

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

### Problem

Recommendations issued by advisory services are often not readily adopted by farmers.

### Solution

Farmer Field Schools (FFS) facilitate exchange between practitioners. Recommendations shared between practitioners are often found more convincing and are thus implemented by farmers more rapidly.

### Outcome

- In the case of animal health care/antibiotics reduction, FFS allow the shift from a static health plan to a dynamic process giving autonomy to farmers in decision making and implementation.
- As a result, antibiotics use was reduced on the participating farms while animal health and welfare were maintained or improved.

### 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 circulated before the FFS takes place.
- A meeting consists of one-hour farm visit followed by a structured discussion of two hours to address problems raised by the host farmer.
- Each guest farmer must give one or more recommendations to answer the questions of the host farmer.
- The host farmer draws his own conclusions based on the proposed recommendations and decides which recommendations will be adopted. The facilitator does not impose any solutions on the host farmer.

### 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



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

Picture 2: Discussing the problem area during a Farmer Field School (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 Animal Health and Welfare Protocol (AHWP).

### Weblinks

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

## About this practice abstract and RELACS

### Publishers:

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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](http://www.relacs-project.eu)

**Social media:** Facebook (@RELACSeu) & Twitter (@RELACSeu)

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