



modern **AKIS**

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AKIS in action: Fostering knowledge flows in practice

Q&A Documentation

Networking event on November 29, 2023 - Online

Building knowledge flows on the road: the inspiration bus trip

Marleen Gysen and Tom Schaecken, Boerenbond, Belgium

Q: Regarding the agrivoltaics and the biochar sites, did you extrapolate data on the interaction of the three practices? Is there any background which supports more information for the participants?

A: all information is on hyperfarm.eu. There is one tab on publications, including scientific publications, practice abstracts, presentations, news articles, videos, publications for the broader public. This material is on agrivoltaics as well as on biochar demonstrations. There are no figures on the visited sites, because they are not operated by the HyPERFarm project itself.

Q: How did you identify this sites that you visited? How did you select them and convince farmers to participate? What was the process?

A: The idea with the bus trip already existed when the project proposal was prepared and was therefore already included in the proposal with a commensurate budget. Due to this we could afford a more luxurious bus.

The bus trip was in May 2023 and the planning started at the end of 2022 during a partner meeting. The farms were selected with the HyPERFarm consortium. As Germany is easier to reach, specifically the German partners were approached, that had been working over the last years with research institutes. Also the Julich institute in the west of Germany was visited. As soon as the list of potential demonstration sites and different set-ups was created, it was not difficult, but time consuming.

In February and March 2023, the selected farms and research institutes were contacted by Tom Schaecken. The farms visited received a small fee, some hundred euros, but this was not what convinced them to participate. The farmers were proud and keen to exchange with our participants (researchers, other farmers, advisors, technology providers, etc.). However, drafting this programme for two days was time consuming.

End of March the bus trip was advertised via the network of Boerenbond and ZLTO (a Dutch partner that often contributes with Boerenbond but is no project partner in HyPERFarm), and networks other project partners.

Through the EUFRAS mentorship programme also an Austrian demonstration site was included. The bus trip engaged 40 participants quite much, 2 full days in May, which made the organisation again time consuming. Nevertheless, it was rather easy to fill the participants list.

Q: Did the participants participate the whole time or was there a hop-on-hop-off situation?

A: There was a possibility to join two visits by car, but it was not really a hop-on-hop-off situation.

Q: Did you engage previously with the farmers? Did you put any expectations on them? Did you prepare something with them? How did that work?

A: With the farms we visited, there was high engagement beforehand, discussing our and their expectations from the visit. We chose the visits wisely beforehand to provide different set-ups and technologies, therefore it was also important for us to exchange with the researchers and farmers beforehand.

Q: Do you consider enlarging the bus trips, possibly to other regions and countries? Do you plan to organise future bus trips? What is the trajectory on this?

A: The next bus trip takes place in May 2024. Unfortunately, our budget is limited, but we could discuss having bus trips in other countries jointly with other organisations. However, the language can be a barrier. Some days before our last bus trip, we realised that we had different languages on the bus but it was no problem at all during the whole trip, not for the participants, not for the farmers. But as a multi-country trip, I imagine this would be more challenging.

Q: How did you finance the bus trip, where did you find a bus with such a special equipment?

A: We looked for bus companies that sent us offers. We knew they existed with such equipment. The trip was not cheap, also as it was for 2 days, including accommodation and lunches. Usually the bus trip is only for one day, even if we go to the UK, but this time there were many farms and set-ups included. The trip was around 800km, which would have been too much for one day.

The budget for this bus trip was financed by the European project, the budget was included in the proposal. There was no fee for the participants.

Q: As we are living in times of an energy crisis, many countries and farmers are interested in setting up agrivoltaics or photovoltaics installation to diversify their income. There is a need to balance the primary production with the energy production. Did you address this in your inspiration bus trip?

A: Absolutely, we did address this. A conclusion was that farmers are very interested in the agrivoltaics, at least our participants, but there is a lot of pressure on land especially in the North-West of Europe. So we focused really on keeping the crops. We often see companies approaching farmers proposing to set up a photovoltaic installation, but luckily we see that farmers are very reluctant to that. This balance definitely needs to be found, and hopefully legislation will help with that. In Flanders it is not allowed to put photovoltaics on agricultural land, except when it is a combined production, like agrivoltaics. But we still need a very, very good definition of what is agrivoltaics. This is an issue in the whole of Europe.

