

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND DEMONSTRATION ACTIVITIES IN THE FRUIT SECTOR IN LATVIA, LITHUANIA AND POLAND

InnoFruit project report



Anda Adamsone-Fiskovica, Mikelis Grivins, Talis Tisenkopfs, Emils Kilis, Sandra Sumane
(Baltic Studies Centre; Institute of Horticulture)

2019

Output 5.1: Recommendations for policy makers of fruit-growing sector
WP5 Activity 5.1
(February 2019)

Work package No 5 (WP5): Development of recommendations for the sectoral policy makers
Activity 5.1 (A5.1): Development of recommendations for policy makers

The present document provides a list of policy recommendations that are based on the synthesis of results stemming from the work carried out as part of the InnoFruit project and especially from the research and analysis conducted on the development of a conceptual framework for the establishment of demonstration farms. Input has also been provided via collective discussions among the project partners as well as during broader national stakeholder workshops held in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. These recommendations focus on the necessary improvements in the field of knowledge advancement in the fruit sector that require also political solutions and support.

Country-specific inputs under the given tasks have been provided by the following partners:

PP1 - Institute of Horticulture (LatHort) (Latvia)

PP2 - Institute of Horticulture, Lithuanian Research Centre for Agriculture and Forestry (Lithuania)

PP3 - Research Institute of Horticulture (Poland)

PP4 - Latvian Fruit Growers' association (Latvia)

PP9 - Faculty of Agriculture, Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (Latvia)

This analysis has been performed by the team of social scientists (Baltic Studies Centre) subcontracted by PP1: *Anda Adamsone-Fiskovica, Mikelis Grivins, Talis Tisenkopfs, Emils Kilis, and Sandra Sumane.*

In case of citation please use the following reference:

Adamsone-Fiskovica, A., Grivins, M., Tisenkopfs, T., Kilis, E., Sumane, S. (2019) Policy recommendations for the development of knowledge transfer and demonstration activities in the fruit sector in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. *Final report*. INNOFRUIT project. Institute of Horticulture (LatHort); Baltic Studies Centre.

Recommendation 1: Ensure a balanced regional coverage of independent full-time advisors in fruit-growing, incl. pre-treatment and processing, as part of a national advisory system

A major problem area with regards to the promotion of knowledge and innovation transfer is related to the general lack of specialised independent advisors in the area of fruit-growing that could provide competent, unbiased and timely advice for commercial and non-commercial fruit-growers. There are generally no state-funded advisors in this area thus leaving this niche to commercial input suppliers, a few independent advisors covering broader fields of expertise, as well as researchers at public and private research institutes who compensate for this lack of dedicated advisors in the field. The problem lies not only in the number, lack of impartiality and expertise of advisors but also their regional distribution, as advice needs to be accessible in different parts of the country to allow for direct and regular contact with growers on their farms and production sites. There is also a need for covering a broad spectrum of expertise necessary for fruit-growers, addressing not only the production stage but also pre-treatment and processing to increase the added value of fruit production.

Critical conditions to implement the recommendation: (i) ensure sufficient training and technical support to advisors; (ii) undertake a complex approach to the provision of advisory services along the whole production cycle.

Recommendation 2: Acknowledge and encourage the contribution of scientists in the provision of advisory services to fruit-growers and the implementation of innovations by covering these activities in the performance evaluation of research institutes and by providing financial compensation for the time devoted to them

At present, researchers at public research institutes working in fruit science often provide the impartial advisory assistance to fruit-growers. These activities, which allow for direct interaction with practitioners, are of great value not only to the fruit-growers who receive competent advice but also to the researchers themselves who have the opportunity to obtain additional field experience and see the practical problems faced by commercial and hobby farmers that can serve as an impetus for new research ideas. On some occasions, these extension activities are introduced as part of fixed-term projects for which the institutes have received funding, but these do not ensure a regular and stable basis for the fulfilment of the advisory function. For the time being these activities are also seldom seen as an integral part of the official mission of public research organisations and as such do not qualify as quantitative and qualitative indices of research performance that are taken into account in the evaluation of these organisations. As this advisory role is not among the formal tasks of researchers it is also not envisaged as part of the remuneration system and workload calculations. Acknowledging that consultations are an inherent, rather than a project-based, duty of research organisations would ensure that there is a continuity of access to advisory services. Recognition of this extension role would also allow to improve the quality of the provided services.

Critical conditions to implement the recommendation: (i) create an incentive structure for researchers to deliver practice-oriented advice to farmers and SMEs; (ii) involve fruit-growers' organisations in assessing the knowledge transfer performance of researchers.

Recommendation 3: Facilitate cooperation between different providers of advisory services and organisers of demonstration activities in the fruit sector (farmers, SMEs, public and private advisors, research institutes) by organising experience exchange seminars on a regular basis

There are a range of individual activities undertaken by different (also mutually competing) providers of advisory services and organisers of demonstration activities in the agricultural sector more generally and specifically in the fruit sector. While there is some cooperation between the individuals and organisations involved, it is mostly sporadic and does not equally involve all parties. Thus, there is an untapped potential for closer collaboration either in the joint provision of advisory services and training or in sharing the positive and negative experiences and promoting mutual learning.

Critical conditions to implement the recommendation: (i) strengthen the back-office of various advisory service providers by enhancing and sharing common advisory skills, such as facilitation techniques, group work methods, knowledge transfer tools and other; (ii) introduce an open innovation approach in communication and knowledge sharing among various advisory services promoting farmer-to-farmer learning, farmer-researcher-consumer collaboration and other forms of open and joint innovation; (iii) look for possibilities to establish national or cross-regional operational groups in fruit-growing sector within the EIP-Agri framework.

