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Agroecology for Europe (AE4EU)

Towards the development of agroecology in Europe

Deliverable report D4.1 – First version of Agroecology Exchange Network Knowledge Hub

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Executive summary

The role of technologies for sustainable agricultural development is strongly increasing in the current changing world. Social networks, as an example of technologies widely used by society, have become an embedded part of everyday life. Thus, this type of tool could also be used by farmers and agriculture related stakeholders and provide social and information support to people that are already applying or going to start agroecology.

The European Agroecology Exchange Hub is aiming to be a tool that provide a strong contribution to social development through its attempt to link people with different backgrounds, knowledge and skills with the same interest for agroecology, thereby also contributing to filling the famous gap between farmers and academia. Furthermore, the Hub is planned as an open space for sharing agroecology knowledge, practice and experiences by its future users. This Hub is not the first one created for strengthening agroecology. However, the European Agroecology Exchange Hub will be a complementary tool, and its main features include strong agroecology focus, multi-stakeholders target audience, networking activities, a participatory and bottom-up approach in order to give an opportunity for different stakeholder's contribution.

In order to describe the Hub and process of its development, the report is structured as follows. The first section provides an introduction to the aims of the Hub, its overall structure and the agreement with the ALL-Ready project for a similar tool but which is focussed on data sharing. The second section describes the methodology and development process. The third section includes further steps of the Hub testing and dissemination. Designed pre-test versions of the Homepage and the user's profile are provided in Annex 4.

1. Introduction

Task 4.1 of the AE4EU project aims at gathering different stakeholders (farmers integrated into territory, local food hubs, policy makers, food suppliers, restaurants and chefs, NGOs, researchers, teachers and students in higher education institutes) in order to create a community of agroecology stakeholders and to facilitate exchanges in the Europe-wide initiatives, organisations or network in or related to agroecology (among others for example linking academia and real-world practitioners and professionals) identified by WP1.

The European Agroecology Exchange Hub (called Hub in this report) was planned as an online platform to link different stakeholders, where they could be connected digitally with colleagues and experts, could share knowledge, insights and best practices, learn from experiences and inspire innovation and new ways of working in agroecology. The main ambition for the Hub is its two-fold role of a virtual place for connecting people and, at the same time, of a source of information for its users. Due to this role, the Hub was planned as a long-term digital instrument that will be implemented during the project, but continued to be operative after the project term. Further activities that provide the long-term life of the Hub will include the following: a test phase (M18), a period that consist of an internal launching of the Hub (engaging multi-stakeholder partners of AE4EU project) and improvements (M24), and finally, dissemination of the HUB to the stakeholders interested in agroecology (since a long time as well as just starting agroecological practice) (M32).

In order to make the Hub an easy and useful tool to link different stakeholders, many people were involved in the development process and contributed to the creation of the structure, general design and wording of content areas of the Hub. Therefore, it will contain a brief explanation about agroecology and its principles, a personal space (users' profile) and different information (photo, video and stories) shared by the users (Annex 3, 4). The users will generate different forms of the content (text, photo, video, podcasts etc.) for the Hub and will connect it with the keywords used for the further search, thereby allowing the stakeholders to find other users with similar interests, roles, stories, skills and activities. The information expected from the users for filling the Hub will include stories, events, movements and other activities related to different aspects and principles of agroecology. The main features and key characteristics of the Hub are summarised in Table 1.

Introduction

Table 1: Main features and key characteristics of the European Agroecology Exchange Hub.

Expected functions	A virtual place and platform for connecting people and, at the same time, a source of information for its users
Objective	An open space for sharing agroecology knowledge, practice and experiences by its future users
Targeted audience	Farmers, Agricultural and food systems professionals, Researchers, Students, academia, Citizens, Social movements & NGOs, Policy makers, Chefs and restaurants
Main features (differences from other similar platforms)	Strong agroecology focus, farmers oriented, civil society and grass-roots targeted, and a participatory and bottom-up approach in order to give an opportunity for anyone's contribution
Planned period of activity	Long-term (with changed administration in future after project end)
Contributors to the content	All partners of AE4EU project

