

SMART – an innovative look at sustainability performance

Food supply for the growing world population significantly contributes to ecological and societal challenges. At the same time, there is a growing demand from policies, society and the food sector to improve sustainability in agriculture. Through operational management, farmers can contribute to an improvement of sustainability while adapting their farm to future challenges.



However, farmers are finding it difficult to assess their sustainability performance in a comparable manner. It is also not always clear for the consumers and they are unable to judge how sustainable a given agricultural commodity or food product really is.

Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems (SAFA) Guidelines have been developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to “provide a common language for sustainability” (FAO). The guidelines are divided into themes such as “water”, “materials & energy”, “biodiversity” and “animal welfare”, each of these are also divided into sub-themes.

To support farmers in meeting these guidelines, the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) has developed a practical sustainability monitoring and assessment tool (SMART-Farm Tool) which makes it possible to record and assess the specific sustainability performance of farms in a systematic manner.

SMART - how it works

The tool takes a holistic approach, looking at a farm’s degree of goal achievement with respect to each of sustainability themes in the FAO SAFA Guidelines. The achievements of the objectives are assessed using multi-criteria assessment approach with about 300 indicators, which can be assessed in 2-3 hours on a farm. The assessment includes on-farm data collection and data processing and analysis.

After the assessment, the farm receives a detailed, automatically generated report which illustrates the sustainability performance. Thus includes positive factors as well as improvement potential for each of the SAFA sustainability themes.

SMART - the benefits

The tool means that a farmer can measure the sustainability of their farm in consistency with the international SAFA Guidelines. It delivers comprehensive information for optimising a farm’s operations, showing where there is scope for improvement or where a competitive advantage is being achieved. It takes into account science, business and agricultural practice and can motivate farmers to improve their sustainability performance. The results also provide increased transparency and credibility for consumers.

Christian Schader, Head of Sustainability Assessment at the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), says “The SMART-Farm Tool is an elegant approach to get a comprehensive overview of the sustainability performance of a farm and to compare farms within and across regions and farm types”

EIP-AGRI workshop on tools for environmental farm performance

How can environmental sustainability tools for farmers be promoted? Farmers met with developers and other users of sustainability tools to address this question at the EIP-AGRI workshop ‘Tools for environmental farm performance’ in Zagreb, Croatia on 7 and 8 February 2017.

SMART was presented as an example of a sustainability tool at this event.

All the workshop presentations and background documents are available on the [event webpage](#).

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