Recommendation 4: Support advisors in the provision of advice by creating, funding and maintaining a joint Internet-based platform for innovation support services covering structured information on the knowledge resources and advice providers for fruit-growers depending on the stage of business development

Fruit-growers are often not aware of what kind of specific advice they require, and there is no systematically organised repository or tool which would make it clear to farmers what kind of advice is available from the various public and private knowledge organisations and services. Thus, there is a certain misalignment between farmers' needs and the available advisory tools. An accessible, well-structured and user-friendly online tool would allow farmers and producers to easily and efficiently navigate the advisory system and identify areas where assistance is required and find out where they can obtain it. The online tool/platform that would allow interested parties to assess the situation in the value chain or production cycle, determine their needs and identify the relevant knowledge and available tools or advisers that would be best suited to help them. The proposed tool has the potential to support and structure decision-making as regards the sequence in which different advisers should be engaged. This could assist in aligning supply (the services and materials provided) and demand (the needs of farmers and producers).

Critical conditions to implement the recommendation: (i) establish a dedicated multi-actor initiative group comprising researchers, fruit-growers, advisors and policy makers for the development of a concept of a joint internet platform; (ii) design technically and launch practically the platform hosted by a reliable organisation to secure its long-term functionality.

Recommendation 5: Support the creation and maintenance of a dynamic network of demonstration farms in fruit-growing based upon their specialisation

Demonstrations on both research and commercial farms are extensively used in different countries for displaying established and novel farming approaches, methods and technologies for practitioners with an aim of providing comprehensive and accessible sensory (audial, visual, tactile) information on these practices. These demonstrations can notably supplement the available sources of farmer knowledge and advice and act as a valuable add-on to the more conventional forms of learning. Since a single farm can serve as a platform for a limited number of demonstration objects, it is important to facilitate the creation of a network composed of a larger number of demonstration farms jointly representing comprehensive and dynamic expertise across the fruit sector. These farms should cover a rather wide spectrum of farm profiles in terms of their size, specialisation, business model and location to ensure their accessibility based on various preferences or their target audience. As part of boosting the visibility, accessibility and complementarity of the active demonstration farms and services, a freely accessible extensive online repository of the available demonstrations in the fruit sector¹ should be maintained (preferably also linked to existing broader information platforms on agricultural demonstrations in all sectors²) and updated on a regular basis.

¹ <http://fruittechcentre.eu/en/demo-network>

² See <https://farmdemo.eu/hub/>

Critical conditions to implement the recommendation: (i) create a geo-referenced map (an online repository) of demonstration farms that is easy to navigate for farmers; (ii) regularly update the online repository of demonstration farms and secure funding of this tool.

Recommendation 6: Introduce financial and non-financial incentives for commercial farms to become involved in hosting on-farm demonstrations in fruit-growing

While peer-to-peer learning is acknowledged as a valuable tool for mutual learning, and on-farm demonstrations serve as a tangible and practice-oriented way for sharing experiences and promoting different farming methods and practices, this format also requires notable investment of financial and human resources. In order to mobilise and incentivise farms that are open for collaboration and knowledge-sharing it is important to establish and offer a set of incentives that would cover for their effort and time. These can be both financial and non-financial ones – either aimed at directly covering the costs involved (incl. infrastructure, staff) or at providing certain advantages to the host farm in terms of free advisory support, training, tax allowances, preferential conditions for state aid or other stimuli. Most farmers would need some additional inputs, skills and training to make the demonstration a well-structured and efficient learning event. This would include common guidelines for setting up, running and following up a demonstration as well as some practical training on presentation and communication methods. This process would also be facilitated by a clear (but not too demanding) set of basic criteria for qualifying as a demonstration farm on a national or sectoral level. Quite a lot of valuable experience and practice-based knowledge is gained by individual farmers along the implementation of various investment projects funded by public support schemes, yet it frequently stays only within the given farm. In order to facilitate the spread of this knowledge and usefulness for a larger farming community, beneficiaries of this funding could be incentivised to share the knowledge gained in the implementation of the project also with other farmers.

Critical conditions to implement the recommendation: (i) prepare methodical guidelines / a manual for demonstration farm hosts to be distributed widely among existing and potential demonstration farms and advisors; (ii) ensure state-funded mentoring support for demonstration farmers by experienced peers, advisors and researchers with regard to both the development of demonstration objects and the implementation of the demonstration process.

Recommendation 7: Tailor the formal requirements (for on-site facilities, frequency of public events) set for the organisation and implementation of on-farm demonstration activities to the realistic capacities of regular farms

While there has been an increasing recognition of the value and potential of on-farm demonstrations as a source of farmer learning, and a range of policy measures are being developed for the establishment of demonstration objects on research and commercial farms, there is a range of formal requirements that are difficult to meet by the farms and the organisers. One set of requirements relates to the presence and condition of different on-site facilities (incl. sanitary) necessary for hosting larger groups of visitors, which are frequently hard to provide on regular commercial farms. Likewise, the required frequency of demonstration activities on a single farm under a public funding scheme should be tailored to the specific object of demonstration, the capacities of the farm, and the timing of simultaneous activities thus allowing to avoid an uneven spread and periodic oversaturation with demonstration events. There is a need for some flexibility and room for manoeuvre depending on the various internal and external factors potentially exerting an influence on the demonstration in the course of its preparation and execution.

Critical conditions to implement the recommendation: (i) apply a differentiation between a limited set of mandatory requirements and a broader set of advisable/optional features for on-farm demonstrations; (ii) make demonstration farms eligible for targeted funding in agricultural and farm modernisation projects that would specifically help them to improve the technical base for the implementation of on-farm demonstrations.