Collaboration with the ALL-Ready project¹ for the development of similar tool was carried out. We explored the concrete possibility to have a unique Hub that would have served the two projects output. After several meetings, it was agreed that the two projects will have slightly different aims and time frame, and it would not be possible to have the same platform. The ALL Ready tool – Virtual Research Environment, was developed for three main categories of users: researchers, policy makers and students. The Virtual Research Environment will be created together by computer scientist and scientists from biodiversity and ecosystem communities across Europe to develop new platforms and tools that those researchers require to take their investigations to the next level². While the AE4EU European Agroecology Exchange Hub is tailored to all types of agroecology stakeholders and in particular for farmers, practitioners and civil society actors. Thus, both electronic platforms complete each other: the movement- and practice-oriented Hub with its

¹ <https://www.all-ready-project.eu/>

² <https://www.lifewatch.eu/internal-joint-initiative/> (footnotes 3 and 12 are the same)

participatory and bottom-up approach and the research-oriented Virtual Research Environment with its deeper scientific focus for data collections and sharing. The two hubs will be accessible from both project websites. Future collaboration of both platforms may include sharing resources, i.e. the Virtual Research Environment will host some AE4EU data and scientific sources, and AE4EU hub will host data of the Virtual Research Environment.

2. Set up of a European Agroecology Exchange Network (MS12 - June 2021)

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A first lists of stakeholders with description of role and activities was developed. In the milestone MS12 document the list of key informants answering the questionnaire about their interest in the hub already is listed (Annex 1) – all key informants were contacted by email. To develop the agroecology network, 65 key informants from 8 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Montenegro, Spain) have been contacted, and 21 key informants have answered to the survey aimed to understand stakeholders' needs and interests in belonging to the network and using the hub. According to the questionnaire, 14 key informants stated interested in being part of the hub and 12 are interested in joining the network.

3. Methodology and development process of the hub

3.1 Process of development

The overall process of development of the Hub included several steps: analysis of already existing Hubs or platforms, discussion with AE4EU partners regarding core elements of the Hub, discussion and drafting of the structure, selection of service providers, development of graphic design and page title, digital version of the Hub, trial, improvements, and dissemination.

The first step of the development process was a comparative analysis of existing platforms or hubs, particularly their objectives, targets, elements and structure. Nine already existing

Methodology and development process of the hub

similar hubs were compared including EAKEN³, Bond Project⁴, UNISECO⁵, EURAKNOS⁶, The AgroEcology Hub⁷, Agroecology Hub⁸, GLFX⁹, Agroecology Knowledge Hub¹⁰ (FAO), Virtual Research Environment¹¹ (ALL-Ready). Comparison of the nine electronic tools and platforms is provided in Annex 2. The nine tools have different objectives and different target audience, not all of them have focus on agroecology, and only two on them (UNISECO and GFLX) have an option of networking, some of them (Agroecology Knowledge Hub of FAO) allow only one way communication (through mailing list) and do not provide an option for networking or knowledge exchange. The European Agroecology Exchange Hub will be a complementary tool to all this platforms and hubs, and its main features include strong agroecology focus, multi-stakeholders target audience, networking activities and a participatory and bottom-up approach in order to give an opportunity for anyone's contribution.

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In order to identify the core elements of the Hub, several workshops were organised in 2021-2022 to co-design the hub. Those internal workshops allowed to define and to discuss different categories for the future Hub such as 'EU projects', 'Education & Training', 'Supporting Materials', 'How to Start Agroecology', 'Policies'. All AE4EU partners contributed to these workshops.

The first internal co-design workshop was organised in February 2021. The objective of the workshop was to balance activities of WP1 (Task 1.1, Task 1.2), WP4 (Task 4.1), WP7 (Task 7.4) regarding their potential contribution to the Hub, and to create a common understanding of the Hub. After this workshop the essential elements of the Hub were defined.

