



SolACE - Solutions for improving Agroecosystem and Crop Efficiency for water and nutrient use

Deliverable 6.5 Intermediate report on the implementation of the dissemination and communication strategy

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1. Introduction

In order to effectively disseminate and communicate SolACE activities, objectives, outputs and outcomes, SolACE WP6 produced a dissemination strategy at the beginning of the project (Willer 2017a). It has the following core objectives, which will be achieved using a broad spectrum of tools and instruments:

- › Ensure that actors and stakeholders are aware of the SolACE project and that they are optimally involved and contribute to the project.
- › Foster linkages with the scientific community: spread the SolACE philosophy, results and methodologies into the scientific community.
- › Give easy access to all project information and materials.
- › Disseminate project results to end-users and general public.
- › Provide easily understandable practical knowledge for uptake by practitioners.
- › Create a SolACE community.
- › Reach a large range of students from different universities.

The dissemination strategy defines the dissemination activities and provides a roadmap, but it also aims to help the project partners become active in communication and dissemination activities.

The following sections outline how the objectives are being met, the lessons learned in the first 36 months of the project and the outlook to the rest of the project.

2. Achieving the objectives of the dissemination strategy

This section outlines how each of the objectives is being or will be achieved.

2.1 Ensure that actors and stakeholders are aware of the SolACE project and that they are optimally involved and contribute to the project

The project has adopted an active knowledge interaction approach to improve the exchange of information and experiences with various stakeholders and amongst them, in order to get advice and feedback from them, to assist in the research and dissemination process and to ensure the effective transfer of knowledge.

As part of SolACE Work Package 6, we are actively engaging with a wide range of stakeholders in the agricultural sector and rural industry throughout the project in a variety of different ways. This includes the SolACE Stakeholder Advisory Board (SAB), European-level stakeholder events, stakeholder evaluation meetings, seven farmer networks, the SolACE Stakeholder Forum, and ad hoc engagement undertaken by the SolACE partners. For more information, see the following sections.

2.1.1 The SolACE Stakeholder Advisory Board (SAB)

The SolACE Stakeholder Advisory Board (SAB) has been put in place for the duration of the project. Members are key, influential parties that help guide the direction of the work. The following members have agreed to

be part of the SAB and are, or have been, supporting the project with advice and their presence at the annual meetings¹:

- › Dr Alan E. Richardson, Senior Principal Research Scientist, CSIRO Agriculture & Food, *not invited yet to attend a SolACE meeting.*
- › Dr Jean-Claude Yvin, R&D Director, Agro Innovation International, Groupe Roullier, *invited to the Kick-Off in 2017; had to cancel but was replaced by a colleague from his group.*
- › Dr Peter Kromann, Potato Production Systems Specialist, International Potato Center (CIP), *actively participated in the 1st and 2nd Annual Meetings in 2018 and 2019.*
- › Dr Iván Ortíz Monasterio, Principal Scientist, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), *actively participated in the Kick-Off in 2017, 1st and 2nd Annual Meetings in 2018 and 2019.*
- › Dr Valérie Maquère, Head of the Bureau of Soils, Water and Circular Economy, French Ministry of Agriculture, Agrifood and Forestry (MAAF), *participated in the Kick-Off in 2017 and then left the SAB as she left her position at the MAAF in 2018.*
- › Dr Cécile Thonar, Scientist, University of Liège, Belgium, *participated in the Kick-Off in 2017 as a partner of the project when formerly at the Research institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), and joined the SAB after that.*
- › Dr Davide Cammarano, Research Scientist, Purdue University, *actively participated in SolACE as WP1 leader and representative of the James Hutton Institute (JHI) until he left JHI at the end of 2019. He joined the SAB in early 2020, to provide opportunities to be further involved.*

2.1.2 European-level stakeholder events

According to the SolACE grant agreement, three European SolACE Stakeholder events were planned. However, three events have already taken place (Montpellier 2017, Foggia 2018, Dundee 2019)², and the fourth will be held toward the end of the project, probably in Brussels (Belgium), organized by ECAF in 2022.

At these meetings, we invite a diversity of stakeholders along to meet face-to-face with SolACE partners and provide feedback on our ideas and proposed innovations. Here, they can interact, ask questions and learn more about the project. SolACE partners have the chance to reflect on the feedback received from stakeholders attending these events, so that they can ensure their innovations are applicable to end-users.

