Interactive innovation in motion: thematic networks and multi-actor projects in H2020

FERTINNOWA

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The main objective of the FERTINNOWA thematic network is to collect, exchange, showcase and transfer innovative water management solutions and best practices in order to improve water use efficiency and quality and reduce environmental impact of fertigated horticulture production systems.

For that, a Platform will be built as instrument for knowledge exchange and transfer of knowledge on innovative water solutions for fertigation of crops (vegetables, fruits and ornamentals) across Europe.

(Slide 1). The Platform consists of:

> The Consortium: research stations, farm advisory organizations, knowledge institutions (Universities) and industry (PRIVA and Optima Agrik).

> Stakeholders: policy makers (regional authorities), consumers (consumer organizations), NGOs (environmental groups), the industry (private companies and associations), and growers (growers and growers associations).

The Platform will be steered by the Executive Board (EB, WP leaders) and the External Advisory Board (EAB, representatives of the different stakeholder groups, of the 20 members of the EAB there will be 8 growers because of their importance for the network).

Main issue: constant exchange and information flow all along the project, between stakeholders and the consortium to ensure expected outcomes from the project. Growers have pointed out the gap between research and the farm and their needs/possibilities.

How is this going to be accomplished?

From the active participation and involvement in the planning of experiments, their execution, the dissemination of results and the demonstration phase.

(Slide 2). Overview of the FERTINNOWA structure. Description of each WP and role of the different actors involved (from WP leader to end-user). WP1: Coordination and management: good and clear coordination of partners (23 from 10 countries) and stakeholders is crucial in this type of projects, in order to fulfill project objectives and monitor deliverables and milestones.

WP2: Inventory of existing technologies: water research and innovation faces several multidisciplinary challenges and involves a wide variety of stakeholders. In this WP we aim to compose a very broad group of stakeholders in order to make sure we gather information from the different points of view (growers, environment, research, consumer, government…). In this WP, the EAB will list relevant representatives of the different stakeholders groups: researchers, policy makers, industry, advisors, NGOs but also growers. Individual and collective stakeholder consultations will take part, as the necessary input for the benchmark study (WP3). An interactive web page will be created for exchange of information, posting results, etc. Stakeholders with specific expertise in a topic will be consulted individually, for example, TECNOVA (explain here very short who/what TECNOVA is), with a broad experience in applied technologies.

WP3: Benchmark on current technology and distribution: Local situations regarding water source, growth system, crop type and technology use will be compared in this WP. Expected results are the identification of best practices and bottlenecks at the technological, regulatory and socio-economic level. Questions such as "Why are technologies not yet implemented at farm level? What are the barriers for implementation?..." will be evaluated and possible solutions pointed out. (Most partners participate in this WP and) stakeholder participation is needed to draft the benchmark strategy (in close collaboration with the EAB) and to map the existing technology at the farm as well as the bottlenecks for implementation of the technologies although they might be available. There will be a workshop organized for the stakeholders in order to evaluate the benchmark study. Growers from the EAB can take part to this workshop costless in order to minimize the threshold for them to take part in this kind of meetings.

WP4: Transfer of innovative technologies to the horticultural sector: In this WP, technologies from other sectors than the horticultural sector (e.g., industry,…) are identified (similarly as in WP3) and evaluated for implementation after small adaptation. The opinion of different stakeholders involved in preparing documents such as Best Available Techniques Reference Document (BREFs) will be asked. Relevant networks such as the WssTP working group on Agriculture & Irrigation will be consulted. In order to get the growers to use these technologies, the benefits from the business perspective, must be shown, as the technology providers must bring the technology to a new market segment (fertigated horticultural crops).

WP5: Exchange of technologies: The aim of this WP is to exchange technologies between the different regions, crops and growing systems. Showcasing the potential use of the technologies (at research stations or at growers' locations) will stimulate local advisors and growers to effectively implement them at their farms. Innovative techniques and **Decision Rules** will be derived from these experiences (e.g., location of a sensor from plant, irrigation lines, etc., minimum number of sensors, measurements,… for optimal monitoring and control) since this is very relevant information for growers. A workshop will be organized in order to evaluate and transfer the experiences of the exchanged technologies to consortium members and the EAB.

WP6: Transfer of knowledge and innovation into use: recognizing that different people learn via different forms of communication, FERTINNOWA will adopt a wide range of communications practices to enable the different groups of stakeholders to hear about and engage with this thematic network. Key messages will be deliver through showcase events, field visits and meetings, trade press and printed literature and online, electronic communication (newsletters, fact sheets, articles, videos… all published in the project´s webpage). Communications will be translated into the languages of the partner countries.

A final conference will take place to disseminate results to a wider community opened to any participant from the industry, academia, end-users, and will include talks and presentations from the FERTINNOWA partners and invited speakers. We will make sure it is a practical conference at the level of the growers, with lots of practical information, showcasing the technologies, …). The project provides budget to make at least 30 growers (divided over the participating Member States) to take part in the conference without costs. Deliverables will be made available on the project website.

For each WP, anticipated risks associated with problems that could arise and result in insufficient or no genuine involvement of the end-users (farmers and farmers ‘groups) were identified and risk-mitigation measures proposed along the project. The External Advisory Board plays a key role in providing feedback on the results expected out of each WP and is open to involve additional stakeholders during the project.