

FICHE – ORGANIC FARMING CASE

“CROSS-VISITS ON ORGANIC SEED PRODUCTION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ‘LIVESEED’ PROJECT”

Data extracted in January 2022

Note to the reader: This set of *fiches – organic farming case* is offering additional information to the meta analysis literature review summarised in *general fiche* and set of fiches on the environmental aspects of ORGANIC FARMING SYSTEMS. Each individual case describes an initiative in different parts of organic food systems within the European Union, delivering more detailed information on possible ways to develop organic systems.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANIC SYSTEM

Geographical location	Different sites across EU
Geographical level	Farm, cooperative, company
Description	In the framework of the LIVESEED project, four cross visits were organised to demonstrate smart practices, to enable a mutual learning process among professionals engaged, to inspire partners to initiate change in their system, and to forge relationships that will last after the project, with the final aim of increasing productivity and quality in organic seed production.
Key descriptors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical and technical issues on production and processing of organic seeds or reproduction material • AgriSpin methodology, adapted to the multi-actor approach of LIVESEED • The four cross visits were organised in France (2018), Italy (2019), Netherlands (2019) and a virtual visit Germany and Switzerland (2020)
Production system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic seed production. The project covered a large diversity of soil-climate conditions, and crop groups, i.e. cereals, legumes and forage crops in FR, cereals and vegetables in IT, vegetables and seed potato in NL, grape/vine and fruit in DE/CH (Switzerland)
Actors involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organiser, program:</i> IFOAM EU together with local project partners • <i>Hosts:</i> farm, cooperatives, national inspection service, government or university research institute/agency, small/medium private companies • <i>Guests/participants (14-24 per visit):</i> agricultural trainers, farmer advisors, organic farmers, experts from seed companies, researchers, seed health and quality inspectors, organic certification. Most came from MS where organic seed production is less developed, such as PL, HU, RO, BG, GR, ES, and PT. Other participants were from: AU, FR, IT, LV, DE, and NL.
Project type	Co-funding from the EU’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, and the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)
Project status/ date of report	2020

2. VISUALS ASSOCIATED TO THE ORGANIC INITIATIVE



3. ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVMENTS OF THE ORGANIC INITIATIVE

Rationale / Motivation for the project	
<p>Driven by the use of a multi-actor approach, the cross visits were based on the assumption that appropriate solutions must be tailor-made, and partners from other regions are in the best position to provide learning that could initiate change. Therefore, it is necessary to visit and explore systems applied elsewhere, to interact with stakeholders, colleagues, and scientists in other parts of Europe. A specific focus was put on inviting experts from countries where the organic seed sector is less developed and/or has particular needs.</p>	
Actions	
Selection of the participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nomination by project partners based on a background information package, a survey, and selection criteria provided by LIVESEED organisers (IFOAM EU) • Nominees' CVs were collected to better understand what they would bring to the group
Visits – Program development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 1: Kick off – Getting <i>acquainted</i> (interactive games, icebreakers to create a team spirit), <i>oriented</i> (intro by main host about their organisation and regional context), <i>updated</i> (brief overview of the process of organising the visit + short intro about LIVESEED), <i>organised</i> (facilitated sessions to provide the attendees specific themes for observation during field visits) • Step 2: Field visit. Around half a day to study a particular farm or farm related enterprise/organisation • Step 3: Reflection. Share observations with the group and reflect on them • Step 4: Social activity (dinners, city visits, cooking together) • Step 5: Preparation of the feedback. Half a day or evening at the end of the cross-visit to prepare the symposium/workshop. • Step 6: Symposium/workshop. Organized by the main host, half a day.
After the visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report. The main host and task leader write a short summary of the visit and outcomes, to be circulated to participants for comments. • 6-months survey. Participants are asked to provide feedback after 6 months on where and how they utilized the gained knowledge, and if their perspective on the learning outcomes has changed over time.
Use of the knowledge generated during the visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production and dissemination of the knowledge through reports, videos, practice abstracts (focused short technical fact sheets), a booklet, articles... created by LIVESEED organisers (IFOAM EU) • The participants exploited the information acquired during visits through knowledge transfer to colleagues, incorporation in their everyday practice, developing training materials, demonstrations at farmers field days, use of new practices/methods/processes/innovations, discussions in round tables/expert groups in some invited MS, follow up with hosting organisations and other attendees for collaboration and networking.

Lessons

- It is advisable that the program development and the selection of participants are an **iterative process** between the sending organisations and the main organiser (i.e. IFOAM EU)
- A **thorough selection of partners** for cooperation is required if networking and cooperation are expected in the future, or a less packed program that allows for more free-minded exploration of the participants' knowledge and fields of interest.
- All participants should be involved in the **introductory exercises** together (i.e. the '*acquainted*' part of step 1 should not be skipped).
- Both **personal questions and facilitated structured learning** approaches bring value to the groups' learning process. Both should be encouraged and facilitated during the visits.
- Due to the intensity of the programs, after each visit, the team needs to take the **time to relax**, process/digest and reflect on the experience.
- It is very important to **meet also small scale initiatives** that match the implementation level of countries where organic seed production is currently underdeveloped (next to more complex places that offers in-depth learning on multiple aspects in one location).
- **Social activities** helped to bring the group together, to break the cultural and linguistic barriers in the group, participants to mentally disengage from the intensive learning experience. The social activity should be simple, relaxing, close to the accommodation, and allow for a cultural rather than professional exchange between the participants.
- Many other **practical recommendations** regarding the organisation methodology of cross-visits are available in the report (see below). For instance, no more than 2 places can be visited per day without overloading participants, with a maximum of three hours of travel.

4. SOURCES, PROJECT WEBSITE OR DATA COLLECTION ON THE CASE STUDY

The LIVESEED project: <https://www.liveseed.eu/>.

The overall objective of the LIVESEED project is to improve transparency and competitiveness of the organic seed and breeding sector, encouraging greater use of organic seed.

Final report on the outcomes of the cross-visits on organic seed production + detailed reports of the four visits in FR, IT, NL, and DE/CH <https://www.liveseed.eu/wp2/reports-cross-visits/>

Booklet 'Success stories on organic seed production & breeding' https://www.liveseed.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FNL_BOOKLET_3-WEB-SMALLER.pdf

Practice abstracts (including those arising from the cross-visits) <https://www.liveseed.eu/tools-for-practitioners/practice-abstracts/#>