The second internal co-design workshop was organised in April 2021 with three main objectives: to define the draft of the Hub's structure, to co-design the menu for each

³ <https://www.eurovia.org/eaken/> (currently in transition to other website)

⁴ <https://www.bondproject.eu/>

⁵ <https://uniseco-project.eu>

⁶ <https://www.euraknos.eu/>

⁷ <https://www.agroecologyhub.info/>

⁸ <https://agroecologyhub.org/>

⁹ <https://www.globallandscapesforum.org/>

¹⁰ www.fao.org/agroecology/home/en/

¹¹ www.lifewatch.eu

Methodology and development process of the hub

typology of stakeholder, and to co-define the Hub questionnaire for end-users. After the workshop the menu was defined for each type of stakeholder, the structure of the Hub (Figure 1) was confirmed by all partners, and the questionnaire was agreed upon. The questionnaire was developed for end-users regarding their interest in using the Hub and the information they would like to find and share on the Hub. The questionnaire was distributed among all AE4EU partners and mappers involved in WP1 activity in June 2021. The 33 answers were used for the design of the HUB. Most respondents of the questionnaire defined the future Hub as an online space for searching people involved on agroecology initiatives, finding and exchanging information on agroecology.

3.1 Hub design/structure

After two co-design workshops, technical requirements of the Hub were prepared and sent to 10 different service providers in several EU countries as well as in Japan. Several online meetings were also organised with the service providers in order to clarify the task and the expectations from the Hub. The company ZetaBi (Italy) has been selected for the collaboration and for development of the European Agroecology Exchange Hub due to the best quality/cost offer. The work with ZetaBi included several meetings (online and in presence) with the USING team in order to discuss the first draft of the Hub, its structure, digital concept and final version of the structure.

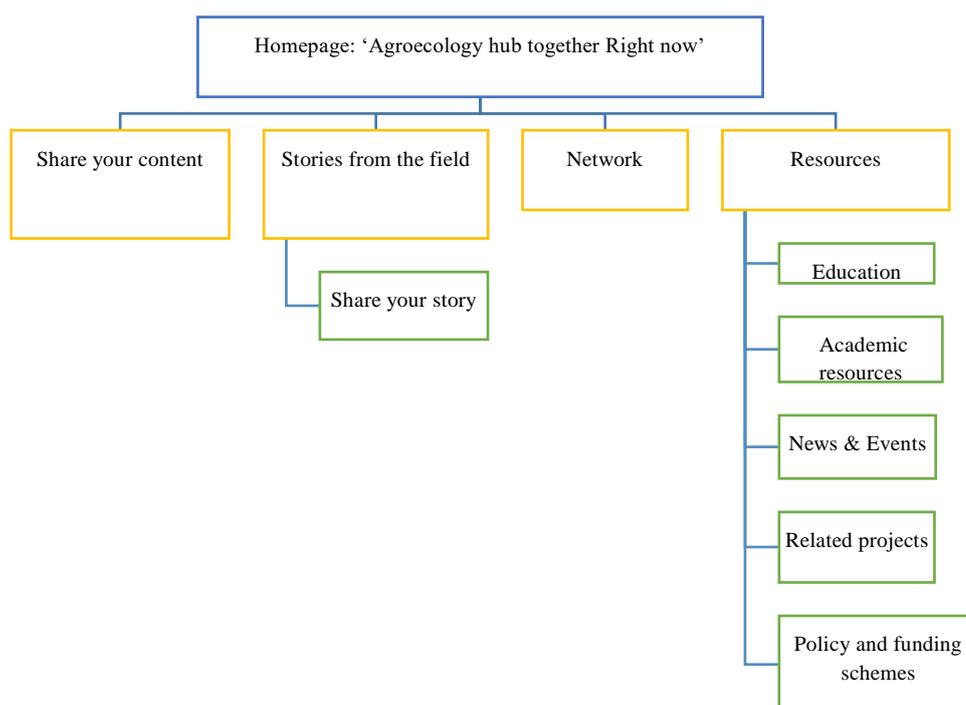


Figure 1: Defined structure of the Hub.

The third internal co-design workshop was part of the online annual project meeting in January 2022, where all participants were asked to give their feedback on the visual aspect as well as potential content of some pages of the Hub including ‘Home page’, ‘User’s profile’, ‘search area’ etc.

The fourth co-design workshop with all partners was organised at the end of April 2022 in order to finalise the structure, content areas and categories of the elements included in the Hub.

