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Animal health and welfare planning for European organic dairy herds – development and expansion

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Animal Health and Welfare Planning (AHWP) is a long-term continuous approach, as initially developed in the Core Organic ANIPLAN-Project. Within the framework of organic principles it is based on regular data collection on animal health and welfare and therewith farm specific. It identifies not only problematic areas but also farm specific successes. The approach is based on the inclusion of external knowledge and persons in the process to reach, finally, farmer ownership of the envisaged improvement measures. A team of farming advisors, veterinary practitioners and on-farm researchers from Spain, France, United Kingdom and Switzerland developed an improved RELACS AHWP protocol and introduced the AHWP approach for the first time in France and Spain. The improvement entails the introduction of the Farmer Field School approach (FFS), a specific form of facilitated farmer inter-collegial advisory in groups representing 5-7 farms. A facilitator is responsible for organization and moderation of the meeting as well as writing up and distributing the minutes to all participants afterwards. Each meeting comprises a farm walk (including the ‘success case’), a structured discussion about two problematic areas pointed out by the host farmer and subsequent inputs from each individual participant on how to solve it. Discussion on each problematic area is closed by a conclusive statement from the host farmer about the next steps to guarantee a high level of farmer ownership within the process. In RELACS, 35 farms (4 from Spain, 11 from United Kingdom and 20 from France) are involved in 6 FFS groups. The impact of the advisory action will be determined based on a comparison with another 31 monitored farms (5 from Spain, 9 from United Kingdom and 17 from France) that did not undertake the FFS approach.