

A Participatory Methodology for Large Scale Field Trials in the UK



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Farmer participatory research methods are an appropriate element within research on complex farming systems and aim to include farmers in research design, experimentation and evaluation. Such methods are commonly used in developing countries, but there is little experience of using them in the UK. This project involved both researchers and farmers in large scale field trials of winter wheat under organic conditions. The project aimed to (1) develop a suitable participatory approach; (2) assess the level of disease in organic farm saved seed; and (3) identify suitable varieties of winter wheat. This poster provides an account of the participatory method used.

Project design

Farmers interviewed about experimental activities and learning methods



Getting farmers involved

Advertised at farm events; connecting with existing contacts; and letter detailing project aims



Trial preparation and drilling

25kg of winter wheat varieties Solstice, Hereward and Xi19, and the 3-way mixture sent to farms; farmers drilled seed using their standard methods; and farmers interviewed by telephone mid-season to record system factors.



Field assessment

Replicated field assessments by Researchers; Field assessments by farmers; and Farmers interviewed about perceptions of variety performance



Dissemination

Quarterly newsletters; presentations at field days; publications in EFRC's magazine; and phone contact



Farmers have their say...

The variety performance data is useful

The effect of the climatic on variety performance showed the need for greater variability between varieties

The comparison between how I thought my crop was doing and the actual variety performance data is useful

We don't want to do field assessments – shouldn't researchers be doing that?

A greater investment of time, particularly at project initiation, is necessary to increase farmer ownership

Meetings between farmers and researchers must take place when demands on the farm are at a minimum; open interviews can easily be disabled by interruptions from farm activities

Field assessment data must be rapidly processed so that farmers can use the variety performance information in the subsequent cropping year

Farmers that are involved should have a high willingness and ability to participate

The balance of power favoured the researcher and this was clear from the farmers' lack of ownership of the project, and their demands for greater researcher time.

The major scientific conclusions² derived from this project would not have been possible without significant farmer participation

1.Harris, F., Lyon, F. and Clarke, S. (2005) ¹Involving farmers in research: Reflections on good practice for participatory projects within the UK agricultural sector. <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/ceedr/ESRC/brefing%20note.pdf>

2.Clarke, S, Hinchliffe K. E., Haigh Z., Jones H, Pearce B, Wolfe, M. S. and Thomas J. (2006) A Participatory Approach to Variety Trials for Organic Systems. *Joint Organic Congress, May 30-31, Odense, Denmark.*



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