

# 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.

## 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 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.



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

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

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