4. Further steps and stakeholder engagement strategy

The M12 was a good starting point to ensure the stakeholder engagement. Past and further activities that provide the long-term life of the Hub include the following:

- a test phase (M18) of the Hub was carried out within the project partners and in particular during the Project meeting in Lugo, Spain (May 2022);
- a period of internal launching of the Hub for its improvements (M24) engaging multi-stakeholder partners of AE4EU project Introducing trial version of the Hub include:
 - TerraMadre1 (September 2022);
 - Symposium “Toward the International Society for Gastronomic Sciences and Studies” (September 2022)

Agroecology Europe Youth Forum² (September 2022); dissemination of the HUB to the stakeholders interested in agroecology (since long term as well as just starting agroecological practice) will be done at the:

- 4th Agroecology Europe Forum (2023)

Dissemination strategy and stakeholder’s engagement activity (M6; M18) included follow steps:

- Introducing the Hub to all participants of the created living labs (NL, IT, UK);

¹ <https://2022.terramadresalonedelgusto.com/>

² <https://www.agroecology-europe.org/agroecology-europe-youth-forum-2022/>

Further steps and stakeholder engagement strategy

- Introducing the Hub to all participants of 3 trainings organised by ECVC as T4.3 activities.

Moreover the Hub will be Promoted through:

- webpages of AE4EU; AEEU; all institutions involved in the project, and requested to be linked to the ALL-Ready website
- using mailing list of mapped initiatives/actors
- in the social media (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter account of AEEU)

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The test phase started in May 2022, when the first trial of the Hub was presented during the project meeting in Lugo (Spain). A workshop within the WP4 was led by the UNISG representatives and will include testing activities of the HUB trial. The workshop participants were asked to use all options and elements of the Hub and to give their feedback. This feedback was used for potential adjustments of the Hub and for preparing its first operative version, thus the Hub will be accessible for external users in October 2022. After the period of the internal launching of the Hub (engaging multi-stakeholder partners of AE4EU project) and further improvements (M24), the HUB will be disseminated among the interested stakeholders. In January 2024 after the project ends, the Hub will be transferred to Agroecology Europe and be administered by their staff.

Annex 1 - Key informants contacted about their needs and interest in the European Agroecology Hub and network.

	Country	Identification code	Pillar concerned
1	Germany	DE_1	Science, Education and training
2	Germany	DE_2	Education and training, Science Movement
3	Germany	DE_3	
4	Germany	DE_4	Science, Education and training
5	Germany	DE_5	Science, Education and training
6	Germany	DE_6	Science, Education and training
7	Germany	DE_7	Several
8	Germany	DE_8	Several
9	Germany	DE_9	Science, Education and training
10	Germany	DE_10	Science
11	Germany	DE_11	Practice
12	Germany	DE_12	Science
13	Germany	DE_13	Practice
14	Austria	AT_1	Practice
15	Austria	AT_2	Practice
16	Austria	AT_3	Practice
17	Austria	AT_4	Science
18	Austria	AT_5	Practice
19	Austria	AT_6	Science
20	Austria	AT_7	Education and training

21	Austria	AT_8	
22	Kosovo		Practice
23	Kosovo		Several
24	Kosovo		Science
25	Kosovo		Science
26	Kosovo		Education and training
27	Kosovo		Education and training
28	Kosovo		Movement
29	Kosovo		Practice
30	Kosovo		Education and training
31	Kosovo		Several
32	Kosovo		Practice
33	Italy	IT_01	Several
34	Italy	IT_02	Education and training
35	Italy	IT_03	Several
36	Italy	IT_04	Science
37	Italy	IT_05	Several
38	Italy	IT_06	Several
39	Italy	IT_07	Several
40	Italy	IT_08	Practice
41	Italy	IT_09	Practice
42	Italy	IT_10	Several
43	Italy	IT_11	Science
44	Italy	IT_12	Several

45	Italy	IT_13	Several
46	Italy	IT_14	Several
47	Italy	IT_15	Several
48	Montenegro	ME_PRACTICE1	Practice
49	Montenegro	ME_MOV1	Movement
50	Montenegro	ME_PRACTICE2	Practice
51	Montenegro	ME_SCI1	Science
52	Montenegro	ME_PRACTICE3	Practice
53	Spain		Several
54	Spain		Several
55	Spain		Several
56	Spain		Several
57	Spain		Science
58	Spain		Movement
59	Spain		Education and training
60	Bulgaria	BGKI01 SENT	Science
61	Bulgaria	BGKI01 SENT	Science
62	Croatia		Several
63	Croatia		Several
64	Croatia		Several
65	Croatia		Several
66	Croatia		Several

