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AKIS in action:

How Knowledge and Innovation Systems Drive Organic Farming Forward

Networking event on October 15, 2025 - Online

Connecting Organic Farmers, Advisors and Researchers: AKIS Fact Sheets from OrganicTargets4EU

Ambra de Simone, Project Coordinator and R&I Associate Manager IFOAM Organics Europe, Belgium

How participatory research contributes to agroecological transition – introducing the ÖMKi On-Farm Living Laboratory

Gerda Jónász, Lead researcher, ÖMKi Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, Hungary

AKIS that delivers: Estonia's organic lessons

Merit Mikk, Estonian Organic Farming Platform, Estonia

Moderation: Florian Herzog, Austrian Chamber of Agriculture

Q&A Session

Q: How are the decision funding and management structures around the ÖMKi living-Labs organised? What is the role of advisory services in all the processes, identifying the problems, implementing the trials or experiments, and then also in the dissemination of the results.

A: Gerda Jónász: I'm not part of the daily operations of the living labs. Coming to the management structures and the decision-making, most importantly, as I have mentioned, there is basically a central coordination of designing the research trials. But also in this process, the farmers are actively present. So it's important that the trials can actually be implemented under the conditions of the given farms. So they have full control of the process itself, which is quite important.

Also, as it is done in a real-life setting, they have the freedom to make certain changes to ensure that if some trial doesn't work, they can save that year's yield. When it comes to funding, if certain trials are selected into, for example, an EU project, then based on the contributions, they can get some funding if they have to do additional work beyond



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their daily operations. So that is something I can see. And when it comes to your question, Florian, yes, when it comes to identifying the challenges in the programme, the different research problems, yes, we do consult experts as well. So it's not just the researchers and the farmers. There are more stakeholders present. So it's not just at the final stage when we present the results, but also at the setup of the research design.

So at different points of the cycle, they are included.

Q: Can AKIS play a larger role in connecting farmers to consumers, for instance, with EIP and demo farms?

A Ambra: I cannot speak directly from the project, but I think it's a very good question. But not only whether it's possible, but also that it should be, because consumers are a driving force for the organic sector development. And often, if on production is the focus, we can have a stop there. So how can AKIS build a link between farmer and consumer? I don't have an example from the project. We were not working directly on that, but one of our recommendations, for example, was indeed to extend education and training to the whole supply chain, including consumers. So I see that it's very important, but unfortunately I don't have a specific example.

Q: What formats of learning seem to work best for farmers and have the best impact? You said that you are providing a diverse set of formats. I think you said also that they were all important, but which of those in your view was the best one, best working one?

A Merit:

If we're asking for feedback or we have been asking for feedback from the farmers, then I think that the most appreciated formats are really the formats where the farmers have an opportunity to visit other farms. We are having a lot of combinations. So we are having like half a day in the seminar room and half a day on the farm. And I think that this format where you have a lecture or two lectures and then the visit to the farm, or you're starting with the visit to the farm and you have the lectures afterwards this format is also functioning very well.

The cross visits—I think that we are getting the highest, or we are getting really good feedback on different study trips. For example, when we are taking, I don't know, potato and vegetable growers, and we are going—organic potato and vegetable growers—and we are going to see how it is working or how all the work is organised in, for example, I don't know, Germany or Sweden. So also we are having different study trips with beef producers, sheep producers. So I think that these are very much appreciated. And I think that when you are asking from which activities you learn the most, these cross visits are coming first, and then probably the different events where we have on-farm visits, on-farm learning involved.

And also every year, we are having several trainings or information days with foreign experts. I think that the farmers are really appreciating hearing about the experiences in different other countries, different innovative solutions, because Estonia is a rather small country. So the people who would like to know something about what is happening here actually have the opportunity to get this information anyway. But these foreign lecturers are very much appreciated as well.

And we have been doing these information-based trainings both online as well as on site. So probably these formats have been working really well. But I think that we have to keep in mind that the combination of different formats is, I think, the success factor. Because, for example, out of season, it doesn't make any sense to go to the farm in



January when the farm is dealing with plant production or horticulture. So all these online formats are really giving additional value during these seasons.

Q: If a country wanted to analyse the organic targets in their own sector as organic targets for EU did, how would you recommend the analysis be applied? Applying the full methodology as the project did?

A Ambra: I would suggest, the organic targets for the EU—the methodology can be applied. But I think that it's very important to consider that each country has a different context. And only relying on the results from another country might not be the right way to go.

I think it's very important to have advisory services or actors that are connected to advisory services, who can explore the real situation in the country. Applying the whole methodology of the project can be one way. But also building from what we are doing. So not always repeating—it depends on where you are. If it's one of the countries we analysed in the project, it's a way to start. But I would still go further than that. If it's a new country and there are no data available, then I would not rely on results from another country. Because it really varies a lot between one country and another.

Also, maybe a disclaimer: in the methodology that we used in the organic targets for the EU, there are some limitations, because the number of interviews and surveys is limited. So sometimes, even in this case, it might not fully and correctly represent 100% of the real situation in the country.