Reports on all stakeholder events were provided on the project website as well as the project's newsletter (Willer 2017b, Rust 2018, Kemper 2019).

For all stakeholder events, proceedings are/will be available on Zenodo (Hinsinger & Willer 2018, Pecchioni et al. 2018, Kemper et al., forthcoming).

2.1.3 Evaluation of stakeholder feedback

The protocol (tools) for recording stakeholder engagement was documented in Milestone 7 (Jones 2017). However, it was then decided that Newcastle University (UNEW) would record feedback from the

¹ Two of them have been invited to attend the SolACE internal meetings: Kick-Off in Montpellier, France (2017), 1st Annual Meeting in Foggia, Italy (2018) and 2nd Annual Meeting in Dundee, UK (2019). One of them attended all three of them to better evaluate the progress made.

² Information about the stakeholder events is available on the SolACE website at <https://www.solace-eu.net/service/stakeholder-events.html>.

stakeholder meetings, the Stakeholder Advisory Board inputs at the annual meetings, the farmer network meetings and the responses from the Stakeholder Forum.

2.1.4 Stakeholder evaluation meetings

One SolACE partner, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) is organising the SolACE Stakeholder evaluation meetings. These activities will take place towards the end of the project aiming to gather feedback from a range of stakeholders on what they think of the innovations.

The protocol is documented in Milestone 13 (Protocol for arranging local evaluation meetings, Carlsson 2018a). Results will be shown by SLU in Deliverable 3.4, to be ready in month 54 (Stakeholders' assessments of innovative agroecosystem management practices).

2.1.5 Farmer networks

The seven farmer networks, which include farmers that are running the SolACE on-farm trials, regularly offer their experiences and thoughts about the innovations. Newcastle University will document farmer attitudes and experiences of the innovations in Deliverable 5.1³ and their identified barriers/enablers to uptake in Deliverable 6.2.⁴

The final list of farmer networks is shown in Milestone 11 (Carlsson 2018b)

2.1.6 Stakeholder Forum

The Solace Stakeholder Forum (related to Milestone 3) is another avenue for seeking feedback and interacting with end-users, where the project regularly engages with members via email on the progress of the project and asks questions to gain further information on their perspectives.

Furthermore, the online forum can be used to discuss relevant topics on water- and nutrient-use efficiency with other interested parties. It is available on the SolACE website at <https://www.solace-eu.net/get-involved/discussion.html>. At the time of writing, not much discussion has been triggered. However, it is expected that towards the end of the project, when more results are available, more active discussion will occur.

2.1.7 Engagement undertaken by the SolACE partners

Ad hoc engagement is undertaken by the SolACE partners, such as at agricultural events, conferences and other communication with interested parties. For example, partners have actively engaged in events like the Durum Days in Foggia, Italy in 2018 (alongside which, the 1st Annual Meeting of SolACE was organized) or the 2017 Agri Innovation Summit in Lisbon, Portugal.

More information about stakeholder engagement is available in Milestone 22.

³ Farmers' experiences and perceptions of agronomic innovations and novel genotypes for agroecosystem efficiency

⁴ Identified drivers, enablers and barriers for uptake of innovations

2.2 Foster linkages with the scientific community: spread the SolACE philosophy, results and methodologies into the scientific community

Scientific results are disseminated through appropriate channels and are made available open access via Zenodo, the projects' online repository.⁵

Scientific findings have also been disseminated at international conferences, workshops, and seminars throughout the project. For example, SolACE partners organised a symposium on microbe-assisted crop production – opportunities, challenges and needs (miCROPe 2019) and are coordinating sessions at Eurosoil 2020. Partners also presented papers and posters at conferences and symposiums, e.g. a poster on the genetic variation of wheat seedling root angle⁶ was presented at the National Symposium for Applied Biological Sciences. Furthermore, some peer-reviewed papers have also been written. These efforts are expected to increase as more results become available in the coming years.

2.3 Give easy access to all project information and materials

The SolACE public website www.solace-eu.net (D6.3, Willer 2017c) includes all vital information about the project, including the aims, description of work packages, partners, field experiments and farmer networks, as well as various communications materials, e.g. the project flyer and poster (MS6, Willer 2017d), links to social media accounts, videos and practice abstracts.

