Benchmarking of Farm Productivity and Sustainability Performance

How can farmers and advisers use benchmarking data and processes to improve farm productivity and sustainability performance?

Benchmarking can support farmers to improve their productivity and sustainability performance. Farm benchmarking allows farmers to compare their farm's performance with peers, learn from others and identify actions. Valuable lessons can be drawn from benchmarking by raising questions such as: why are others better? how are others better? what can be learnt? how can the farm catch up?

Benchmarking is based on data sharing. In approximately 80% of the EU member states benchmarks are discussed on a regular basis individually between a farmers and their advisor, or discussed in a peer group among farmers.

Increasing the willingness and technical possibilities to share farm-level data between systems in a seamless way will encourage greater participation in benchmarking. It will boost the available dataset and therefore improve the accuracy and applicability of benchmarking.

Although originally introduced by advisory services, new businesses such as ICT companies, now also sell data management services with benchmarking options. For other businesses like machinery companies, input suppliers, etc. data is an essential part of their business model, and the data they collect from farms may not be available free of charge for the farmers themselves. For operational benchmarking, data ownership is key for farmers to enable neutral and holistic advising. The need for innovation in a changing landscape of players is to find governance mechanisms for benchmarking where data from different organisations can be combined to **create value for farmers**.

The EIP-AGRI Focus Group on benchmarking identified five **aspects of data sharing** that bring advantages and have the potential to **keep farmers interested in benchmarking:**
- ▶ a single entry point for data, thereby avoiding repetition of data input
- ▶ open data, made public by the government
- ▶ the farmer as data-owner and manager with authorisations
- ▶ harmonising definitions and integrating data at farm level
- ▶ paying explicit attention to business models and governance of benchmarking tools in order to make the sharing of data sustainable.

"The challenge for benchmarking is to create trust, interoperability and data-ownership and to integrate the data into a useful dashboard for farm management."
Mr. Krijn Poppe, coordinating expert of the Focus Group Benchmarking of Farm Productivity and Sustainability Performance

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Ideas for Operational Groups and other innovative projects

▶ **Automatic data sharing based on data-authorisations.** To promote benchmarking and better use of data in farm management, data should be available for the farmer in a digital format which is suitable for further processing.

▶ **Benchmarking with real time operational data.** Available operational data could be integrated into dashboards for farmers (including forecasting modules). Special attention should be given to data standardisation and making these data commonly available for farm advisors, enabling them to include operational benchmarking in their services.

▶ **Benchmarking on sustainability and strategic changes.** Farmers applying for CAP payments or under sustainability certification schemes have obligations to report on issues like environmental practices, soil fertility, water management, etc. Benchmarking these data could help farmers to improve sustainable farm management while at the same time backing up sustainability claims towards retailers and consumers.

▶ **Business models and governance in benchmark systems.** With the ICT revolution, agriculture is becoming more data-driven. Data related innovations in benchmarking systems can be developed but they have to be managed carefully, taking the risks into account.

▶ **Benchmarking for small farms.** Small farms are generally less active in benchmarking, unless if organised by cooperatives or producer groups. Farmers are obliged to provide a lot of data to paying agencies. The government could enrich these data with benchmarks, and return them to the farmers. Advisory services could use automatic data sharing methods with agri-businesses to further improve these benchmarks and make them more farm-specific.

Other recommendations

▶ The Focus Group concluded its work with remarks on the **European dimension** of the innovation challenge in particular the **CAP data management** and the **cross-border exchange of data**.

▶ There is a need for a **multi-actor approach** in the innovation topics proposed. These involve social innovation and changes of the ways farmers work: how they administrate, use a dashboard for farm management (including operational benchmarking) and how they discuss often sensitive results in farm discussion groups. They also involve advisors and changes in administrative procedures with agri-businesses and government agencies.

More information on the EIP-AGRI website

Final report	Workshop on 'Tools for Environmental Farm Performance'
Focus Group webpage	Inspirational idea: Staying in tune with farm performance

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