break-out groups, the importance of relationships between learning providers and learners and between learners themselves, was emphasised. The predominant skill set identified as essential across all break-out groups was proficiency in soft skills. This is crucial for ensuring that learning processes effectively attract and engage learners 'wholeheartedly' and that learning is successfully mediated and optimised. The integration of learning outcomes in the participants' working lives serves as evidence of impactful results on the ground.

Enabling supports from the CAP and beyond to enhance the full range of learning opportunities was the focus of Interactive Session 3. A diverse range of learners were identified as linked to wide-ranging formal and informal learning opportunities within AKIS. Participants identified opportunities to leverage CAP and other support for learning which, consistent with the previous sessions, emphasised the potential of cross-visits, peer-to-peer learning and the multi-actor approach (directly supported by Horizon Europe, EIP-AGRI and other initiatives). Furthermore, participants recognised the potential benefits to be gained from cross-sectoral cooperation for skills development and life-long learning by gathering lessons and good practices outside of the agriculture sector in terms of effective approaches, engagement of learners and collaborative, creative partnerships.

The seminar generated rich, diverse and practical knowledge from its expert participants regarding the three challenges it addressed. While one of inspiring examples presented early on at seminar used the quote '*you don't know what you don't know*' (by Socrates) to emphasise the importance of continuously exploring the needs of learners so that they addressed by learning providers; the paraphrase *'You know what you know'* was used in the summing up of the seminar by DG AGRI in recognition of the vast and diverse knowledge that was discussed at the event.

The specific details of what transpired during the event are too extensive to capture in this summary report, yet the event's core themes, topics and messages are intended to provide an *aide-memoire* and inspiration in relation to key strategies and approaches that can be taken to enhance and accelerate learning for the twin transition. A key message to ensure a just transition is to maintain an emphasis on diversity. By engaging with a greater diversity of learners – the full range of whom are working in, involved in or influencing agriculture – the impact of skills development and lifelong learning can leverage the potential of individuals, agriculture and society as a whole.

Annex I. Poll results – participants' responses

Question 1. Do you engage with the following stakeholders in education/learning/ skills development activities?

Stakeholders	Responses
Farm advisors	77%
Family-owner operators	61%
Youth	60%
Farm managers	57%
Women	54%
Cooperative/organisation personnel	48%
Older farmers	45%
Family members/workers	43%
Professional farm personnel	41%
Qualified farm personnel	35%
New entrants	34%
Hired workers	21%
Migrant/'foreign' workers	16%
Hired workers from local regions	15%
Seasonal workers	14%
Unremunerated workers (family/local)	12%
Contractors	12%
Indigenous peoples	7%
Casual employees	5%
Transient workers	3%

Question 2. What concrete actions/tools/methods that you heard about at this seminar will you use when you return home?

- Make a presentation for advisors
- Short videos of one, three or five minutes
- Farmers' working groups
- Cross-visits for farmers
- Establishing demo farms
- On-site activities
- Improving soft skills for both advisors and farmers
- More training
- Regarding the attractiveness of the sector: go do something in person – we are resourceful!
- More cooperation with veterinary faculties
- Farmers' corner, drinks or meet-ups
- Very interesting group work on storytelling
- Be a good listener
- Systematically feed og results into training and advice to broaden the dissemination of innovative practices
- The erasmus programme's mobility budget could be used for sending our staff (and farmers) for trainings abroad
- Adapt training based on the type of farmer
- Kitchen talk
- Training farmers to be trainers
- Field trips
- Connecting with other advisors and strengthening peer-to-peer advisory services
- Demo farms and peer-to-peer dissemination
- ERASMUS+ for training advisors
- Peer-to-peer activities
- Peer-to-peer learning
- Soft skills are needed to enable innovation to tackle climate change
- Tap into the potential of the erasmus programmes
- Engage farmers in using digital tools
- Video podcasts for farmers
- Podcast to communicate
- AKIS academia
- Structural training assessment survey and programme to determine offer for the year
- Work on social skills
- Peer-to-peer interactive time-bound blended learning
- The 'bar' method used in the first session
- Detailed personas
- Farms demo
- Forestry rocks!
- Advisory training focusing on methodology, especially for young and unexperienced advisors
- The use of personas for developing training curricula
- Field trip, demo farming
- Experimental training
- Farming personas and makeit toolkit
- Operational groups to get started under the new budget framework
- Localised blended learning approaches
- Different types of farmers' discussion groups
- Allowing participants to advance at their own pace
- Field trips
- The voucher system for advisory services
- Demo farms
- Bus tours
- Field visits
- Soft skills for advisors
- Social and perceptive skills are key
- AKIS Academy, ATTRACTISS lifelong training
- Excursions
- Inclusive knowledge transfer and empowering farmers
- Farm days
- Innovative interaction
- Improvement to the design of training programmes
- Teach the teacher
- Learner personas
- Exchange of experiences on the international level
- Support for the dissemination after the project is done
- Farm demo
- The MakeIt toolkit
- Advisor trips to other countries
- Cross-visits of groups and ambassadors

- Interactive learning
- Kitchen farmers' training
- Online learning
- Peer-to-peer training
- Training advisors and training of farmers for innovation

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