



# Activity Access

## Improving access to on-farm demonstration activities

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### **The Challenge: improve access to on-farm demonstration activities**

Taking measures to ensure that events are advertised to all target groups, and the facilities at the event suited to a wide range of abilities, will increase the accessibility of on-farm demonstration for all actors. In the PLAID case studies, we found various examples of events which were predominantly visited by visitors that were not well informed and were unaware of what was happening at the demonstration event and were unable to follow certain activities.

### **PLAID Lessons: good practices to facilitate good access**

At the demonstration event, it is important to enable participants to participate in all of the planned activities. Particularly for larger demonstrations, with various activities running in parallel, it is much more of a challenge to give visitors a good overview of what will happen and to help them to find the activities that are most interesting to them. A simple tool is to provide a brochure or leaflet with the main parts of the programme and to explain the main features of the programme during an introductory talk at the opening of the demonstration. For very large demonstrations it is also useful to provide a helpdesk or assistance desk. To allow visitors to follow their own path through the demo programme, it is important to carefully plan the timing of the various activities and to entrust a number of people with the responsibility to ensure that this timing is kept for all activities.

The case studies show that there are some other organisational issues that are not always well addressed, making it difficult or impossible to follow certain activities. One of these is sound quality. This is usually not an issue indoors, but for outdoor activities speakers are often not well audible due to the background noise, including wind, machinery, etc. Even with an outdoor sound installation this can be problematic, especially when the public takes part in the discussion without the use of a microphone. In such a case, a pragmatic solution is when the person with the microphone (speaker or facilitator) repeats the question or gives the microphone to the person who reacts. Though this may seem trivial, this was not always observed in many of the case studies. A more fundamental solution is to make group sizes small enough so that audibility is not a problem.

Video (also on-screen presentation) quality can also be an issue, especially outdoors or in tents that should be properly addressed. One thing is to make sure that strong sunlight will not hamper visibility.

Toilet facilities are also not always sufficient or are of a low standard. In one case, no toilet facilities were provided at all, which is particularly unwelcoming for female participants. Disabled facilities should be made available where possible.

Furthermore, at the demonstrations studied there were rarely any provisions for people who are unable to walk for long distances or cannot stand for long periods of time. People with such limitations may decide not to attend a demonstration because they expect it will be difficult for them

to get access to various activities. It is recommended that organisers take specific measures to make it attractive to people with physical limitations: providing seating, level surfaces on which to walk etc. Indicating this in the invitation could encourage more people to participate and would therefore open up demonstrations to a group of people that would otherwise be excluded.

### Examples from PLAID case studies of practices that have worked to increase access

At the Swiss organic cattle day, microphones were made available for several activities. In those sessions where the microphone were not used and where there was a lot of background noise, the level of attention dropped quite quickly and the participants started chatting and discussing among small groups while the speaker was still presenting. This happened in different cases, where speakers would not repeat questions that were asked to ensure everyone understood. The level of participation also depended on the volume of a speakers' voice and on the visibility of what was demonstrated.

Concerning sound, at the Latvian demonstration on animal husbandry a portable microphone and loudspeaker were used to allow all visitors to follow the narrative. As for visibility, a good solution used was to place the demonstration object (including livestock units) in a place that could be approached by visitors from several sides, thus avoiding crowding in a small area.

A new approach to allow larger groups of visitors to follow what was going on was used at the Polish national potato day. This involved the use of a drone to record the activities and display these on a big screen on a podium. The practicalities of this approach, however, still require further improvement. By just showing the video, it was not clear to visitors what they were observing and there appeared to be rather limited attention for these videos.

Various specific measures were taken at demonstrations to assist visitors in following the various activities. At the UK integrated farm management field event, tractor trailers were used to drive visitors from one activity to another. These were covered as a precaution in the case of bad weather. For the same reason refreshments were provided indoors, enabling the event to continue in the case of rain. On the day of the event, however, the weather appeared to be very sunny which caused a new, unforeseen problem. Excess light affected the visibility of the video played during lunch as well as affected the panel presentations.

At the Dutch grounded maize cropping demonstration, a 'multifunctional vehicle' was used that provided a podium with sound installation as well as an issue point for refreshments. This was provided by one of the organisers and it is also made available for use at similar field demonstrations by others.

A good way to connect visitors to the demonstration event is to provide food based on products from the region. This was done, for instance, at the Italian demo day for sustainable viticulture. Providing ample time for eating and drinking also served as a good occasion for interaction and networking between visitors, as well as between visitors and demonstrators.

In the PLAID cases we observed a general tendency to see the number of visitors as an indicator of success of the demonstration. However, larger numbers may attend at the expense of the quality of the demonstration, making it more difficult for visitors to follow what goes on. For that reason, the Italian organic farming demo decided to limit the number of participants per demo event to facilitate good quality interaction. In the case where there was a greater interest, the organizer preferred to repeat the event instead of enlarging it. Also at the UK integrated farm management field event the number of participants was limited (to 90 people) due to constraints with space on the tractor trailer.