May I end with an anecdote why we need a multi-actor approach? At the first agrivoltaics site we visited, a site from Nexus sun, a commercial company in Germany, they had a big field with vertical panels and everyone was really stunned about it. And one of our participants afterwards said in a bus "my husband would not be happy with this on our fields, because he will not see his potatoes with the vertical panels". From a research view it was very interesting but our farmer participants instantly said "very nice, but I will not be able to see my field anymore". So as a synthesis of why we need an AKIS approach.

Linking research to practice: the Speeding Up Innovation event series

Florian Herzog, Austrian Chamber of Agriculture, Austria

Q: Before the Speeding Up Innovation events series started, did you already carry out similar events in Austria or have you taken a completely new approach with this kind of event?

A: We were already trying bits and pieces and were always trying to get more research partners involved, as we have a continuous training plan for advisors. We tried to also get slots at research conferences to communicate needs of advisors there, but we have not had any event series like "Speeding Up Innovation". It was a completely new approach, that we saw necessary also with the discussions on European level on AKIS and innovation. We were actively involved in this discussion but we needed kind of a bracket to bring this theoretical discussion on the ground and to our teachers and advisors.

Q: You said in your conclusions that you have now as a learning to work with those who want and that take ownership. What does ownership mean in this context? What is the level of commitment that you expect from the participants, also possibly in the follow up?

A: The kick-off event of "Speeding Up Innovation" was in 2021 where we introduced general AKIS concepts. There, we also asked the target group on where they see the biggest need to accelerate this transfer between research and practice. From this input, we had a list of several topics. It was important to choose the focus topics, which over the years, became more and more specific (i.e. the first events were on livestock and plant production, whereas this year [2023] this was more detailed and concretised e.g. climate change – challenges for plant production). The challenge then was to find people who organise this with us and our unit as the service station to organise the event.

We contribute the knowledge on AKIS and knowledge transfer, but all the technical expertise has to come from experts. In the beginning we observed hesitance as participants were usually confronted by topical workshops instead of different methodologies.

With ownership, I meant that we therefore work with people who are interested and we are now a good team. The first events were very successful and now interest is growing and we receive requests from different sectors as focus topic. The subject-matter experts are co-organisers and support with organising the event through topics. This is also in cooperation with the research department of the agricultural ministry that provide results from funded research projects. The cooperation is very good and we work on the goal to provide an event with relevant topics for the target group and also trainings on their daily work in advisory services.

Q: The technical topics addressed by "Speeding Up Innovation" being also possible Communities of Practice (CoP) – How big, flexible, dynamic should this CoP be, what is the optimum size, how should they be governed. Do you have any experience you can share?

A: I am happy to share all the experiences in the course of the next 6 years of the modernAKIS project. We are getting now a good overview in Europe on what groups are there. When we started with this series the main goal was to link and connect the actors so they could network with each other. Now we realise that it is more important to have a follow-up and look at the results. Results need to be further discussed and ideally also implemented. So now we are working on a concept for the next year, which I hope to present more of them.

As we are a project partner in the modernAKIS project, we need to build a CoP on national level that focuses on the AKIS functions and will also be a support service for the AKIS Coordination Body in Austria. As a first step, we plan that the outputs from the "Speeding Up Innovation" series feed into this CoP. This CoP will be rather small, including 15 key AKIS actors of different organisations.

Q: How are you engaging the stakeholders and participants? What are the activities to get this community to come to the events?

A: It is very crucial for the success of the event that we integrate all the key stakeholders in the respective thematic area in the beginning of the planning process and implementation. For example in the "Speeding Up Innovation" event on organic agriculture, we evaluated the most important actor groups we need to involve.

The organisation was shared between the ministry, our organisation, FIBL, BOKU University with an organic institute and a big organic farmer association. With them, we built a core organisational team where we always had backstopping to plan and exchange ideas on key notes and thematic workshops. We also discussed with them the list of research projects we wanted to give the floor to.

