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Topic 4 - Innovation in Organic farming: "thinking out of the Box"

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THE ONLINE PLATFORM "ORGANIC FARM KNOWLEDGE"

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Abstract: The complexity of organic farming requires farmers to have a very high level of knowledge and skills, but cross-border exchange on farming practices, including organic, remains limited. The Organic Farm Knowledge platform (<https://organic-farmknowledge.org/>) provides access to a wide range of tools and resources about organic farming that can help improve production, and it promotes the exchange of knowledge among farmers, farm advisors, and scientists. The first version of the platform was built by the project OK-Net Arable, and it is now extended by OK-Net EcoFeed. Both projects are thematic networks funded under the European Union's research programme Horizon 2020. OK-Net Arable aimed to improve productivity in organic arable cropping, while OK-Net EcoFeed aims to help organic pig and poultry farmers achieve the goal of using 100% organic and regional feed. In addition to these two projects, Organic Farm Knowledge is cooperating with several other projects to widen the knowledge base of the platform.

Introduction: The Organic Farm Knowledge platform aims to fill the gap in the exchange of information about organic farming between farmers and advisers across Europe, thus constituting a knowledge reservoir as defined by EU SCAR (2019): a collection of different kinds of knowledge, expertise, best practices and methodologies, presented in different dissemination formats, tools and materials. The platform (<https://organic-farmknowledge.org>) provides access to a wide range of tools and resources about organic farming with the aim of increasing productivity and quality in organic farming across Europe. Furthermore, the platform promotes the exchange of knowledge among farmers, farm advisors, and scientists.

Organic Farm Knowledge was originally set up in the Horizon 2020 project OK-Net Arable (Organic Knowledge Network Arable, Rasmussen et al. 2017) and is now being further developed in OK-Net EcoFeed (Organic Knowledge Network on Monogastric Animal Feed). Both projects are thematic networks. OK-Net Arable addressed organic arable cropping. OK-Net EcoFeed aims to help organic pig and poultry farmers achieve the goal of using 100% organic and regional feed. OK-Net EcoFeed is a logic continuation of OK-Net Arable, making the link between feed cultivation, feed processing and animal production.

Material and methods: Based on the knowledge syntheses conducted by OK-Net Arable and OK-Net EcoFeed (Niggli et al. 2016, Studnitz 2019), the main thematic areas revolving around arable farming and feed for monogastric animals were identified. In order to support the innovation groups with relevant knowledge and to foster knowledge exchange in both projects, a range of activities are/were undertaken:

- Selection of existing end-material with English metadata;
- Translation of existing end-user material, which is relevant for other countries and regions;
- Production of factsheets and videos generated in the projects. The factsheets are based on the EIP-AGRI common format for practice abstracts.

All tools and materials are available on the Organic Farm Knowledge platform, to which the following types of tools can be uploaded: web platforms & websites, videos, educational resources such as webinars & e-learning, leaflets & guidelines/fact sheets, calculation tools & decision support systems, books & reports and audio/podcasts. In the OK-Net Arable project, the term "tool" was defined as "formatted information used as a means for circulation of knowledge among farmers and advisors" (Rasmussen et al. 2017).

An important development is that a number of further Horizon 2020 and CORE Organic projects have joined the platform and want to use it for their practice-oriented output. These include Liveseed (Improve performance of organic agriculture by boosting organic seed and plant breeding efforts across Europe), Relacs (Replacement of Contentious Inputs in organic farming Systems), Remix (Redesigning European cropping systems based on species MIXtures) and all CORE Organic projects (Coordination of European Transnational Research in Organic Food and Farming Systems). In order for them to be able to join and use the platform, they are requested to provide their products in high quality, to provide translations, texts for the theme pages (see below) and relevant keywords (see below).

Results: In the framework of OK-Net Ecofeed, the existing platform was enhanced to cover the needs of OK-Net Ecofeed and other projects:

- The platform was extended to cover more themes, in particular monogastric feed (five sub-themes based on the findings of the knowledge synthesis, Studnitz 2019). Each tool that is uploaded to the platform is allocated to one of these themes. For the other projects mentioned above, similar theme pages will be created to give easy access to the tools related to seeds and breeding, horticulture and inputs.
- The platform is now available in the 13 languages of the partners of the two projects (in addition to English: Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Polish, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish). For most parts of the platform, automatic translation is offered (using DeepL and Google Translate).
- The core of the platform is the "toolbox" of tools, which are described with metadata. The metadata includes information about the problem the tool addresses, the solution(s) it offers, a description of the tool, the theme(s) it addresses, the language(s) it can be found in, the year it was released, the country of origin and information about the issuing organisation. The metadata about the tools are translated by Google Translate.
- Users can rate the tools, helping others to see whether previous users have found a certain tool relevant.
- Users can search for tools on a specific topic using either the themes, the specific keywords, or free-text search. The users can also search for specific tool types (e.g., videos), tools in certain languages, and tools from a certain country of origin.
- In order to make tools easier to find using harmonized keywords, FAO's Agrovoc thesaurus (FAO 2019) is used, and the keywords to describe a tool must be chosen from Agrovoc.

- The metadata of the tools, and, if possible, the tools themselves are stored in the online archive Organic eprints (orgprints.org), the world's largest archive with publications about research and development in organic agriculture.
- In order to accommodate discussion about the themes and tools, a module from DISQUS (disqus.com) has been integrated for each theme and each tool page. Furthermore, links to the social media entries of the individual tools are provided.
- Tools are primarily promoted via the project website (news), the project's social media and the channels used by the project partners.
- The platform also includes a news and events section and background information about the partner projects.

Discussion: The work of OK-Net Arable and that of OK-Net Ecofeed shows that a lot of knowledge exists about organic farming practices, but it can be difficult to find, and in many cases, it is difficult for farmers and advisers to use in their daily work. The online Organic Farm Knowledge platform offers tools that present scientific and practical knowledge that is designed for by practitioners, making it easier to access and apply. In addition, it offers the possibility for users to comment, discuss and ask questions about important themes and specific tools. In this way, the online platform contributes to helping farmers and advisers become more innovative and improving towards best practices.

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Studnitz, Merete (Ed.) (2019): Knowledge synthesis. Feeding monogastrics 100% organic and regionally produced feed. Deliverable 2.2 of OK-Net Ecofeed. Aarhus University/ICROFS, Tjele

Weblinks

- <https://organic-farmknowledge.org/>
- <https://ok-net-ecofeed.eu>
- <https://www.liveseed.eu>
- <https://relacs-project.eu>
- <https://www.remix-intercrops.eu>
- <http://projects.au.dk/coreorganicofund>

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