

Facilitating collaboration between farmers

Problem

Cooperation between farmers with different specialisations can support crop diversification and close local nutrient cycles. However, farmers from different sectors usually do not come into contact, and experience with setting up and maintaining partnerships is lacking.

Solution

Cooperation was stimulated through setting up regional farmers' meetings, organising workshops around common topics and facilitating existing partnerships.

Benefits

Cooperation can strengthen the position of the farmer and provide economic and ecological benefits. For example, the exchange of land between a vegetable and dairy farmer led to the introduction of grass-clover into the intensive vegetable crop rotation. The vegetable farmer received benefits to soil health (in terms of nitrogen, structure, and organic matter) and the dairy farmer received more land and could increase feed production. Regional meetings, online tools, and a general understanding of how to cooperate can facilitate new and existing partnerships.

Practical recommendation

- To overcome the lack of relationship between neighbouring organic farmers, regional meetings should be organised by governmental institutions and farmer organisations for initiating first contact (see picture 1). Agricultural advisors also can play a role in initiating contact between two farmers of different specializations. The benefits of cooperation should be publicised, e.g. through inspiring stories (see videos).
- Before or during the establishment of cooperation, major impediments include legal uncertainty, a lack of guidance and/or support, and a lack of insight into the (economic) value of the cooperation. In already existing partnerships, the distance between farms and legal constraints are the major problems. For example, a farmer that leases a plot of land can only exchange this plot in a 1:1 ratio in Flanders. Specific guidelines on technical, economic and legal difficulties should be developed and used to cope with these issues (see brochure).
- Setting up a successful partnership takes time and should be developed gradually. Every farm has unique characteristics (location, products, environmental and economic conditions, social aspects, etc.) and a one-size-fits-all model of cooperation does not exist.
- Cooperation should be a win-win for all parties, and this must be the main ambition of all parties. The needs of the parties involved should be explicitly stated, explained and regularly evaluated. If a cooperation is terminated, it does not mean it was not successful.
- The economic value of many aspects of a partnership is difficult to estimate and balance out, especially when collaborations get more

Applicability box

Theme

Actors, Learning, Barriers and enablers, Organic

Agronomic conditions

Applicable to all sorts of agronomic conditions

Application time

Continuously

Required time

Variable, depending on the intensity of the cooperation

Period of impact

Long-term

Equipment

Means to meet farmers from other sectors

Best in

Applicable all year round



Picture 1: Regional farmers' meeting (Photo: An Jamart, BioForum Vlaanderen)

complex. There are also significant non-financial gains. Therefore, mutual trust, familiarity and empathy are essential elements.

- Legal barriers for cooperation should be discussed with policy makers.

Further information

Videos

- Weblink to inspiring videos (coming soon)

Further readings

- Moraine M, Duru M, Nicholas P, Leterme P, Therond O. (2014). *Farming system design for innovative crop-livestock integration in Europe*. 8(8):1204-17. doi: 10.1017/S1751731114001189
- Oosterhof, W. (2019). *Handboek: Samenwerken Akkerbouw & Veehouderij*. Aeres Hogeschool Dronten. (<https://www.aereshogeschool.nl/-/media/aeres-hogeschool/files/dronten/onderzoek/publicaties-en-artikelen/1901105a4-lighandboek-samenwerken-akkerbouw--veehouderijhr-intern-los.pdf>)
- Prins, U. de Wit, J. Heeres, E. (2004). *Handboek Koppelbedrijven: Samen werken aan een zelfstandige, regionale, biologische landbouw*. Louis Bolk Instituut. (<https://www.louisbolk.instituut/downloads/1436.pdf>)
- Van Dalen, J. (2020). *Samenwerking akkerbouw - veehouderij Noordoost-Nederland - Onderweg naar kringloplandbouw*. (<https://www.greeni.nl/iguana/CMS.MetaDataEditDownload.cls?file=2:147214:1>)

Weblinks

- Webpage Bioforum on cooperation (coming soon)
- Weblink to online brochure (coming soon)

About this practice abstract and DiverIMPACTS

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Project website: www.diverimpacts.net

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