The workshops were also hosted by the different partners of the coordination team, but with the same methodologies and formats.

We also cannot pay the organisations, this is again the ownership I addressed. These organisations participate, because they see the need to bring forward their sector and AKIS in their sector.

Q: How do you finance the "Speeding Up Innovation" events? What is the cost in terms of money but also in terms of human resources needed for the preparation?

A: We are not looking too much to the financial side, because this is not a mission or task we have. It is because we think this is an added-value in the events and we and our participants want to make them happen. A total budget of around €2.000 per event comes from the national funds for the continuous training plan, where we pay room costs and honorary for speakers. The event is one day with around 70-100 participants. The whole organisation team bring in their own resources. The time effort depends on your role. For example we have a technical expert who is also the moderator in the discussions. These persons do not have too much effort. In our organisation I would say the effort is about 150 hours manpower for everything (moderator + organisation) and the other organisations contribute to it.

Bringing new knowledge to practice: the Latvian demonstration farms

Kaspars Žūriņš, Latvian Advisory and Training Centre, Latvia

Q: Concerning the practical implementation of the measure of demonstration farms in the [CAP] Strategic Plan (SP), did you consider using simplified costs options as lump sums? Is this complex in the implementation? How was the day-to-day handling of the measure?

A: There is an ongoing discussion and in the CAP SP 2023-2027 it is planned to use the simplified cost option or lump sum. We will see how this will be in practice, because at the moment our focus is on the greening activity implementation, not the demonstration site. We see that there is a similarity in costs, so you could use simplified cost options, which could be easier to use. However, this is allocated to a project place and you have to justify the use well to the paying agency in any case. The plan is to use the lump sum model for the current period.

Q: How were the demonstration farms selected? Where did the innovation come from (research, farmers?) and what criteria did you consider eligible for a demonstration or an innovation in terms of topic or technical application?

A: We are certifying our advisors on several levels and to be involved in demonstration, there needs to be an additional training and certification. This means that our farmers who are participating are involved through advisors. Involving new farms has become more and more difficult to offer a wider diversity to participants. There are not many farms that can be included as demonstration farms, especially for horticulture or sheep breeding, but if they are eligible we would like to involve them. And regarding innovation, this can come from science or from commercial companies (e.g. strip-till, no-till – technology exists but is not widely known/used). Suggestions for cooperation could also come from outside of Latvia from advisors or science. The topics themselves are defined 2-3 years before demonstrations take place.

Q: Do you allow farmer-led innovation, for instance if a farmer has developed something new, can they propose themselves?

A: The farmer could push his idea through a farmer or advisor association, because the ideas come together here and are appointed for implementation. This is a longer process, short-term ideas cannot be included. This would rather be a topic for an EIP project.

Q: Do you prepare the farmers to do a presentation? Do you do a training with them, as some are hesitant to speak in public?

A: This is truly challenging and yes we have discussions and methods beforehand to prepare them how to approach the demonstration. There are also technical questions (e.g. number of participants regarding technical equipment). Usually, small groups with around 30 people are preferred and easier to handle for the farmers.

Q: You have an inspirational collaboration in teams around the demonstration farms. How are the participants checked upon quality and independence? Do you ask for specific profiles, is there a register, etc.? Is this important for you? How do you approach this?

A: There are two aspects. One is the technical quality, which is quite well developed in Latvia and can be checked by the paying agency. As an organiser you are registered in the database of this paying agency and they can request to make the geolocations or the pictures of the event online to technically check if it is well organised. The second part is the content. Here we try to approach it by a team that are supervising the project. They are mostly involved associations as external supervisors to monitor the process. The results are published yearly, which is subject for evaluation.

Q: The farms where the demonstrations take/took place, do they get any funds? Not for the demonstration itself, but beyond that.

A: Yes, this is part of our expenses. It is not much but compensates a bit this one-day event, which we think is fair. The maximum per year is around €15.000 for a demonstration, and around €1.500-€2.000 go to the farm, depending on the theme and farm involvement.