News and updates are regularly communicated via:

- › news items on the website⁷
- › in the SolACE newsletters⁸ as well as
- › the project's social media accounts.⁹

For key indicators about website and social media activities, see annex 6.3 and 6.4.

Other dissemination channels include the SolACE pages on the EIP-Agri website,¹⁰ the SolACE community on Zenodo,¹¹ partner websites as well as specialised and national press.

2.4 Disseminate project results to end-users and general public

At the beginning of the project, a press release was used to increase awareness of the project (Willer 2017e). The SolACE newsletter, which is published twice per year, also provides all subscribers with regular updates about project activities and results.

⁵ The SolACE community can be found at <https://zenodo.org/communities/solace>

⁶ The poster is available on the SolACE Zenodo community at <https://zenodo.org/record/3485095#.XoLvoYgzPZ>

⁷ So far 70 news item have been published at <https://www.solace-eu.net/service/news-archive/>

⁸ So far, four newsletters have been published. They are available at <https://www.solace-eu.net/service/newsletter.html>

⁹ The SolACE Twitter account is available at https://twitter.com/SolACE_EU_NET; the Facebook page is available at <https://www.facebook.com/solaceEU/>

¹⁰ The SolACE page on the EIP Agri website is available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/solace-solutions-improving-agroecosystem-and-crop>

¹¹ The SolACE community can be found at <https://zenodo.org/communities/solace>

Publications and communications for the general press and the farmers' specialised press and magazines have been produced. For example, SolACE partner, the Hungarian Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (ÖMKi) sends out regular press releases to relevant news affiliates about SolACE project work¹².

Exhibitions and field visits are used to disseminate project activities and outputs to farmers, policymakers, and consumers. For example, SolACE partners such as Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) regularly organises farm visits to demonstrate practices and encourage exchange with and between farmers and the general public.

All project videos are posted on the SolACE YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoaB0JZdh1sVQmfj2L8qog>. The channel has had 515 views, and we expect this number to increase as more videos are added to the channel.

So far, five SolACE videos have been produced, which provide information about the project (see table Table 1). Future videos will focus more on project outputs and results. All videos can be accessed through the project website here: <https://www.solace-eu.net/service/videos.html>

Table 1: SolACE videos

Video title	Release date	View
SolACE - WP2: Phenotyping platform	19.02.2020	25
SolACE - Farmer Network Introduction	31.05.2019	17
Stakeholder engagement in SolACE	30.08.2018	68
SolACE Annual Meeting - Foggia 2018	26.07.2018	156
SolACE Project - Kick-off meeting	01.08.2017	249

Furthermore, policy briefs are being produced to address key issues that policymakers should be aware of. The provisional list of topics includes:

- › Climate change impact on crops
- › Crop modelling
- › Identified drivers, enablers and barriers for the uptake of innovations
- › GS (Genomic Selection)-selected genotypes obtained
- › Simulation with improved models

2.5 Provide easily understandable practical knowledge for uptake by practitioners

SolACE partners have been advertising events as well as producing articles and communications for farmers and specialised press and magazines. Field visits, exhibitions and other events, where farmers, policymakers, and consumers are participating, have also been used to disseminate project results to a broader audience. The farmer networks foster particularly strong connections with practitioners and offer a channel through which project partners can engage with external stakeholders.

¹² One such example is available here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UNRjz4dXoyv_OXlqXH9QJ3RBgk-p6L5N/view

A special focus has been put on the easily understandable practice abstracts in the Common EIP-AGRI format. These practice abstracts aim to enable wide uptake among practitioners, make the research visible to the target groups, and facilitate information sharing in the EU agricultural knowledge and information system (AKIS).

So far, two practice abstracts have been published:

- › Mycorrhizal fungi – How to produce your own bio-fertiliser: <https://zenodo.org/record/3385633>
- › Undersowing leys in cereals: <https://zenodo.org/record/3529114>

A further five practice abstracts are being finalised, and several additional practice abstracts are planned for the second half of the project (see Table 2). Additional topics are being discussed with potential authors. Relevant practice abstracts will also be translated into various project languages to facilitate dissemination. All practice abstracts are submitted to EIP-AGRI to be published on their website. Furthermore, all practice abstracts are disseminated using the project website, newsletter, social media accounts, and partner channels.