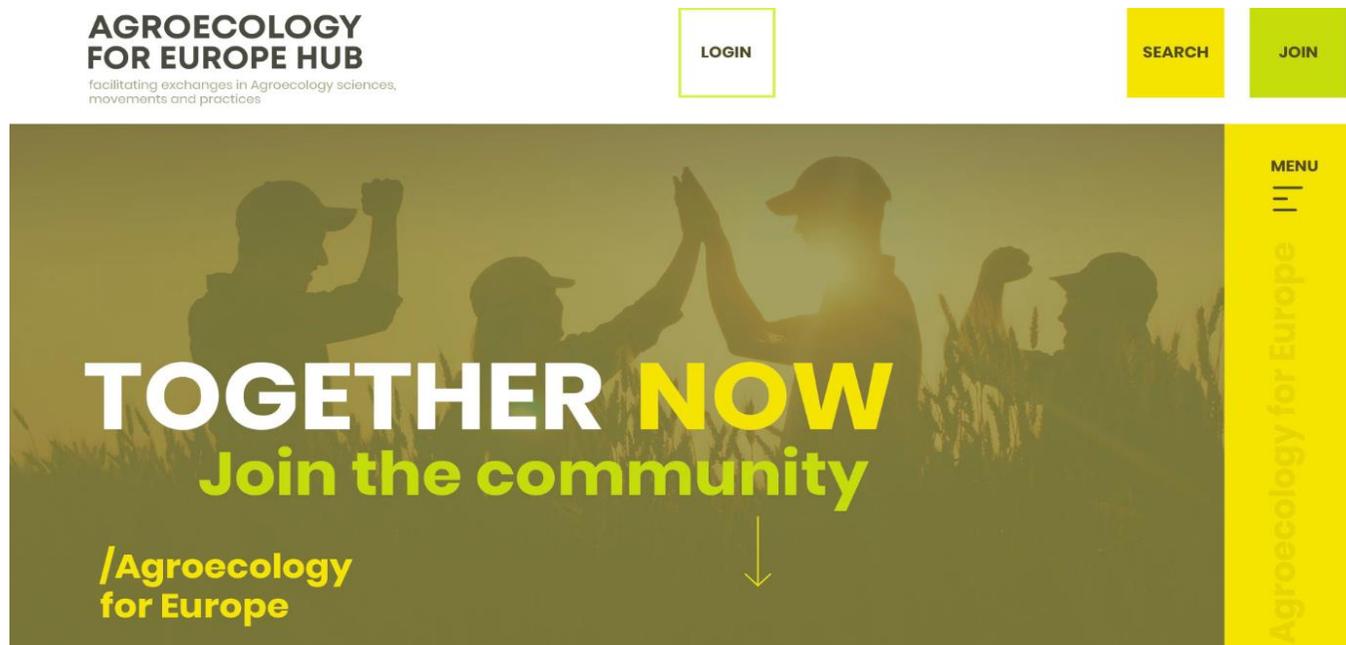
Annex 2 – Characteristics of different agroecology platforms and hubs

N	Name of the tool	URL	Organisation/project	Objectives	Target audience	Focus on AE	Comments
1	European Agroecology Knowledge Exchange Network	https://www.eurovia.org/eaken/	European Coordination Via Campesina			yes	at the moment under improvement
2	BOND (repository on the project webpage)	https://www.bondproject.eu/repository-2/bond-projects/	Bond Project - Bringing Organisations & Network Development to higher levels in the Farming sector in Europe	Sharing stories	Farmers and land managers	no	no focus on agroecology
3	UNISECO agro-ecological knowledge hub and MAP NEF under development	https://uniseco-project.eu/	UNISECO	to promote group learning processes and co-creation of knowledge with actors and stakeholders in Multi-Actor Platforms both through physical interactions such as workshops and focus group discussions at EU, national and local levels as well as through virtual networking in the UNISECO Multi Actor Networking Facility (MAP NEF).	Multi-actor audience	yes	mix of the project website and AE info
4	EURAKNOS	https://euraknos.eu/thematic-network	sister project of EUREKA	facilitate and support the thematic networks community that are collecting agricultural knowledge	researchers, farmers, advisors, policy makers, NGOs, SMEs and Facilitators	no	no focus on AE
5	The AgroEcology	www.agroecologyh	Virginia	To simplify the process of charting	An information	yes	tool for small

