“How can family farmers work together to deliver innovation? Examples of best practice”

Maira Dzelzkaleja, Copa Vice President
Running the family farm “Kaigari’ in Bauska region, Latvia since 1991

Arable crops including seeds production – started with 14ha, today 520ha

Vice – Chair of the Latvian Farmers Parliament, responsible for Agriculture and Rural development strategy, project implementation and international relations

Vice President of Copa and Chair of the Copa-Cogeca Working Party on Rural Development
Characteristics of family farms and factors that hamper innovation

- Great heterogeneity in family farms across the EU e.g. full/part time, old/young farmers, with basic skills/well educated -> “one size fits all” not an option
- Conservatism and strong habits
- Dependence from subsidies
- Lack of access to research outcomes
- Lack of cross sectoral, cross border cooperation

BUT regardless the great differences each farm must be competitive and sustainable
- to be able to produce food
- to contribute to rural economies
Innovation is essential for family farms

- Driving forces for uptake of innovation:
  - Entrepreneurship / willingness to make progress and development
  - Finances (adaptation to market situation)
  - Limited land and workforce availability
  - To make life easier (mechanisation)

- Access to information about innovation in “farmers’ language” as a prerequisite

- Innovations in technologies, organisation and management practices, farm structure, marketing, communication (relations between generations)

- Normal practice in one sector could be highly innovative in another!
Innovation creates added value (1)
Honey lollipop

• Idea from young farmers in Latvia to find alternative use for honey
• Product development by food specialists and in collaboration with SME candy producer
• Honey producers get access to new marketing channels (shops, pharmacy, wholesalers) and a better price for their honey
Innovation creates added value (2)
Miscanthus straw

- Idea from young farmer in Wallonia as alternative use of low productive arable land
- Straw in easy to handle packaging sizes for gardeners as shelter and for horse bedding
- Adaptation of own machinery for planting and harvesting in cooperation with local welder
Innovation creates added value (3)
Laser-Apple

- Idea from farmer growing apples at lake Constance, Germany
- The apple becomes an advertising tool allowing individualised messages
- At the same time it allows to promote sales of apples from this region as the new product has an international market
Organisational innovation  
Giving old crops new life

- Creation of a new brand for forgotten vegetables “Bel’Oblita”
- Answer from growers to new trends: seasonal, local sale, “forgotten” vegetables
- Business opportunity for (smaller) family farms, today over 150 farmers are participating
- Introduced in November 2011 as part of “Flandria”: same rights & obligations and access to existing markets
- Strong position of farmers within the producer organisation, with great potential through cooperation
- Very own style recognised by consumer; supported by strong marketing tools
- Contribution to maintaining genetic biodiversity
On farm innovation
Roughening of slatted floors

- Roughening of slatted floors in stables

- Farmer and successor of a family farm with 60 dairy cows from Bavaria, Germany, developed in 2011 a machine to avoid his animals to slip

- Today this technology is widespread and is a cost-effective solutions to improve living conditions for animals
Organisational innovative Compost stable

- Milking cows living in a stable with compost as bedding, Netherland
- Change in nutrient management at farm level, with separation technology allowing a very efficient use of manure
- Splitting in a solid and a liquid fraction reduced mineral fertiliser use and a better targeting to crop needs
- Good animal welfare and improved milk production in new stable
Precision technology allows to differentiate application of plant protection products inside field.

It contributes to efficient use of farm inputs and to protect valuable habitats in agricultural landscape.

Young farmers were asked to come with their brides and had a nice surprise ... none of them got wet!
Concluding remarks

• Innovation potential from farmers should not be underestimated
• Family farms are playing an important role in bringing innovations into practice
• Uptake facilitated through stronger links between science and farming sector
• Cross sectoral, cross region and cross border cooperation is beneficial
• Encouragement of dialogue/cooperation between generation to boost innovation
• Innovation is essential for the viability of rural areas and to secure competitive EU family farming in future