Table 2: Upcoming SolACE practice abstracts

Title	Expected publication date
Reduced Soil Tillage: Mulch sowing in organic agriculture	Summer 2020
Utilising demonstration events for knowledge exchange	Summer 2020
Hybrid Potatoes	Summer 2020
How to use formulations based on DCM Minigran technology in the field	Summer 2020
Experiences in on-farm experimentation in organic potato systems in Hungary	Fall 2020
Bread wheat: Conservation agriculture for water conservation and nutrient use efficiency	Fall 2020
Tweet to exist	Fall 2020
How to evaluate the performance of microbial inoculants	Fall 2020
How to select pre crop for your wheat	Early 2021
Breed it or buy it: Participatory breeding of durum wheat	Early 2021

2.6 Create a SolACE community

A project logo, as well as several templates (Power Point, MS Word) based on the project’s layout, were created in order to enable project partners to present results in a harmonised way and ensure good visibility of the SolACE project.

To help project partners become active in communicating and dissemination project information and results, WP6 also produced a communication manual (Kemper and Willer, 2019), which introduces the key communication and dissemination formats for the SolACE project and how to use them. These formats and tools include:

- › Press releases

- › News and events on the SolACE website
- › SolACE newsletter (published two times per year)
- › Partner websites
- › National and specialised press
- › SolACE repository on Zenodo
- › Social media (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube)
- › SolACE project flyer
- › Posters
- › Videos
- › Practice abstracts
- › Policy briefs
- › Stakeholder forum
- › Discussion forum

Furthermore, five electronic newsletters, including project updates, activities, outputs and results, have been distributed to the consortium as well as all stakeholders and other subscribers.

2.7 Reach a large range of students from different universities

Among the researchers involved in the project are professors, teaching undergraduate and graduate students. These academic partners will ensure the dissemination of the main scientific achievements and tools through training materials, which will be developed in the second half of the project. Furthermore, several graduate students are participating in the SolACE project as part of their theses or dissertations, thus contributing to the results as well as benefiting from them.

3. Lessons learned

Project partners often have very high workloads, making it difficult to prioritise communication and dissemination activities. As a result, getting input, feedback and non-scientific publications can be challenging. Furthermore, given the nature of the research being done in SolACE, it can take several years to generate results, which makes it challenging to produce outputs in the early stages of the project.

Keeping realistic expectations regarding the timeline of project outputs is therefore very important. Focusing on communicating project activities rather than results can also attract the attention of external stakeholders at the beginning of such projects. Sending consistent reminders to partners can help stimulate feedback; however, this is quite time consuming and is not always appreciated by project partners. A potential solution to generate more communication and dissemination activities in future projects would be to allocate a period of time at the end of the project, which is dedicated solely to dissemination and communication activities. During this period, experiments and other direct research would no longer take place, giving partners more time to focus on communications activities.

Getting partners to commit to writing practice abstracts has also been a challenge. Part of the problem was that many partners were not familiar with the process. Based on the name (“practice abstract”), partners often had different expectations. We found that holding a “practice abstract training sessions” at the annual meeting was an effective way to address this issue and convey the importance as well as the benefits of practice abstracts. This was initiated successfully at the 2nd Annual Meeting in Dundee, UK (2019).

Furthermore, although we use the project SharePoint page to provide partners with templates, logos, instructions and other information and materials, some partners are still not aware of these resources. It

could be useful to make this more evident at the start of the project and include requirements so that partners have to actively use the shared working space in order to help familiarise them with it.

Finally, it has been challenging to engage external stakeholders. Consultation with stakeholders has revealed that many who have participated in previous projects did not see benefits for themselves and often did not feel that their feedback was taken up by the projects. This can result in “stakeholder fatigue”, where stakeholders no longer want to participate in research projects. To address this, it can be much more effective to engage stakeholders through existing channels and relationships. The farmer networks have proven to be a valuable resource in this regard. It can also be useful to engage stakeholders at events they already plan to attend, such as large exhibitions. Furthermore, providing clear benefits for stakeholders (e.g., demonstrations of new techniques or tools) can help stimulate interest.

