



Connecting People in Demo Events: Provide space to foster diverse forms of exchange

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The Challenge: to make on-farm demonstrations interactive

Interactions between the host and visiting farmers, between visiting farmers, between farmers and advisors or scientists and also between the different demonstrators are essential for knowledge exchange and for the effectiveness of demonstration activities.

Providing opportunities to foster these exchanges presents a large challenge for the organisers.

Items to be considered are: ensure there is sufficient time and space and freedom for these exchanges, as well as the facilitation method.

PLAID lessons: Good practices to connect people

One of the PLAID project objectives was to look further at the exchanges that occur between the multi-actor groups that interact at on-farm demonstration. These exchanges, which occur between visiting and hosting farmers, are of key importance at on-farm demonstrations. This was corroborated by the observations made, but also stressed the importance of other types of exchanges.

- **Space and free time to allow diverse forms of peer to peer learning between farmers is welcomed:**
 - Between demonstrating farmers and the visiting farmers: Demonstrations by farmers is often smoother, and more convincing;
 - Between the visitors of a demonstration: to allow them to benchmark their own ideas with those of their peers, to place the demonstrated innovation in her/his own context;
 - Between the visitors and their neighbours, after the demo, on what they learned at the demonstration.
- **Providing physical space for other kinds of exchanges is advantageous:** Visiting farmers at demonstrations also learn a lot from other types of presenters (e.g. researchers, commercial actors), i.e. 'farmer-to-expert' exchange. Good moderation is essential to facilitate this kind of exchange. Hence, a farmer may learn more from a well-moderated expert presentation than from a poorly moderated farmer presentation.
- Exchanges between farmers and commercial companies can also be rich and useful if the demo event is co-organised between neutral actors and different commercial selling companies and if there is a good agreement on the main messages between all the organisers. Commercial companies should not solely co-organise or attend the demonstration to make a sales pitch, but should be encouraged to contribute in terms of knowledge and information exchange. Involving more than one company and involving 'neutral' parties like non-commercial advisory services or researchers can contribute to the credibility of the demonstration event and thus the wider use of the demonstrated novelties. Having an experienced neutral facilitator in cases

where there are these diverging interests can also be a good way to increase the credibility for the audience.

Examples of strengths and weaknesses, tips and tricks from PLAID case Studies:

- The visiting farmers appreciate the opportunity to get to know advisors of companies that can be source of knowledge and advice to them (Belgium).
- Demo event can be an ideal place for networking and interacting between participants. This can be the case during lunch break, between the sessions or also during sessions. The event should be designed in a way to provide a lot of space for interaction and networking among all kind of stakeholders, to allow participants complete flexibility (Switzerland, Bulgaria).
- Demo event can allow advisors to link with researchers and with experts of commercial companies and to invite them to participate on other demonstrations on this field (Bulgaria, Croatia).
- The time used for moving from one workshop to another may allow for moments of individual exchanges between visitors. It was observed that the change of the spatial arrangement (moving from the farm to the premises for group discussion) allowed for some group rearrangement with female participants approaching the host farmer with some questions that had emerged during the field walk (Latvia).
- The informal atmosphere (including humour in mutual communication) can also enhance learning among peers by encouraging micro interactions between both the host and the visiting farmers and amongst the visiting farmers themselves.
- The possibility to have a more comprehensive view of multiple practices linked to overall farm management seemed to be a rational way of doing the informal demonstration process on the farm. The lack of a predefined focus allows for spontaneous observations and ad hoc discussions of different practical issues as these appear and are seen as interesting, puzzling, and inspiring by the visitors along the route of the farm walk.
- The informal set-up of the demonstration activities works well, in some cases also because of the lower attendance: the smaller groups allow a lot of interaction between the hosting farmer, the visitors, the advisor, the installer, the (local) policy makers, ... (Belgium).
- In small groups, the demonstration atmosphere can be both serious and friendly. This aspect is fundamental for small groups of farmers (Spain).

