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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input used</th>
<th>Anthelmintics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mineral oil</td>
<td>☒</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fertilisers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antibiotics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vitamins</td>
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</tbody>
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**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

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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 Organic 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

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