4. Outlook to the second half of the project

In the second half of the project, we will work together with partners to continue the existing communication and dissemination activities.

Together with partners, WP6 will focus particularly on the following activities:

- › Videos: Additional videos will be produced in the second half of the project, with a focus on farmer networks. These videos will highlight the work being done in the networks but also some of the key take-away messages and lessons learned. As a result, they will be relevant for practitioners, policymakers and other interested stakeholders.
- › Practice abstracts: Five additional practice abstracts are being finalised, and several additional practice abstracts will be written in the second half of the project. In addition, relevant practice abstracts will be translated into multiple project languages to facilitate dissemination.
- › Policy briefs: Several policy briefs will be written, based on project results and experiences. These policy briefs will target policymakers as well as other decision-makers.
- › Training materials: Training materials will be produced about relevant SolACE practices and results. SolACE partners working at or with universities can incorporate these materials into their lesson plans.
- › Fourth stakeholder event: The fourth stakeholder event will be held toward the end of the project, probably in Brussels in 2022. Unlike the previous three events, this event will focus on policymakers and will aim to transform SolACE results into policy outputs.

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6. Annex

6.1 List of WP 6 Milestones

Milestone	Title	Due date (month)
MS2	Concept for website including open access strategy ready	2
MS3	Stakeholder forum established	3
MS4	Dissemination strategy ready	3
MS5	Identification of IPUDC members for each partner	3
MS6	Project flyer and a project poster for distribution among all partners and for presentation at scientific conferences, open information days, symposia and other scientific and non-scientific events	6
MS7	Protocol (tools) for recording stakeholder engagement	6
MS22	Interim report on response to protocol for recording stakeholder engagement and initial actor/stakeholder views on the potential of the innovations	24
MS36	Policy briefs for policymakers, informing them about policy-relevant project results	48
MS40	Full set of videos	60

6.2 List of WP6 Deliverables

Deliverable	Title	Due date (month)
D6.1	Combined proceedings of the three European Stakeholder events	60
D6.2	Identified drivers, enablers and barriers for uptake of innovations	60
D6.3	SolACE Public Website	3
D6.4	First collection of SolACE Practice Abstracts	30
D6.5	Intermediate report on the implementation of the dissemination and communication strategy	36
D6.6	Report on website implementation and open access web activities	54
D6.7	Second collection of SolACE Practice Abstracts	54
D6.8	Final report on the implementation of the dissemination and communication strategy	58
D6.9	Final report on the implementation of technology transfer tools and activities	59

6.3 Key indicators from the website (as of 31.3.2020)

- › Number of visits: 2699
- › Number of visitors: 1370
- › Top 5 months in terms of number of visits:
 - 2018-04: 196 visits
 - 2018-05: 160 visits
 - 2019-03: 109 visits
 - 2018-10: 106 visits
 - 2019-11: 98 visits
- › Top 5 months in terms of numbers of unique visitors:
 - 2019-11: 71 visitors
 - 2020-01: 64 visitors
 - 2019-10: 62 visitors
 - 2019-03: 60 visitors
 - 2020-02: 59 visitors
- › Top 5 pages with the number of visits:
 - Homepage: 2021
 - About: 660
 - Partners: 495
 - Get involved: 388
- › Top 5 referrer sites
 - archive.newsletter2go.com: 121
 - zenodo.org: 82
 - www.youtube.com: 49
 - www.zenodo.org: 37
 - docs.google.com: 33
- › Top 5 countries of visitor origin
 - Switzerland: 569
 - USA: 387
 - France: 258
 - Germany: 244
 - UK: 244
- › Subscribers to the Newsletter: 167

6.4 Social media (as of 31.3.2020)

Indicator	SoLACE Twitter account (Start May 2017)	SoLACE Facebook page (Start September 2017)
Followers/Fans	333	90
Number of posts	201	64
Most successful post (Title + reach)		New Solace EU practice abstract – share your experience! - 2158

Most successful post (Title + No of engagements)	4.11.2019: New practice abstract on how to produce your own bio-fertiliser – share your experiences! – 15 Retweets; 18 likes	4.12.2019: Have a look at the fourth Solace EU newsletter! - 30 clicks, 16 reactions
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