

Farmer Field Schools – Using peer-to-peer advisory to reduce antibiotic inputs and to improve animal health and welfare

Problem

Several advisory approaches are available but don't necessarily lead to an improvement in animal health. One reason for that is the missing takeover of the ownership of arguments and recommendations.

Solution

Farmer Field Schools (FFS) facilitate farmer inter-collegial advisory. The recommendations from practitioners, are in general implementation orientated and convincing.

Outcome

- Shift from a static health plan to a dynamic process giving autonomy for farmers on decision making and implementing measures.
- Reduced use of antibiotics and incidences of mastitis.

Applicability box

Input used

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Copper | <input type="checkbox"/> Anthelmintics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mineral oil | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Antibiotics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fertilisers | <input type="checkbox"/> Vitamins |

Geographical coverage

Global

Application time

Throughout the year

Required time

3 hours

Period of impact

Throughout the year

Equipment

Hard copies of host farm information, coffee, optionally flip chart and coloured pens

Best in

Advisory of dairy cow farmers

Practical recommendations

- FFS are groups of 5-7 farmers including one host and 4-6 advising guest farmers per meeting and one facilitator (possibly an advisor)
- A set of well-prepared data of the host farm (overall farm information, performance, health and welfare, treatments) are circled ahead of the FFS
- A meeting consists of an approximately one-hour farm and a two hours structured discussion including problems pointed out by the host farmer
- Each guest farmer must give one or more recommendation(s) to the questions of the host farmer.
- The host farmer sums up what he/she thinks after having heard the opinions, rejects and reflects on suggestions and commits him/herself to certain improvements. The facilitator does not push the host farmer into precise lines. It will be as precise as the host farmer wants it to be



Picture 1: Farm visit before a Farmer Field School (Photo: Olivia Tavares, ITAB)

Picture 2: Farmer field school – discussing the problem area (Photo: Olivia Tavares, ITAB).

On-farm application

System approach

- FFS combine farmer's meetings with a preventive animal health and welfare approach and data collection. An Animal Health and Welfare Planning Protocol helps to focus on a specific health problem (e.g. mastitis).

Evaluation

- Quantitative: Analysis of antibiotics use in udder treatment and of yearly milk recording on farm level
- Qualitative: farmer's satisfaction

Further information

Further readings

Handbook: RELACS AWHP Protocol

Weblinks

Check the [Farm Knowledge Platform](#) for more practical recommendations.

About this practice abstract and RELACS

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RELACS: 'Replacement of Contentious Inputs in Organic Farming Systems' (RELACS) builds on results of previous research projects and takes far-advanced solutions forward. As a system approach to sustainable agriculture, organic farming aims to effectively manage ecological processes whilst lowering dependence on off-farm inputs. The RELACS partners will evaluate solutions to further reduce the use of external inputs and, if needed, develop and adopt cost-efficient and environmentally safe tools and technologies.

Project website: www.relacs-project.eu

Social media: Facebook ([RELACSeu](#)) & Twitter ([@RELACSeu](#))

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