	Hub	ub.info	Cooperative Extension	and learning path relating to food systems, agriculture, and natural resources conservation by identifying classes, courses, information sources, supportive people and organizations affiliated with Agroecology	clearinghouse. It facilitates lifelong learning relating to food systems, agriculture and natural resources conservation. It exists to help Loudoun's residents chart learning paths through local in-person classes and online programming.		audience. No focus on AE
6	Agroecology Hub (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania)	agroecologyhub.org		project with a goal of cultivating a community of practice (CoP) for those with a passion for agroecology for smallholder agriculture development.		yes	a project in Kenia, Uganda, Tanzania, not a hub
7	GFLX	glfx.globallandscapeforum.org	digital platform for the Global Landscapes Forum community	to enable and empower community members with the connections, knowledge and technology to connect, share, learn and act online and in person.	passionate people who are working to accelerate action towards more sustainable, integrated landscape management	no	repository of events on landscape approach
8	Agroecology Knowledge Hub	www.fao.org/agroecology/home/en/	FAO	showcases evidence, policies, practices and science on agroecology. The Hub also facilitates discussions via forums related to agroecology.	provides a platform for farmers' organizations, cooperatives, civil society organizations, research centres, NGOs, policymakers, decision-makers and the private sector working in family farming and agroecology with the common goal of identifying opportunities and gaps to promote a shift towards sustainable food	yes	no network, just database, newsletter and shared content. Unique forum on the site

					systems.		
9	Virtual Research Environment	www.lifewatch.eu	All-Ready	<p>-offers scientists access to data, web-services, VREs, workflows and training opportunities to support biodiversity and ecosystem research</p> <p>-specialised content for students of all ages, such as training resources, relevant news and events, and more</p> <p>-specialised content for policy makers, such as projects, events, official documents and more.</p>	Students, policy makers, researchers	yes	

Annex 3 - Homepage of the Hub



AGROECOLOGY FOR EUROPE HUB
facilitating exchanges in Agroecology sciences, movements and practices

LOGIN

SEARCH JOIN

TOGETHER NOW
Join the community

/Agroecology for Europe

MENU

Agroecology for Europe

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Building a European network on agroecology

OUR GOALS

- To accelerate the transition towards sustainable agriculture and food systems. Agroecology in Europe is at a turning point.
- To further push and embrace the development of agroecology and its different facets in Europe a strong development with ambitious and longer-term joint actions

**Share
Learn
Inspire**

Connect
digitally with
colleagues
and experts

**A hub for
agroecology**

EXPERTISE, KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES

**EXPERIENCE A GROWING
NETWORK**

The Agroecology for Europe Hub will gather different stakeholders to facilitate exchanges in the Europe-wide network of agroecology organizations.

BEGINNERS TOOLS
Training and practicing

Let's start Training sessions LL creation Farmers' diaries

NETWORK
Sharing your skills and experience

AE initiatives Find farmers Fundings Share your experience

WORKSHOPS
Living Labs and Research infrastructure

Annex 4 - The user's profile of the Hub

AGROECOLOGY FOR EUROPE HUB
facilitating exchanges in Agroecology sciences, movements and practices

SEARCH

/MY PROFILE MENU

User Name
📍 ITALY
[go back to content creation](#)

SHORTCUTS

- General information
- About me
- Education

General information

Profile image
Upload your image [BROWSE](#)

My name
Name

I live in
Choose your country

My occupation is
Occupation

My area of speciality
Choose area

[+](#)

About me

Write something about you

I am looking to connect with...:
 The change I would like to bring about is...:
 To reduce the gap between agroecology practice and research
 A book/podcast I would recommend is...:
 Find out more about my project(s)...:

My experience and skills related to agroecology

My farmer experience is:

My Academic knowledge is:

I can share the following agroecology tools for beginners:

My skills related to agroecology are:

Education

School name	Degree
<input type="text" value="School name"/>	<input type="text" value="Degree"/>
Field of study	Start date
<input type="text" value="Field of study"/>	<input type="text" value="MM / DD / YYYY"/>
Other information	
<input type="text" value="Other information"/>	

I give consent to the publication of the uploaded content and to its storage in the safe database/cloud of the Hub*
[Read all details](#)

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